



Applying to a UK university

DENISE BAINES, EEB4 UCAS COORDINATOR,

JAN 2015

So you want to go to the UK....

- ▶ How the application system works
- ▶ Choosing a university and a course
- ▶ Entrance requirements
- ▶ What must I do to prepare, and where do my S6 choices fit in?
- ▶ Finance

Where do I start?

- ▶ There are 300 institutions of higher education (universities, music and art colleges, post-graduate teacher training ...) and 40,000 courses to choose from !!
- ▶ You will apply through The Universities and Colleges Application Service (UCAS). The website UCAS.com has a huge amount of information on how to apply, with a complete list of all universities and all courses, and links to the individual university websites.
- ▶ Read UCAS and the university websites.
- ▶ Visit universities you are interested in – many have virtual tours
- ▶ Talk to parents, friends, teachers
- ▶ There are many (expensive) careers services that will tell you the same information, but if you take the time to do your research on line you probably won't need them

How it works

- ▶ The application system is centralised through UCAS.
- ▶ You **MUST** apply on-line through UCAS, unless you are applying to a private university.
- ▶ Start at www.ucas.com
- ▶ You will apply with your school's code, and with the guidance of a teacher. There is a cost.
- ▶ You now have many hours of browsing ahead

Latest update: [15 January deadline reminder – undergraduate applications](#) 18 hours ago

Not sure where to go?

Find the information you're looking for in a few simple clicks.

Get started here >



Search for courses and training programmes

Search for courses >

Search for courses and training programmes starting in 2015.

Apply or track your application

Apply or track >

Start or continue your application, or track your progress.

Higher education in the UK

Undergraduate options



Your first level of higher education, with a huge range of courses.

- [Undergrad study](#)
- [When to apply](#)
- [Performing arts](#)
- [Find courses](#)

Postgraduate options



Thousands more courses you can take after you graduate.

- [Postgrad study](#)
- [Performing arts](#)
- [Teacher training](#)

UCAS Teacher Training



Postgraduate teacher training programmes in England and Wales.

- For Scottish courses, use UCAS Undergraduate.
- [Overview](#)
 - [Routes into teaching](#)

International applications



Information for students and advisers outside the United Kingdom.

- [Study in the UK](#)
- [Finding courses](#)
- [How to apply](#)

UCAS Progress

Are you thinking about Post-16 education or training?

On UCAS Progress you can:

- Find out about all Post-16 options
- Research different qualifications
- Search for courses and places to study

[Find the next step on UCAS Progress](#)

'That was my milk, you...!!'

The inside track on sharing a house with students.

[LivingatUni.com](#)
– all the advice you need.



UK, EU or International?

- ▶ Since you are coming from another country, you are international students, BUT
- ▶ If you hold an EU passport you are considered an EU student for fees purposes.
- ▶ Even if you are British, you are still an EU applicant if you have not lived in the UK for the 3 years prior to starting your course.
- ▶ <http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/international>

How it works

- ▶ Use UCAS 'Apply' on-line – Apply opens in July for entry September the following year (July 2016 for entry Sept 2017)
- ▶ You can apply for up to 5 courses at up to 5 different universities (including either Oxford OR Cambridge. Only 4 applications for medicine or veterinary are allowed)
- ▶ You apply through your school with your school code
- ▶ UCAS sends your application to each of your universities
- ▶ Universities consider your application and may call you for interview. Eventually they will
 - ▶ reject you; or
 - ▶ offer you a place conditional on obtaining certain grades in your Bac; or
 - ▶ offer you an unconditional place (if you already have sufficient qualifications)

How it works

- ▶ UCAS sends you details of the universities' responses. You follow this through 'Track', an on-line system to which you have a personal secure password
- ▶ In May you accept the offer you most want. You can also keep a second offer as a back-up, in case you don't make your first choice.
- ▶ When your exam results are out, if you have made the offer for your first choice you have to accept the place at that university – you cannot then change your mind, unless you withdraw completely.
- ▶ If you don't make either of your offers you can apply through 'clearing' for places that have not been filled.

Choosing a course

- ▶ Start by considering your career ambitions.
- ▶ Research courses carefully – all are listed on the UCAS website, with links to the universities
- ▶ Combinations: Had you thought of
 - ▶ Maths with French, Sport, Business, Theoretical Physics, Statistics, Accounting
 - ▶ Law with ... European legal studies, criminology, sociology, management, Italian ...
- ▶ Subjects you have never thought of ... Forensic studies, construction management, artificial intelligence, mechatronics, behavioural studies, sport and exercise psychology, creative writing, social policy
- ▶ Year in industry
- ▶ Year abroad (not only for language courses)

Art and music colleges

- ▶ Use UCAS to apply to music conservatories, but beware - deadline for some conservatories is October 1st! This is to allow time for auditions
- ▶ Check websites for deadlines for performing arts (theatre, dance ...)
- ▶ University music courses have the same application procedure as other courses.
- ▶ If you want to study art you usually apply for a foundation year, and then for your degree programme a year later after you are sure which direction you want to go in

Subjects you have studied at school

- ▶ Beware that many subjects are VERY DIFFERENT at university.
 - ▶ E.g. Maths becomes very abstract, or may have a lot of Physics in it ...
- ▶ Courses vary greatly from university to university
 - ▶ E.g. Music at one university may be preparing musicians (instrumentalists, conductors ..) whereas another may be mostly history and knowledge of music; another may major on composition...
- ▶ Look for interesting variations and combinations.
 - ▶ You like Biology? Why not look at Genetics or Biotechnology or Biochemistry?
 - ▶ Economics or Econometrics?

Subjects not studied at school

- ▶ It is not usually necessary to have studied subjects such as
 - ▶ Psychology
 - ▶ Geology
 - ▶ Sociology
 - ▶ Chinese
 - ▶ Computer Science
 - ▶ Economics

And many others

- ▶ If you haven't studied these at school, but are considering them at university, read a book, find someone who has studied them, and inform yourself fully....
- ▶ check the course description and entry requirements

Choosing a degree

- ▶ Bachelors' degrees are usually 3 years, unless they include a foundation year, a year in industry or a year abroad
- ▶ Many Russell Group universities offer 4 year degrees straight to master's level, but will require higher entry levels, typically 8.5 or higher
- ▶ Medicine (MB ChB) and Vet (DVM) are usually 5 years, and require high entry levels and experience in the profession

Choosing a university

- ▶ Oxford or Cambridge?
 - ▶ Not the only good universities in the UK, and not even the best for all subjects.
 - ▶ College-based, so lifestyle and some teaching is different from elsewhere. You have to be the right kind of person, as well as have very high grades.
 - ▶ You apply to a particular college as well as to the university, and have an additional application form and usually an interview.
 - ▶ 1 in 5 applicants get in, though the % varies with subject and is lowest in medicine, economics, politics, maths engineering & architecture
- ▶ Russell Group Universities - <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/>
 - ▶ 24 leading UK universities which have strong research programmes, outstanding teaching and learning and strong links with business and the public sector.
- ▶ Many other universities offer excellent programmes, and a lot depends on what you want to study, how much you like the course and the place, and your career goals.

Choosing a university

You should look for

- ▶ **A course you will love!**
- ▶ A **style of teaching** you will be comfortable with – E.g. lecture-driven, mostly independent or group study (Problem-based learning)
- ▶ A **large or small** university
- ▶ A **place where you will want to live** for 3-4 years – a city university, a campus university, London...
- ▶ **Accommodation possibilities and cost** – living in catered hall, student flats (you will have to shop, cook and share kitchens!), private homes Cost depends on location with London far higher than elsewhere
- ▶ **Reputation and opportunities for employment** on graduation – are there partnerships with employers, job fairs...

Choosing a university

- ▶ Be realistic – can you match the grades asked for? Do you have what it takes to do well in the course?
- ▶ Have a back-up – choose one or more universities likely to give you a lower offer than your first choice
- ▶ Reviews of universities such as The Times World University Rankings are sometimes useful, but can be misleading ...
 - ▶ Their information is often based on a small sample
 - ▶ They are comparing different courses even within the same subject
 - ▶ Student satisfaction often appears low amongst the best universities because they don't bother to insist the students complete the surveys!

Interviews and visits

- ▶ Sometimes a university will call you for interview
- ▶ Interviews are usually subject-specific and can be gruelling, especially for competitive and vocational courses like medicine.
- ▶ Interviews are two-way – you get a chance to see the university, meet a member of staff, check out the accommodation and get a ‘feel’ for the place.
- ▶ If you are not called for interview, make sure you go to an open day or arrange a personal visit before you accept a place

What goes on your application form

- ▶ Personal information
- ▶ The codes and names of the 5 courses you are applying for
- ▶ Qualifications you have so far
- ▶ Qualifications you are going to obtain
- ▶ A personal statement (motivation letter) – equivalent to about one A4 side (maximum) saying why you want the course and why the university needs you!
- ▶ A reference written by your teachers and UCAS advisor

The European Baccalaureate

The EB is recognised as a valid qualification for entry to UK universities, BUT entry is not automatic

- ▶ Entry to most courses is competitive
- ▶ There are specific subject requirements for most courses
- ▶ Different universities will ask for different grades – often an overall grade and specific subject grades

How to make your application stand out

Your personal statement must show how YOU are special, as well as why you want to study the course.

- ▶ Academic excellence
- ▶ Evidence of genuine interest in the subject, with efforts to go beyond the school syllabus (E.g. Science club)
- ▶ Leadership, initiative, teamwork, problem solving
- ▶ Voluntary work, service
- ▶ Talents in music, drama, dance ...
- ▶ Sporting successes
- ▶ Competitions ... literature, science ...

Give **evidence** – specific examples, exams passed, positions of leadership, competitions won etc.

Should be extra-curricular – not a family holiday or a school trip, or part of your school course!

What not to put on your personal statement

- ▶ The same statement goes to all 5 universities, so it must be general enough to fit all 5. Don't name any university.
- ▶ Only name the course if all 5 applications are for the same course (except medicine – 5th choice has to be different)
- ▶ Don't describe the subject ('The world needs more engineers because...') – the admissions tutor already knows that – he wants to get to know YOU
- ▶ Don't exaggerate: (I read 'The Economist' regularly. (you read it once)) Interviewers know how to catch you out
- ▶ Don't put anything you can't back up at interview
- ▶ Write it on Word, spell check it, grammar check it and ask someone to read it before you copy it into your application
- ▶ Sometimes shorter is better Don't waffle!

Additional qualifications

- ▶ UK students have already taken GCSE qualifications in S5 in 8-12 subjects. You have no equivalent qualifications, so your application must include your S6 results and sometimes those from S5. Some universities will ask for a full S6 report.
- ▶ Other qualifications that 'count' are
 - ▶ Music grade exams (E.g. Royal Schools of Music, Belgian music academy)
 - ▶ Drama and speaking exams (E.g. LAMDA)
 - ▶ Dance exams
 - ▶ Language qualifications (E.g. Cambridge English exams)
 - ▶ Lifeguard or other leadership qualifications

L2 English students

In principle students with a good L2 (at least a 7) are accepted for most courses in the UK, BUT

- ▶ Some universities will ask you to take a standardised English test, especially for literary courses
- ▶ If you already have a certificate in English (Cambridge Advanced, Cambridge Proficiency or equivalent) you will not need to take another test.
- ▶ These certificates are recognised by employers and universities world-wide, and it is always an advantage to show that you are good at something!

How to take Cambridge English tests

- ▶ You do not need to take a course, other than the courses you are following at school, but you should use the Cambridge website to learn about the structure of the exam, and get a book specific to the exam to practice from.
- ▶ You can find out about the exams and take practice tests at www.cambridgeenglish.org/
- ▶ You can enrol and take the tests at the British Council in Brussels. www.britishcouncil.be/exam/cambridge

Other exams and tests

Some universities require tests for some subjects. Here are the most common:

- ▶ The BMAT (Biomedical Admissions Test) is necessary for medicine and vet at some universities
- ▶ The UKCAT (UK Clinical Aptitude Test) is required by most universities for medicine if the BMAT is not taken
- ▶ Oxford and Cambridge set their own entrance exams in some subjects, or require special exams. E.g. Cambridge STEP papers form Maths.
- ▶ We will inform students in **S6** how to prepare for these. If you leave it to S7 to start preparing, it is too late!!

Other valid experience

- ▶ Leadership in a scout group or equivalent
- ▶ Membership of a competitive sports team, sporting awards outside school (e.g. tournament wins ...)
- ▶ Membership of a theatre group or music society
- ▶ Work experience- especially if relevant to the course. This is very important for medicine and veterinary applications!

What S6 options should I take, and what grades do I need to get in?

Biochemistry with Molecular Biology & Biotechnology

University of Bristol

Duration	Study mode	Attendance	Qualification	Course code
3 Years	Full-time	Study on site	BSc (Hons)	C790



Summary

Entry requirements

Fees & finances

How to apply

First year entry

Qualification requirements

- GCSEs
- A Levels
- BTECs
- Baccalaureate - AQA
- Baccalaureate - Welsh
- Baccalaureate - International
- Baccalaureate - European
- Scottish qualifications
- Cambridge Pre-U
- 14-19 Diplomas
- Other Academic qualifications
- English Language
- Overseas qualifications

Baccalaureate - European

University of Bristol will make offers based on the following qualifications individually and when they are combined with others

European Baccalaureate

General information on subjects/grades required for entry:

85% overall with 8.5 in Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics

i If you cannot find the qualification that you are studying (or have previously studied) please contact University of Bristol

English baccalaureate policy

University statement on the English Baccalaureate:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/policies/admissions/14-19qualifications-changes.html#ebacc>

Click on the course you are interested in, and then use the Entry requirements tab

Many universities will not commit to EB grades ...

English
The University of Birmingham

Duration	Study mode	Attendance	Qualification	Course code
3 Years	Full-time	Study on site	BA (Hons)	Q300

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Summary | **Entry requirements** | Fees & finances | How to apply

First year entry

Qualification requirements

GCSEs
A Levels
BTECs
Baccalaureate - AQA
Baccalaureate - Welsh
Baccalaureate - International
Baccalaureate - European
Scottish qualifications
Cambridge Pre-U
14-19 Diplomas
Other Academic

Baccalaureate - European

The University of Birmingham will make offers based on the following qualifications individually and when they are combined with others:

European Baccalaureate

i If you cannot find the qualification that you are studying (or have previously studied) please contact The University of Birmingham

Unit grade policy

The University of Birmingham does not make offers based on the unit grades achieved in AS and A2 level examinations. However, unit grade achievement may be taken into account when considering applicants who have just missed the terms of their offers.

So click instead on A levels to get an idea

English
 The University of Birmingham

Duration	Study mode	Attendance	Qualification	Course code
3 Years	Full-time	Study on site	BA (Hons)	Q300

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Summary | **Entry requirements** | Fees & finances | How to apply

First year entry

Qualification requirements	A Levels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSEs A Levels BTECs Baccalaureate - AQA Baccalaureate - Welsh Baccalaureate - International Baccalaureate - European Scottish qualifications Cambridge Pre-U 14-19 Diplomas 	<p>The University of Birmingham will make offers based on the following qualifications individually and when they are combined with others</p> <p>GCE A Level</p> <p>AAB Typical offer</p> <p>Specific subjects/grades required for entry: (English Literature or English - Language & Literature at grade A).</p> <p>Specific subjects excluded for entry: General Studies.</p> <p>GCE A Level Double Award</p>

Unit grade policy

The University of Birmingham does not make offers based on the unit grades achieved in AS and A2 level examinations. However, unit grade achievement may be taken into account when considering applicants who have just missed the terms of their offers.

Estimated*
equivalence

A*	9
A	8.5
B	8
C	7.5
D	7
E	6

* Important note: This is NOT official, nor binding on the universities!

Minimum requirements do not guarantee you a place

- ▶ When you read the 'minimum requirements' or 'typical offer' on a university website, beware. You are in competition for places! 'Minimum' means minimum – not a guaranteed offer for you!
- ▶ Things that help give you the edge ...
 - ▶ Higher grades,
 - ▶ supporting subjects, important because you don't have GCSE's. (For example, Maths for Biology ...)
 - ▶ work experience – essential for medicine and veterinary medicine courses. You must be able to show you understand the profession.

Considerations for S6-7 options

- ▶ Keep your options open – make sure you have the options that will allow you entry to courses that interest you
- ▶ Assess yourself: What grade am I getting now? Could I do better? What does my teacher think?
- ▶ Remember that universities will look at your overall grade. So choose courses you have a reasonable chance of doing well in.
- ▶ You will not take written exams in all subjects at the Bac, and later you will need to choose exam subjects carefully

A few specifics....

- ▶ Your big **advantage** coming from the European School is your languages and multi-cultural exposure.
- ▶ Your **disadvantage** is the fact you have no GCSE's, so you need to ensure your Bac includes supporting subjects that UK students might only take to GCSE.
- ▶ Examples:
 - ▶ Most **arts subjects** (**languages, humanities..**): Any combination which includes principal subject(s) you want to study; maths 3
 - ▶ **Medicine**: 3 sciences, Lab Chemistry or Biology, Maths 5 + work experience
 - ▶ **Law**: Any combination, depending on the type of law that interests you. (More languages, history or philosophy, science if forensics seems interesting)
 - ▶ **Engineering**: Maths 5, Physics, Lab Physics; Computing is a good idea
Chemistry for Chemical Engineering....
 - ▶ **Architecture**: Art (you will need a portfolio), Maths 5, Physics an advantage
 - ▶ **Economics**: Maths 5. Economics is not essential, but an advantage
 - ▶ **Biology**: Chemistry, Biology, Biology lab, Maths 5
 - ▶ **Computer Science**: Maths 5 or 8, Physics an advantage

Deferred entry ('Gap' Years)

- ▶ Many students take a 'gap' year between school and university.
- ▶ Apply at the same time as everyone else, but check the 'deferred entry' box and set the starting date one year later (September 2018)
- ▶ Plan your year carefully. It can be disappointing if you don't.
- ▶ You must justify your gap year in your personal statement – what will you do? How will it enrich you and prepare you better for your studies?

Why take a gap year?

- ▶ You get a break from study, a chance to work or travel, broaden your experience, think through your career choice, develop maturity
- ▶ When you start university you will be away from home for the first time, you have to manage your time, money, washing, cooking, getting up in the morning.... That is a BIG change, and many students experience homesickness. You can prepare for this with more independence in your gap year.
- ▶ If you are only 17 we strongly recommend waiting a year. Some courses such as Medicine and Nursing will not allow you to start until you are 18 (Except Scotland – Scottish students often start at 17). Waiting will give you more readiness for higher education and the best chance of social integration (you cannot enter a bar until you are 18!)
- ▶ You will experience culture shock (unless you have lived in the UK recently) which worsens the homesickness. There are also some serious social issues to handle such as heavy drinking and drug use in student circles
- ▶ A gap year can ease the transition from home and thus improve your university experience

Timeline

- ▶ July 1st : *Apply* is open. You can register with UCAS, and with your UCAS advisor at school. You should choose your courses and universities, and prepare your personal statement during the summer holidays.
- ▶ September 15th : Payment of 260 euros must be made to the school account.
- ▶ October 1st : Deadline for some [performing arts courses](#)
- ▶ October 15th : Deadline for applications which include [Oxford, Cambridge and all medical and veterinary courses](#). Internal deadline: [October 1st](#) . To meet this, we need your personal statement and completed form in time to prepare your reference.
- ▶ January 15th : [Deadline for all applications](#), BUT
- ▶ [December 1st: School's internal deadline](#). This is essential to give us time to prepare your reference and finalise your application before Christmas.
- ▶ [The earlier the better](#) Although you are guaranteed equal consideration if you submit by Jan 15th, universities start giving away places as early as November! It is also well-known by admissions tutors that the best students apply early

Finance – What will it cost?

Tuition fees:

- ▶ **For EU applicants maximum tuition fees vary by country** – some course providers charge less than the full amount:
- ▶ up to £9,000 per year in England and Wales
- ▶ up to £3,575 per year in Northern Ireland
- ▶ free in Scotland
- ▶ International students (non-EU) pay higher

Other costs – accommodation, food, transport, books, pocket money...

- ▶ A budget of 10,000 pounds per year per student allows for reasonable living, travel and equipment at most universities and courses except London.

Help with finance

Student finance includes:

- ▶ **Tuition Fee Loan** – available to EU nationals for a first degree, but you have to pay it back. It covers your fees entirely.
- ▶ **Maintenance Loan** – UK resident students only
- ▶ **Maintenance Grant** – UK residents only; does not have to be paid back.
- ▶ Parents: Check if your **employer** gives an 'Education Allowance' or enhanced child allowance. (E.g. EU Commission)

Common misconceptions

- ▶ The universities will reject me if I don't make them my first choice
 - ▶ **False:** No preference is indicated in your application
- ▶ If I apply to Oxford or Cambridge the other universities won't like me
 - ▶ **False:** Universities cannot see what other universities you have applied to. They might suspect it if your application arrives just before the Oxbridge deadline, but there is still no need to fear discrimination.
- ▶ I cannot afford to go to university in the UK
 - ▶ If you are an EU national you can get help with your tuition fees, and you pay them back when you are working