

## HOW TO APPLY

### Higher Futures' guide to applying for a higher education course

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## How do I apply for a higher education course?

All applications for full-time higher education courses are handled by [UCAS \(University and Colleges Admissions Service\)](#) a national organisation working with all higher education providers. This ensures fairness and standardisation within the admissions process. Applications for part-time courses are handled directly by the providers themselves.

There is a clear process to follow, with deadlines for each stage set by UCAS. All the information you need is outlined on the following pages. If you need more help and advice, please contact your tutor or your [Higher Futures adviser](#). What you have to do for yourself is:

- be aware of the applications process and the deadlines
- research courses and providers carefully
- shortlist the courses you are interested in
- attend visits, open days and planning events
- complete your application in good time

## **The UCAS application process - general information**

Applications are made via an on-line form which will take some time to complete but does not need to be completed all at once. For detailed advice on the completion of each section see 'A guide to completing the UCAS form' (from page 4).

You are allowed to choose up to 5 courses, and your application will be sent by UCAS to each university or college you have applied for separately.

The Personal Statement is a key part of the application process and will need careful composition. The Reference is also important. It must be an academic reference, and if you have attended an educational course within the last three years should be completed by that institution.

If you are in a college or have been within the last three years, you will send your completed application to your referee, and the administration will be completed at the college electronically. If you are not currently or recently in a college, you will complete the process and send off your application yourself. Either way, you will receive an electronic receipt immediately, and an acknowledgement letter from UCAS a week or so later.

## **What happens next**

Each university or college you have applied for will receive a copy of your application, although they will not be aware of what else you have applied for. Your application will be considered and a decision made about whether to offer you a place. This is usually based solely on the application form (hence the importance of completing it well).

For some courses, if your application is approved you will still need an interview (examples are teaching, nursing, social work etc. where it is necessary to demonstrate skills such as communication, which the application form cannot convey).

An offer of a place may be made within weeks or may take months to arrive - this is because different institutions have different procedures for dealing with applications, so don't worry if you don't receive an offer immediately. An offer will usually be conditional - i.e. it will depend upon you achieving certain grades in future qualifications.

Once you have all your replies you will be asked to make a decision about which offers to accept. If you achieve the conditional results your place will be confirmed.

## A guide to completing the UCAS form

Before you start, have ready the information you will need, particularly the dates of your secondary and college education, the dates of any examinations you have taken and the awarding bodies (exam boards) for each - this information is given on your certificates. If you don't have them, try contacting your school or college who may have duplicates. At some stage you will need proof of your examination results.

Go to [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk). This website has plenty of useful information, and a 'Help' section is available at every stage. Select 'Apply' and then select 'Register'.

The first question is whether you are applying through a school or college, or as an individual. If you are currently studying in a college, or have done so within the last three years, select 'through a school or college'. The college will process your application and ensure you have the most helpful reference.

**NB.** If you are not currently a student, please contact the college to let them know you will be applying, to request a reference and to ask for the college 'buzzword' for UCAS applications.

Enter the college buzzword, which will ensure your application is Registered with the right organisation. You will be asked to select a tutor. If you are an ex-student, leave this blank. Proceed with the personal information which is requested. Take care when selecting a password - you may need to reveal it at some stage!

Once you have successfully Registered you can proceed to the application form itself, which is in sections. Each section can be selected using the navigation links on the left of the page. They can be completed in any order and need not be completed in one sitting. You can save partially completed sections and return to them later. When completing the sections, you will find drop down boxes wherever there are options. Always use these - they will ensure your entries are accurate and will save you a lot of time.

When all parts of a section have been filled in, mark the section as 'finished' (if you have omitted anything you will not be allowed to do this).

When all sections have been marked as finished you will be given the option to 'mark as complete'. Once you do this, although you can still view your form it will be locked and you won't be able to alter it - this is so that your referee can see your final version. However your tutor or the college administrator can unlock it for you again if necessary - just ask.

Your tutor or referee will check your application for accuracy and approve it - it may be sent back to you if any amendments are needed. Once it has been approved, the reference will be added and the form will be e-mailed to UCAS by the college.

If you have not been in education for some time and therefore applying as an individual, it will be your own responsibility to forward your application to a suitable referee for completion. In this case the referee will not be required to check your form, so it is even more important to ensure everything is completed accurately.

An administration fee is payable with the form (currently £15, or £5 if you are only applying for one course). Colleges have their own method of sending payments - usually collecting the money from applicants and sending payments in bulk - check the procedure with the college. If you are applying as an individual you will need to make the payment on-line using a debit / credit card.

## Tips on completing the different sections

**NB.** All the information given on the form must be accurate and complete. If it later comes to light that information has been withheld or is inaccurate, your application may be refused.

### Personal Details

The information you give to Register on the site will automatically appear in this section of the form, but there is other information to be added, mostly self-explanatory.

Always use the drop down menus in this section - the information required is not always obvious and you could enter the wrong thing.

Student Support: this part is asking who will finance your studies. Select 02 (LA = Local Authority). If you select 01 (self - financing) it will be assumed that you do not require any grants, loans or bursaries even where you are eligible for them. When you later apply for finance this confusion will need correcting.

Criminal convictions: you must declare these so that the higher education provider can assess any risks. Be assured that this will only rarely prevent you from getting a place in higher education, particularly if the conviction is spent or was for a less serious offence - exceptions are for offences against children and for physical violence. If you have any conviction you can expect the university to contact you for more details.

Disability/ special needs: universities and colleges need this information to ensure that you receive any support that you may need (e.g. for dyslexia), and also to be informed about any health conditions which they would need to know about for safety reasons whilst you are on your course (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes). As well as a drop down menu to indicate your disability or medical condition, there is a free text box. In this, you should put details of any support you are currently receiving or would need in higher education.

### Choices

Enter up to five course choices in the boxes. Use the drop down menus to find the institutions, course codes and campus codes you need.

It is acceptable to choose more than one course at the same institution. However, you should not choose courses which are very different from each other as this will make it very difficult to write a Personal Statement which supports your choice. If you find yourself in this position, seek help from your adviser for guidance on making appropriate choices.

The Start Date / Year of Entry should be left blank unless you have the agreement of the university to start the course at a point other than first year (which may be the case if you have completed a Foundation Degree or HND).

Use the 'Defer' box if you are applying for a course to start a year later (e.g. if you are taking a 'Gap' year). Use the 'Home' box only if you are absolutely sure you will want to stay at home. Ticking this indicates that you will not require student accommodation (and you may change your mind about where you want to live) and you will also be offered a lower rate of student finance. If you leave this option open, you can still opt to stay at home.

Further Details: this section is only used when applicants need to make a choice between course options. The course code entry will indicate if it is necessary to complete this.

## **Education**

Enter the secondary schools and colleges you attended, with dates of entry and leaving. There is a 'search' facility here for all UK secondary schools.

Next, add all your qualifications including GCSE / equivalents, whenever taken. Awarding bodies and dates of achievement (or dates when these are expected) will also be needed.

You must include all qualifications, including those failed. If you have taken a qualification more than once on different dates, you should enter it more than once. If you have taken it six times, you should enter it six times.

Include qualifications yet to be taken as well as those achieved, entering a future date for completion. Enter the month and year the course will end but leave the result box blank - don't insert your predicted grade.

Available qualifications, including international and historical qualifications, are listed alphabetically, by both title and by awarding body. The most common qualifications for Higher Futures students are listed as Access, Advanced Modern Apprenticeship, BTEC National Diploma, CACHE, GCSE and NVQ.

Take particular care if selecting BTEC National that you choose the correct one (pre- or post-2003) since the new National Diploma has 18 units of study whilst the old one had 12 units of study. This can make a difference in terms of the acceptability of the qualification for some higher education courses.

If you have an unusual qualification and can't find it, look under 'Other'.

In most cases it is clear how you should record the results achieved. In some cases you will be asked to enter module or unit titles in free text format. These are stated on your achievement certificates.

## **Employment**

In this section enter details of your paid employment experience - dates, employer and job details. It is particularly aimed at mature and employed applicants with considerable work experience. There is only a limited amount of space, so focus on the most relevant and / or most recent jobs you've had.

If you are a full-time student with a part-time job, by all means include it, but there's no need to include every Saturday job you've ever done. However, do include any work which is relevant to the course you have applied for. NB Be careful when stating the hours you work if you are a full-time student; too many may not be seen as an advantage, particularly if the impression is given that this takes up too much of your time - it will look as if studying is not your priority!

Voluntary work does not go in this section - include details of this in your Personal Statement instead.

## **Your Personal Statement: getting started**

This is your opportunity to sell yourself - something which most people don't find easy. It is worth taking time over - be prepared to make several drafts.

### **General Advice**

#### **DO**

- Make rough notes about what you are going to include.
- Discuss your first draft with a tutor or adviser.
- Use clear language, spelling and punctuation - obviously!
- Use an essay style, with paragraphs. Your written communication skills can be judged by the presentation of your statement.

#### **DON'T**

- Type directly into the text box provided. Use a Word document, then Cut and Paste into the text box. This is because you can't make all the alterations you want in the text box and there is no spelling or grammar check; there's also a tendency for you to be 'timed out' in the middle of working.
- Include information already given on your application form (e.g. 'I am currently studying...')
- Aim your statement at only one course - unless you are only applying for one course.
- Waffle
- Tell lies!

### **What to include in your statement**

What follows is not a formula and is in no particular order, but here are general guidelines about what could be included.

#### **Your motivation for studying**

What do you enjoy about studying? Why do you want to study at a higher level? What are your short term and longer term plans (including career aims if you know them)?

#### **Evidence of genuine interest in the course applied for.**

(This is very important, and why it's difficult to write a good statement when you have applied for different courses).

Do the courses chosen link to your current course of study or current employment? How? If not, where has your interest come from and when did it start? What aspects of the higher education course are you particularly interested in? What relevant publications do you read? Have you attended any events, exhibitions or conferences? Have you undertaken any projects, reading or research over and above those which are part of your current course?

#### **Relevant work experience or shadowing - paid or voluntary**

For some courses (e.g. teaching, health related and other strongly vocational courses) this is essential. As well as stating where and when you had the experience, it is important to say what you learned from it and how it has enhanced your understanding of the career area and the course you are planning to take.

**Information about you as a person**

Your personal strengths, qualities and interests should be stated, but you must give evidence to support what you say. Your personal or work history could contribute to this, as could any extra-curricular activity, commitments or personal interests. Be specific - 'reading' is often included as an interest - but what do you read and why do you like it? 'Sport' - do you play or watch, and how much are you involved? Very ordinary interests are not helpful - e.g. 'socialising' could be claimed by all applicants. Anything which can demonstrate broader skills such as teamworking or independence is useful, as is anything which shows your willingness to work hard or persevere with problems and tasks.

**Your Personal Statement: gathering evidence**

Use the following examples to compile your own list of achievements and examples which may be included to support your Personal Statement.

**Personal qualities, skills and strengths**

Use (and add to) this list to identify your own strengths. Then consider which of your experiences would best illustrate that quality

interpersonal skills  
communication  
self-discipline  
using initiative  
motivation  
teamwork  
leadership

organisational skills  
commitment  
perseverance  
sociability  
problem solving  
confidence  
responsibility

multi-tasking  
representing others  
listening  
enthusiasm  
speaking  
reliability

**Experiences**

Use (and add to) this list to identify appropriate and relevant experiences which you might want to include in your Personal Statement.

work experience  
paid employment  
volunteering  
clubs and societies  
performing and musical interests  
sport and active interests  
literature, film and theatre  
enterprise and business  
arts and culture  
reading and writing

information technology  
speaking  
mentoring or helping others  
travel and broader experiences  
family background  
visits, conferences, field trips  
awards  
leading and representing  
charity work  
organising events

**Describe yourself!**

Use (and add to) this list to decide what you would like to say about yourself - this depends on you and your course choice - there are many other words you could use.

independent  
efficient  
confident  
trustworthy  
diplomatic  
sensitive  
approachable

sociable  
responsible  
self-motivated  
optimistic  
determined  
open minded  
energetic

hard working  
ambitious  
conscientious  
creative  
committed  
individual

### **Style and structure for your Personal Statement**

There is no set way to write a Personal Statement; the ideas which follow are only one way to complete the task so don't be afraid to do something different. This section offers you some sections you may wish to include, and some tips on writing them. Sketch out your paragraphs to make a first draft. The order in which you write your paragraphs is not that important - move them around to see how they look. When writing up, use a style which is natural to you and feels comfortable, but err on the formal rather than the informal side. However, don't use rambling sentences and wordy explanations. Humour is probably best avoided (an admissions tutor may not share your sense of humour) and it is almost always inappropriate to go into detail about personal experiences and problems. It may be obvious, but always use the correct grammar and punctuation, and never use slang or text type abbreviations.

### **Writing an introduction**

Avoid stating anything already on your application such as what you are studying now - you could start with the topics / subjects you most enjoy on your current course - you could introduce yourself as a person - you may choose not to have an introductory paragraph and can start with any of the sections below.

### **Writing about the choice of course**

Demonstrating your interest in the course is the most important part of the Personal Statement - explain why you are applying for the course - why you really want to study it - show that you understand clearly what the course involves - the particular aspects of it you like - you possess the skills required to succeed on it - you have a related career in mind - you have read articles or books relating to the course (say which, and what you earned from them) - any other reasons for your choice.

### **Writing about work experience**

School based work experience is unlikely to be very relevant - the most valuable is experience you have set up yourself - explain what the work experience involved - what skills developed from it and which duties developed those skills - what you learned from the work - link this to the course you are applying for.

### **Writing about your educational background and experiences**

Explain any relevant issues relating to your educational history - any gaps in your educational record - if yet to pass GCSE English or Maths. explain your plan to do so - why you chose your level 3 course - what skills you have learned other than study related - your participation in college life.

### **Writing about your interests and extra-curricular experiences**

Key activities or experiences gained outside an educational setting - outline what they involve - explain the relevance - what skills and abilities you have acquired as a result - your ability to balance studying with other aspects of your life.

### **Writing about yourself**

Why you are suited to the course chosen - describe your personal qualities - why you are suited to higher education - (only if appropriate) family or health matters - sound like an interesting person!

### **Writing a conclusion**

Choose one of your ideas and move it to the end, developing it into a conclusion, e.g. your career aim, your personal qualities - think of an experience you have not mentioned which you can develop to illustrate your suitability - state what you are expecting from higher education - what you are most looking forward to - why you will be successful on your chosen course.