

St Bede's College



**UCAS APPLICATION
2020-2021**

**Student Information
Booklet**

CONTENTS

1. What is UCAS?
2. Researching Courses
3. Admissions Tests
4. The Personal Statement
5. Interviews
6. Making your Choices
7. Results Day

1. What is UCAS?

UCAS is the Universities and College Admission Service. It provides a central application service for full-time undergraduate course in the UK. UCAS works with 327 universities and colleges and over 50,000 courses.

This means that if you want to go on to higher education after A-levels, it is highly likely that you will be putting together a UCAS application at the start of your first term in the Upper Sixth. Most students who have been through this will tell you that it is a time-consuming process and can be very stressful. That is why you have a range of help and support provided for you and this booklet is just the beginning.

What the UCAS process involves

- 1) *Choosing a course/courses*
Reflect on your skills and consider which courses might be right for you. Think carefully about where your skills lie and what you would enjoy doing every day for between 3 and 6 years.
- 2) *Choosing 5 universities*
Investigate institutions where these courses are available. Find out as much as you can about the course structure and style, each subject varies considerably from institution to institution. Consider your personal requirements, look closely at their entry requirements (also admissions policies if you can find them out) and find your 5 best matches!
- 3) *Putting together your application*
You will have to gather information about past examination results and former schools, know your Local Education Authority etc. but writing your personal statement is the most important part of this form. You will work on this with your tutor and with subject teachers.

The UCAS deadline for all those students applying to Oxbridge or to Medicine and Dentistry is 15th October. All other students will be expected to have completed their forms by 15th November at the latest. This is an internal deadline intended to allow students to focus on their A-level courses.

QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

Abbreviations

UCAS: University and College Admissions Service
UMS: Uniform Mark Scale
UKCAT: UK Clinical Aptitude Test
BMAT: Biomedical science Aptitude Test
LNAT: Law National Aptitude Test
CF: Conditional Firm offer
CI: Conditional Insurance offer
UF: Unconditional Firm offer

<u>UCAS Points Tariff</u>	
A-level	AS
A*= 56	
A = 40	A = 20
B = 40	B = 16
C = 32	C = 12
E = 16	D = 10
	E = 6

UCAS Deadline for Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science and Oxbridge:

15th October

College Deadline for applications to all other courses:

15th November

Maximum number of courses students can apply for on their UCAS form: 5

Maximum number of Medicine courses students can apply for: 4

The fifth choice on the UCAS form can be used for a related subject e.g. Biomedical sciences

UCAS Extra

Runs from February to the end of June. Can be used by students who have

- already made five choices;
- received decisions from all these choices; **and**
- either had no offers or declined all the offers they have received.

Admissions tests: These are used by some institutions for the most competitive courses. They vary from course to course and must be researched and booked by the students. The most common are the UCAT (Universal Clinical Aptitude Test) and the BMAT (Biomedical Sciences Admissions Test) required by some universities for Medicine or Dentistry.

Oxford and Cambridge Universities make a wide use of Admissions tests to help decide which candidates to invite for interview. This year these

tests are due to take place in late October. Further information can be obtained from Mrs Lockett and the Examinations Officer Mrs Mataskova.

2. Researching Choices

Higher Ideas

The College has a software package called Higher Ideas which is available to all students through the College network. It has details of all available UCAS courses and advice to help choose which is right for particular individuals.

UCAS Course Finder

Details of all courses are found through the 'Course Search' section of the UCAS website. Type in the subject area you are interested in and you will be able to look at entry requirements and course details for all the programmes linked with that subject. This information is particularly useful as it is provided by UCAS, not by the institution, so it is unbiased, unlike prospectuses which are there to 'sell' the university at its best.

Prospectuses

These are still useful as they provide a picture of the university as a whole and go into some more depth than Entry Profiles. You can find them in the Quiet Room of the Sixth Form Common Room and get the latest editions early in March at the UCAS convention at Manchester Central. This event presents students with a good opportunity to ask questions to representatives from universities face to face.

Your 'long list'

At this stage, you may even have a 2 or 3 different courses you are interested in. If they are wildly different (e.g. Medicine, Fine Art and Human Resource Management) you need to have a serious re-think. However, it is fairly common for students to be deciding between such subjects as English and History, Economics and Law or Biochemistry and Life Sciences. Remember that combination courses, for example English with French, have fewer applicants than, for example, straight English, and that means higher acceptance rates. If you are really struggling with the decision, find out what modules are studied in the first year of each course at your chosen universities (it will vary from institution to institution) and ask yourself what you would rather spend all day doing.

Family, friends, professionals.

It's always worth getting an insider's perspective on universities and courses so talk to older friends, siblings and other family members to find

out what their experiences were like. What did they do before applying? With the benefit of hindsight, would they do anything differently if they had to go through it again? If you already have an idea of what career path you would like to follow, make sure you talk to people in that profession and find if any courses are essential/desirable.

Soul search

It is essential that your chosen course appeals to you as you will spend most of the next three or four years working on it. Doing a degree as a means to an end does not always lead to a successful career. If you love the idea of being a lawyer but the Law degree looks extremely dull, it is unlikely you will suddenly start enjoying legal work on graduation!

Open Days

Attending university and college Open Days is a great way to get a feel for the place. It's very difficult, if not impossible, for students to make their minds up about somewhere just from reading a prospectus or visiting a website.

Most Open Days take place during term time so it is essential you choose visits carefully and seek permission from your Head of Year before attending.

During your visit, you should also be shown around various parts of the university or college, such as the student union, library, accommodation areas and the department in which you might end up studying. There might be opportunities to meet some of your potential tutors and chat with students currently on the courses in which you are interested.

Most students agree that Open Days have enabled them to make an instinctive decision – the place may or may not feel right. Making the effort to explore a university or college in this way should prevent you applying to go to somewhere just because it “looks nice” in a prospectus or on a website. If you don't explore beforehand, you risk feeling disappointed when turning up to start your course, only to find that it's not what you expected.

Each year, UCAS publish a *University and College Open Days* booklet, a copy of which should be available for reference in the Common Room.

When you go to an Open Day, remember to take the ‘Open Day Checklist’ with you which you will find on the UCAS website.

Open Day Policy

As with other absences, permission must be sought before a sixth former takes a day or days off. The request should be made in writing and cleared with Mrs Gallagher as well as with your tutor. Permission is not guaranteed.

We encourage you to attend universities you are seriously considering but it is obviously important to take as few days off as possible in the Upper Sixth. Please consider your Open Day choices carefully and remember that most universities now have Open Day events on Saturdays.

NB. Later in the year when students receive offers, it is increasingly common for these to come with invitation to visit which is not an interview. In some cases it is worth the student taking up this invitation, but it should be remembered that universities are keen for visitors so they get as many 'firm' acceptances as possible. If an offer has been made it is not retractable and the student is not obliged to go and take valuable time off school.

Your Short List

This is the tricky bit so discuss it thoroughly with your tutor or Heads of Year. You have five choices which are entered on the form in alphabetical order so you do not have to show any preference at this stage. However, you should have a clear idea of how your chances of success vary at each institution. After considering entry requirements, your predicted grades and other factors to take into account (e.g. Does this university prioritise certain applicants, local students for example? Is my chosen course oversubscribed here? Will an interview be required here and will that improve/damage my chances?) you should feel that you have:

- THREE choices where standard offers for your course are in keeping with your predicted grades.
- ONE ambitious choice if you wish, where typical offers for your course may be marginally in excess of your predicted grades.
- at least ONE insurance course where typical offers are lower than your predicted grades.

This next piece of advice sounds obvious but more people than you think end up at their 'back-up' university so **DON'T WASTE CHOICES ON PLACES YOU DON'T WANT TO GO TO.**

Every one of the five should be a course and an institution where you would be happy to spend the next three or more years.

NB Students applying for Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Sciences may only choose FOUR such courses. Your fifth choice must be an alternative e.g. Biomedical Sciences.

3. Admissions Tests

Some universities and colleges require you to pass an admissions test as well as standard qualifications if you are applying for courses in certain subjects. The details for most of these tests and which universities use them can be found on the UCAS website. Oxford and Cambridge both now have Aptitude tests for many subjects.

It is important that you find out which tests you may have to take as early as possible in the summer term of Lower Sixth. Some can be taken in school but must be arranged through the Examinations Officer, others require you to go to a test centre.

Some of the most common admissions tests are listed below:

BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT)

For entry to Medicine and Veterinary schools.

English Literature Admissions Test (ELAT)

For entry to English courses at the University of Oxford.

History Aptitude Test (HAT)

For entry to Modern History and a joint honours degrees involving Modern History at the University of Oxford.

Health Professions Admissions Test (HPAT)

For entry to certain medical courses at the University of Ulster.

The National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT)

For entry to Law.

Modern and Medieval Languages Test (MML)

For entry to Modern and Medieval languages at the University of Cambridge.

Sixth Term Examination Papers (STEP)

For entry to Mathematics at the University of Cambridge.

Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Cambridge)

For entry to Computer Science, Natural Sciences, Engineering and Economics at the University of Cambridge.

Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Oxford), formerly known as the PPE Admissions Test

For entry to the Philosophy, Politics and Economics, and the Economics and Management courses at the University of Oxford.

Universal Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT)

For entry to medical and dental schools.

4. The Personal Statement

This should take several drafts and each one should be discussed with your tutor and/or subject teacher for the course for which you are applying. This is your chance to show the University Admissions officer your strengths, personality and interests. This statement is increasingly important as pressure for places mounts and interviews are rarely held.

A good personal statement...	A bad personal statement...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ shows that the applicant has researched the course well and has good subject knowledge✓ is written in the applicant's own voice✓ has a clear structure✓ ties in a range of activities by focusing on specific skills learned✓ uses varied vocabulary✓ is unique!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ is <i>too</i> 'original' or odd■ features plagiarised ideas (e.g. pyjama story)■ makes false claims about work experience or books read■ contains negative comments■ uses a boring formula or lists experiences without comment■ employs hyperbole■ has several spelling mistakes

Content

Reasons for choice of course

School experience

Relevant work experience

Interests & experience outside of school

Concluding statement

Reasons for choice of course

Enjoy the subject – why?

Enjoy aspects of the subject – which?

Look forward to studying in greater depth – state specific interests

Work experience confirmed interest – how?

Possesses required skills for the course – which?

Post degree aim? (where useful)

School experience

Consider what skills have been developed through school activities such as

- Sport
- Drama
- Musical instrument lessons/orchestra etc.
- Prefect duties
- Voluntary/charity work
- School trips
- Clubs & societies
- Organising events
- Helping staff
- Public speaking

Work experience

As well as mentioning duties carried out, students should consider the skills they have acquired e.g.

- communication
- working independently
- team work
- working to deadlines
- problem solving
- initiative

Outside school

Avoid listing activities; try to make them relevant to your application. Tutors are looking for things that make applicants stand out and possible things to discuss at interview.

Interest	Outline	Relevance
Reading novels	E.g. Science fiction/historical/classic	Enjoy a wide range of literature
Travel	Unusual / educational visits	Curious & eager learner Mature and ready to live away from home
Part time work		

Cooking		
Concerts		
Films		

Concluding Statement

Something not covered by the above which relates to the degree course
Summarise how anything already mentioned makes you suitable for university

Example & Analysis of a Personal Statement

(THIS IS NOT A 'PERFECT' EXAMPLE. IT HAS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES WHICH ARE ANALYSED OVERLEAF)

GUILTY!!! I confess!!! I want to study law!!!

From an early age I was attracted to law as it is such an important aspect of Society and more recently the evolution of laws has interested me. I have taken part in exchanges, travelled internationally and this together with a Belgian mother has given me a cosmopolitan outlook and fuelled my interest in European law. Following my GCSEs in which I gained the Latin prize I chose a mixed combination of A levels. By studying mathematics and Chemistry I have acquired the scientist's respect for logic, reason and critical analysis and from the study of German I have developed a greater sense of linguistic awareness and enhanced my oral expression and writing skills.

Spending two week's at one of the region's largest firms of solicitors gave me an insight into property, litigation and company law. This was followed by a week's mini-pupillage at a barrister's chambers. During this week I attended the courts which dealt with small criminal matters. Having spent three weeks at Reuters before this, the work experience I gained confirmed that I wished to study Law at degree level. Reuters showed me the importance of the law in international business and I eventually hope to pursue a career in company law.

At school, I am involved in Model United Nations and I have helped organise, re-establish and promote the school's debating society. I have debated in front of 4000 delegates at a conference in The Hague and this improved my debating and language skills and strengthened my knowledge of

current affairs as well as developing my self-confidence. In addition to my interest in debating I am computer literate and I enjoy journalism, albeit on a small scale, as I write for the Sixth form magazine.

Swimming is my main sport for which I received the Bronze medallion in life saving. I also play netball for the school and have joined in hockey and tennis where I class myself as a willing and enthusiastic player.

In my final year at School I have been appointed a prefect and selected as a member of the Christmas Ball Committee and the Year Book Committee.

Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good, short summary of reasons for studying law • Good indication about why this unusual combination of A levels was studied and this is used to demonstrate relevant skills • Two relevant work experiences commented upon positively • Debating experience is highly relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gimmicky opening line – a serious candidate? • Mentions some extra-curricular activities without explaining their worth/relevance • Some inconsistencies in punctuation – capital letters

Additional Help with Personal Statements & References

As well as help from their tutor, students could also have one of the following subject specialists check over their personal statement.

Accounting/Business/Economics
 Art
 English
 History
 Law/Politics/ Psychology

Mrs Hatton
 Mrs Dittman
 Mrs Boylan
 Mr Power
 Mrs Lockett

Classics
Sciences/Medicine
Theology/Philosophy

Mr Yates
Mrs Pike
Mr Sanders

Remember the following:

The personal statement should be **47 lines (4,000 characters including spaces) (Times New Roman point 12 font)**. Draft it carefully and ensure that it is well written and technically accurate. Ensure you recruit help especially from your Form Tutor. Mrs Gallagher, Mrs Lockett and a subject specialist will also help. You do not need to ask more than three teachers to read it. This is your way of standing out from the crowd so make sure it is excellent. The statement must be typed as a Word document and can then be pasted into the relevant space on the online form.

5. Interviews

If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge, you will probably be invited for interview early, in December. Relatively few courses outside these two universities require interviews so don't rely on your sparky personality to make up for a weak UCAS form.

Interviews are likely to be requested for Medicine, Law, Dentistry or Veterinary Sciences. Last year, many of our applicants for Geology, Architecture and Engineering were also invited for interviews.

When you are given a date, see Mrs Gallagher or Mrs Lockett to arrange a mock interview in school.

Sometimes these come with an invitation to visit which is not an interview. If the offer is from one of your preferred institutions and you feel that it is a demanding one, it may well be worth visiting and getting to know the tutors. This could go in your favour on Results Day if you don't quite get the grades. However, offers with invitations to visit are increasingly popular as universities are also trying to get as many 'firm' acceptances (more on this later) as possible. If you feel like the offer is easily achievable, have already visited the institution or have even changed your mind about going there, do not feel obliged to go and visit. The offer is not retractable once it has been sent to you and you should always think carefully about taking time off valuable lessons during your Upper Sixth year. See Mrs Gallagher if you are unsure.

6. UCAS Extra

If you have applied through UCAS and are not holding any offers, you may be able to apply through Extra for another course. Extra allows you

to apply for courses with vacancies between the end of February and the end of June. In Extra, you apply for one course at a time using the Track service on the UCAS website.

To use Extra you need to have:

- already made five choices;
- received decisions from all these choices; and
- either had no offers or declined all the offers you have received.

If you decline your offers and add an Extra choice, you will not be able to accept any of your original choices later. N.B. Only those universities which still have vacancies will have courses in Extra.

7. Making your choices

At the beginning of May, you will be asked to select a FIRM offer and an INSURANCE offer.

FIRM choice – your favourite course from the offers you have received.

INSURANCE – a course you would be happy to study, ideally, though not necessarily, with a lower, more easily achievable offer.

This seems simple but a number of difficult situations could arise...

Frequently Asked Questions

What if my firm choice has a lower offer than my insurance?

Your firm choice should always be your first choice, as that is where you will be automatically placed if you achieve the grades of the offer.

If you just miss the grades and your 'firm' institution does not accept you, it is unlikely that another institution who gave you a *higher* offer will accept you now unless they were hugely undersubscribed and now need to fill places (unlikely but not impossible).

My first and second choices have made me the same offer. Is it worth putting one as an insurance?

Yes. If you miss the grades for your firm choice, your insurance could still accept you if you have only missed by a few marks and they need to fill places.

My favourite places have both given me very high offers. I have one low offer for a place I don't really want to go to, should I keep that as an insurance?

No. When you officially name an insurance place, if you miss the grades for your firm place and the institution does not accept you, you will be automatically placed on your insurance course. **DO NOT CHOOSE A COURSE YOU DO NOT WANT TO DO!**

I only have one offer, does this matter?

No. Often, if you are applying for a competitive course like Medicine or English, you should only expect one offer. This highlights the importance of **ONLY CHOOSING COURSES AND UNIVERSITIES YOU DEFINITELY LIKE.**

I don't have any offers. What should I do?

Don't panic, you still have options. Read the above section on UCAS Extra.

I've changed my mind since last November and I want to do a different course I haven't applied for. What should I do?

Decline all your offers and use UCAS Extra to apply for your new chosen course.

I have five reasonable offers but there's only one course I definitely want to do. Do I have to select an insurance?

You clearly did not read most of this booklet during the application process but no, you do not 'need' an insurance. **ONLY SELECT THE COURSE(S) YOU WOULD DEFINITELY WANT TO DO.**

It's Results Day, I've got in to my first choice but I would now prefer to go to my second choice. What should I do?

Once you have selected a course as your firm choice, you are committing yourself to studying there if you meet the grades offered. It is difficult to get out of this commitment, but not impossible. See Mrs Gallagher or Mrs Lockett on Results Day.

8. Results Day

From sometime after midnight on the night before your results are available, you will be able to log on to your UCAS Tracker to see the final results of your application. You could have been accepted already or

the university's decision could be pending. If this is the case, you need to come into school prepared to get on the phone (have names of admissions/course tutors and their phone numbers ready). Often, if you have missed your grades, you can still be accepted, it all depends on how many applications the course received that year. It helps to be in school when you are making these phone calls as you have more information about your results and can argue more convincingly. (Mrs Gallagher, Mrs Lockett, Mr Gallagher and the Sixth Form tutors will be around to help, but a teacher calling on a student's behalf to explain why they really want to go to university is much less convincing than a personal call from a potential student!)

If you have not achieved the grades offered by your firm or insurance choices, you still have options. You go into 'Clearing'.

What is Clearing?

Clearing is used by applicants who have not managed to secure a place at university or college for the current year. It matches applicants to suitable courses with vacancies. More than 30,000 people gain a place during Clearing every year.

If you are flexible and you have reasonable examination results, there is still a good chance you will find another course. Consider carefully before making a commitment though, don't panic and choose a course for the sake of it. Make sure you think it through and talk it over with family and teachers.

Course vacancies for Clearing are published on the UCAS website from early summer onwards.

Adjustment

UCAS Adjustment is a process that's available to anyone who exceeds the grade requirements of their firm offer. If that ends up being you, you can use Adjustment to swap your existing university place for one at another university. **If your A-level results come as a pleasant surprise you might find it can help you 'trade up' to a higher-ranked university.**

Remember - the majority of our students do get in to either their first or second choice universities. Those who don't are often just as happy at the course they found through Clearing. Mrs Gallagher, Mrs. Lockett and Mr Gallagher are still available to help should you choose to reapply for 2021 entry, just call the school to make an appointment to see us.

You will have to work hard to get to university. You must aim to score as highly as you can in your Lower Sixth examinations to give yourself the best possible chance to win a place at the university of your choice.

GOOD LUCK!