



Sep 2009

THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS PROCESS

In this special edition of your informative newsletter, we focus on the UCAS application process summarising key steps and providing tips to help along the way. More detailed information should be obtained by visiting the UCAS website and checking directly with the universities of interest.

UCAS - what, who & where?

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Application Service, is the body that manages most applications for undergraduate degree programmes at UK universities; their web address is www.ucas.com

Who applies through UCAS?

A variety of people including mature students apply through UCAS. This article addresses the process for a specific category of applicants - those who are at the start of the second year of the sixth form.

What are the timescales?

The time to apply for a university place through UCAS is generally between October and the January before the start of the programme. Applicants intending to embark on an undergraduate course of study from September or October 2010 will be applying between next month, i.e. October 2009 and January 2010. There are usually about three cut-off-dates within the overall deadline that are worthy of note. The first one is **only a few weeks away**; the UCAS website reveals that an application deadline of 15 October 2009 has been set for the 2010 admissions to:

- All medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and veterinary science courses at any university
- All courses at Oxford and Cambridge

The other application deadlines for the 2010 year of study are 15 January 2010 and 24 March 2010. Further details of what these dates relate to are clearly stated on the UCAS website.

How does the process work?

The process described below relates to the applications for courses of study starting in September or October 2010. UCAS rules may change from time to time but the main elements of the process have been relatively consistent over the past few years.

- Prospective students apply for up to **five university places** on the UCAS website. This does not have to be in 5 separate universities.
- The application has a number of sections including personal & education details, the choices, a personal statement and a reference (usually from the applicant's school).
- UCAS will send a copy of the application to each of the courses and universities the applicant has applied to.
- Each applicant will also receive a unique ID which can be used to track progress of the application.
- Some universities will interview some or all of the applicants intending to embark upon certain courses of study before making their offers.
- The universities consider the applications received and decide whether or not to make an offer based on their own admissions criteria.
- Following the university's decision, applicants will receive offers by 31 March from some, or all of the universities or colleges that they have applied to.

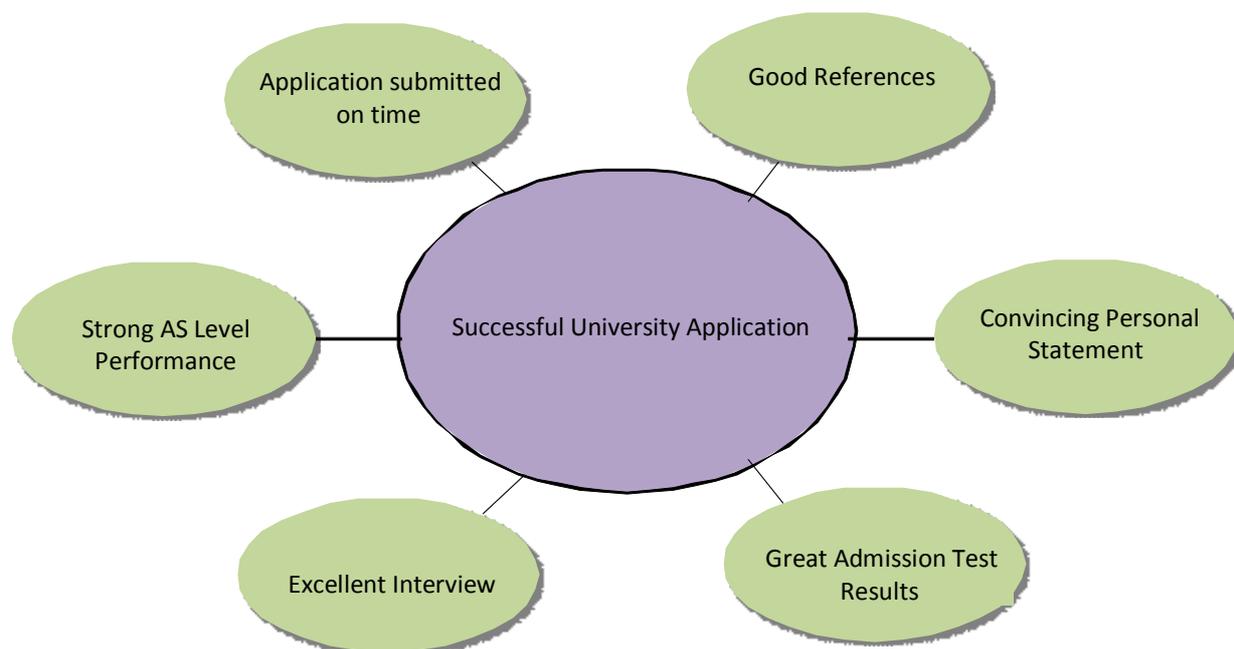


Sep 2009

- The offers received may be conditional (i.e. dependent on final grades achieved) or unconditional.
- If an applicant has more than two offers, he/she will have to select the top two choices, one of which will be their preferred choice, and the other as a back-up (or insurance) in case they do not get the grades the first course requires.
- Once again there are strict deadlines in place for accepting or rejecting the offers - this is usually between May and July.

Important things to note

This may sound like stating the obvious but planning ahead is of essence. The competition is so fierce in today's world that applicants need to have a definite plan of attack if they want to get the best places available. It is important to start researching and obtaining information about requirements early. **Some key success factors** of the process are shown in the diagram below:



- Applicants targeting the top universities will benefit from a **very strong performance at their AS level** exams as these results form the basis for the A level grades predicted by their school.
- An applicant **may be** invited for an interview as part of the university's decision making process.
- The interview is another opportunity for the applicants to demonstrate their skills and experiences and they would do well to prepare for these well in advance.
- Late applications received at UCAS after the deadlines are only considered by universities if they still have vacancies in the course(s) selected. Considering the current shortage of university places, it is **advisable to get the UCAS application in on time**.



Sep 2009

- A number of universities now require applicants to **pass an admissions test** (see range of tests below) as part of their application. There are set deadlines governing when these tests can be applied for, therefore applicants should:
 - Establish well in advance if an admission test is required for the university or course of choice
 - Find out the registration deadlines and exam dates
 - Prepare for the tests in good time
- Applicants should never copy their personal statements from the web or anyone else as UCAS puts all applications through a similarity detection test.

UCAS points

UCAS tariffs or points are awarded for a variety of qualifications. The full range of qualifications that are included can be found on the UCAS website. Further insight into the average UCAS points required for a course of study at a specific university can be obtained at www.unistats.com. UCAS recognises that applicants are increasingly opting for the International Baccalaureate (IB) qualifications instead of GCE A levels, hence in addition to the IB Diploma tariffs, points for IB Certificate come into effect for entry into higher education from 2010. The points awarded for the GCE and IB qualifications are listed below:

GCE AS Level Grade	Points
A	60
B	50
C	40
D	30
E	20

GCE A level Grade	Points
A* (<i>new from 2010</i>)	140
A	120
B	100
C	80
D	60
E	40

IB Higher Level Grade	Points
7	130
6	110
5	80
4	50
3	20

It is worthy of note that the points are not only awarded for traditional academic qualifications. The following examples demonstrate the importance of extracurricular activities.

- A distinction in the LAMDA Level 3 Certificate in Speech and Drama equates to 90 points for Speech and Drama Exams
- A Grade 8 distinction in Music Examinations is worth 75 points
- A Stage 3 Horse Knowledge & Care pass is worth 35 points under the British Horse Society / Equestrian Qualifications

Admission tests

Some of the admission tests that universities require to be taken are listed below. It is advisable to visit the individual universities' websites to find out additional details of entry requirements.

1. BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) for Medicine & Veterinary Science
2. UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) for Medical & Dental courses
3. The National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT) for Law
4. English Literature Admission Test (ELAT) for English courses at Oxford



Sep 2009

5. History Aptitude Test (HAT) for Modern History at Oxford
6. Modern and Medieval Languages Test (MML) for Cambridge
7. Sixth Term Examination Papers (STEP) for Maths at Cambridge
8. Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Cambridge) for Computer Science, Natural Sciences, Engineering & Economics at Cambridge
9. Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Oxford) for Philosophy Politics & Economics, and Economics & Management courses at Oxford

Code Cracker

Clearing	A system used towards the end of the academic cycle. If you have not secured a place, it enables you to apply for course vacancies.
Conditional Offer	An offer made by a university or college, whereby you must fulfill certain criteria before you can be accepted on the relevant course.
Confirmation	When conditional offers that you have accepted become unconditional or are declined. Confirmation is dependent on your qualification/exam results.
Deferral	Holding an offer until the following year.
Extra	The opportunity to apply for another course if you have used all five choices and not secured a place.
Firm Offer	The offer that you have accepted as your first choice.
Insurance Offer	The offer that you have accepted as your second choice, in case you do not meet the requirements for your firm offer.
Unconditional Offer	An offer given to you by a university or college if you have satisfied the criteria and can attend the course.

Source: www.ucas.com

Where to find more information

Finally for further guidance on writing a personal statement, preparing for university interviews or admission tests and indeed anything to do with the admission process, contact our team of experts by sending an email to info@thesmartkid.org.

Other useful websites

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/universityguide>

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/good_university_guide/