

Applying for a higher education course

Where to start

There are over 50,000 different courses at well over 300 different universities and colleges available through the UCAS system in the UK. So how do you set about choosing the right higher education course?

- Be clear about what you want. Are you looking for specific skills and knowledge for a specific job or vocational route? Or do you want in depth knowledge of an academic subject area so you can plan your career later?
- The UCAS website offers a short selection test, known as the **Stamford Test** which matches your interests and abilities to possible areas of higher education
www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/whattostudy/stamfordtest
- The **Centigrade online test** goes into more detail and can offer up to 8 possible areas with a full report on your results. There is a charge for this test.
www.coa.co.uk/centigrade
- Do you really need a university degree or diploma? There may be professional training that is more appropriate.

Before you apply

All applications for **full time** higher education courses are managed by the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS). The comprehensive website is very helpful and includes a course search facility and links to each university. If you want to study a **part-time** course, you can apply direct to the institution and they will advise you about their application process.

www.ucas.com

At this stage you need to decide not only which course but which universities or colleges (you can have up to five choices).

- Look online for course details
- Attend Open Days
- Speak to the Admissions Tutors
- Ask for the Student Destinations List (which indicates where recent graduates have found employment following the course)

Find out as much as possible at this stage.

- Be sure you have the necessary entry requirements
- Students from overseas should contact NARIC (The National Academic Recognition Information Centre) who can verify equivalent qualifications from over 180 countries and supply you with a Letter of Comparability
www.naric.org.uk
- Check in the prospectus to see whether you need a certain level of English, IT or Maths

The application process

To apply for a full time course, register on the UCAS online application system and follow the step by step instructions that are clearly given. **You can fill in the form online, save it and go back to it to make changes or correct things before you send it off.**

www.ucas.com

In general applications for courses starting in September/October should be submitted between the previous September and mid-January. After this date it's still possible to apply through UCAS for any courses which still have vacancies. Exceptions are:

- applications for the Route B Art courses can be submitted up until March
- closing date for applications for all Medicine and Veterinary Science/Medicine courses and applications for Oxford and Cambridge Colleges is earlier (currently 15th October).
- applications for part time courses, which are made directly to the university or college and not through UCAS

What do I put in the Personal Statement?

This is your opportunity to show the Admissions Tutor that you deserve a place on the course. Look at the UCAS Entry Profiles for examples but bear in mind that UCAS does use a Similarity Detection Service to identify plagiarism. Think of things in terms of your past, present, and future.

- **Past:** What gave you the interest in this subject initially?
- **Present:** What are you involved in now as a result of that interest? What skills or knowledge have you developed? Are you doing any relevant work experience, or voluntary work?
- **Future:** Where do you want this course to take you? How will you use the degree?

The reference (details provided on UCAS website)

This needs to be given by someone who knows you well and understands your abilities, interest and commitment to the course you are applying for. While school or college, you can probably ask your tutor to be a referee. If you're at work, ask your line manager, trainer, employer or an adult who understands the demands of the course and your reasons for studying.

What next?

Once you've applied, you can track the progress of your application through the UCAS website using your personal number and password.

You may be invited for an interview. If so go really well prepared. Find out about the course, the optional modules, opportunities for placements or work experience. Read about any relevant stories or issues currently in the news or in professional journals. What sort of student do you think they would like to have on their course? Think about your interests, and be ready to ask them a question.

For further information, advice and examples of personal statements and interviews see: www.studential.com