

## Applying for a higher education course

### Where to start:

There are over 50,000 different courses at 325 different universities and colleges available through the UCAS system in the UK. So how do you set about choosing the right higher education level (Level 4/6) course when faced with such a bewildering range of possibilities?

- First be clear about what it is you want. Do you need specific new skills or are you looking for a general course of study?
- You may be keen to study but unsure about which subject. The UCAS website offers a short selection test, known as the **Stamford Test**. This simply matches your interests and abilities to possible areas of higher education subjects and makes suggestions.  
[www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/whattostudy/stamfordtest](http://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. An emailed report costs £15 and a fully bound hard copy £20  
[www.coa.co.uk/centigrade](http://www.coa.co.uk/centigrade)
- Check whether you really need a university degree or diploma, there may be professional training that is more appropriate. Many of the professions, including Law, Accountancy, Engineering, Human Resources, Business and Finance, also have their own qualifications. Speak to your line manager or trainer about the available options and ways of applying to professional institutions.
- If you are working you will need to consider the best way to combine work and study. For information look at the Learning Opportunities booklet or website:
  - Choosing a Course, College or University
  - Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Work Based Learning
  - Find time to study
  - Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning[www.learning-opportunities.org.uk](http://www.learning-opportunities.org.uk)

### Before you apply:

All applications for full time courses in Higher Education are managed by The University and College Admissions Service (UCAS). There is a course search facility and links to each university and its courses on the UCAS website:  
[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

At this stage you need to decide not only which course but which universities or colleges you wish to you apply to (you can have up to five choices on the UCAS application form). Once you have had a look on line and got some ideas you may want more information to help you decide. You can also:

- order prospectuses
- attend Open Days

- speak to the Admissions Tutors
- ask for the Student Destinations List (which indicate where recent graduates have found employment following the course)

It is important to access as much course information as possible to make sure that you make the best choices of course and institution on your application form. In particular:

- be sure you have the necessary Entry Requirements. If in doubt contact the course Admissions Tutor (usually mentioned in the prospectus on the relevant course page)
- 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](http://www.naric.org.uk)
- check in the prospectus if you require a certain level of English, IT or Maths. If you can supply evidence of skills and knowledge acquired previously either through work or training you may apply for AP(E)L accreditation.

## The Application Process

To apply for full time courses you will need to register on the UCAS online application system, known as **Apply**. Full details on the application process can be found online with instructions for using your personal number and password. It is usual and faster, (though not compulsory) to submit the completed application online. Step by step instructions are clearly given:

[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

In general applications for courses starting in September/October should have been submitted between the previous September and mid-January (15<sup>th</sup> January for Sept/Oct 2010 admissions). After this date it is still possible to apply through UCAS for any courses which still have vacancies. There are a few exceptions to this:

- applications for the Route B Art courses can be submitted up to 24 March 2010
- the closing date for applications for all Medicine and Veterinary Science/Medicine courses and applications for Oxford and Cambridge Colleges is much earlier (15<sup>th</sup> October 2009 for 2010 entry)
- applications for part time courses, which are made directly to the university or college and not through UCAS

The cost of applying is £9 for one course and £19 for more than one course (you can apply for a maximum of five courses). While the majority of students are British school leavers, mature students, and students from other nations, are welcome to apply although the financial details may differ.

**Filling in the form carefully is well worth the time spent. Check details of education, qualifications, contact details and your residential or national status.**

## What do I put in the Personal Statement?

This is the part of the application form that many students find most difficult to complete. It is your opportunity to show the Admissions Tutor that you deserve a place on the course so think about what the Tutor will be looking for, and describe in a clear and concise way why you want to be on that course. If you think it makes it clearer you may use bold/italic/underline functions. But don't forget Spell Check! You can look at

the UCAS Entry Profiles for examples but be true to yourself. (UCAS does use a Similarity Detection Service to identify plagiarism.) Above all, allow the tutor to get a glimpse of who you are, what you are interested in and where you want to go in life.

You may find it helpful to think of this in terms of your Past, Present, and Future.

- Past: What gave you the interest in this subject initially? Why are you interested in it?
- 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 students are likely to have a tutor as referee, those at work could ask a line manager, trainer, employer or a capable adult who understands the demands of the course and your reasons for studying.

### **What next?**

Once you have 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](http://www.studential.com)

**Best wishes and good luck with your application!**