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# Applying to University: A brief guide

Undergraduate Recruitment Team | 2026

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1. Questions to ask
2. Research
3. Preparing the application



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# Which subject?

**Over 50,000 courses to choose from in the UK:**

- Take a school subject to the next level?
- Related subjects?
- Something completely new?
- Vocational courses?

**Try to choose a subject you enjoy!**



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# Which course?

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## Research:

- Course content
- Flexibility
- Teaching and assessment methods
- Quality of teaching and research
- Professional accreditation
- Placements / study abroad?
- Future career paths



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# Which university?

What sort of environment will suit **you**?

- Location?
- Big or small?
- Campus or city?



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# Scottish Universities

University of Aberdeen

University of Abertay

University of Dundee

University of Edinburgh

Edinburgh Napier University

University of Glasgow

Glasgow Caledonian University

Heriot-Watt University

University of Highlands & Islands

Queen Margaret University

Robert Gordon University

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

University of St Andrews

University of Stirling

University of Strathclyde

University of the West of Scotland

The Open University in Scotland



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# Which university?

## Consider university facilities:

- 10 Academic facilities and resources
- 10 Accommodation options
- 10 Student support and welfare
- 10 Social and sports facilities
- 10 Societies and sports clubs
- 10 ... and beyond the University? (city facilities, opportunities for work?)



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# Preparing the Application

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# Entry requirements

- Check entry requirements carefully...
- Minimum requirements:
  - Subject specific?
  - General entry requirements?
  - Vary whether taken by end of S5 or S4 – S6?
- Advanced Highers required / recommended?
- Level of competition? ('Standard' offer level?)
- Work experience?
- Additional tests or interviews?
- If in doubt – **check with universities directly before applying**



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# The UCAS system

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## Apply to:

- Universities
- Some college courses
- Conservatoires

## One application, 5 choices

- Maximum 4 for medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine
- Back up choices

## Equal consideration dates:

**15 October 2026 18:00**

- Medicine
- Dentistry
- Veterinary medicine
- Oxford/Cambridge

**13 January 2027 18:00**

- All other courses

**Follow your school's deadlines!**



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# The UCAS application

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## Information required:

Personal information – name, address, email

Year of entry

Educational history and qualifications

Employment history

Subject & university choices

Personal statement

School reference



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# What are universities looking for?

**Academic achievement – and potential** to do well at university

Evidence (via **personal statement**) of:

- strong interest in your chosen subject area.
- commitment, motivation and readiness for higher education
- suitability for your chosen degree programme (especially for vocational courses).

Supporting **school reference**



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# Personal Statement (recent changes)

- More structured
  - Q1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?
  - Q2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you prepare for this course or subject?
  - Q3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?
- Total character count remains the same



# Why do you want to study this course or subject?

**Think about what motivates you to apply for this subject.**

**This will be personal to you(!) but might include:**

- Love of the subject and want to pursue further?
- Inspired by a person/event/experience/book/exhibition?
- Interested in a particular part of this subject area and want to know more?
- Part of a long term career plan? Driven to pursue a particular profession?



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# How have your qualifications and studies helped you prepare for this course or subject?

Thinking about your formal education (at school/college/or even short online course).....

- What transferable skills have you gained?
- What has helped to give you an insight into this subject? (*Has a particular module helped you understand the subject more? Have you done any extra courses/study outside school that is relevant?*)
- How might this help you succeed at University?
- Any other academic achievements that can show your skills and abilities? (*e.g. winning school competition? Acting as school ambassador or team captain? Musical or drama achievements?*)

**Focus on what's most recent and relevant** to you application.

Remember you **don't need to include information about the grades you've achieved** already – universities see this in another part of the application.

# What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

A chance to highlight other activities/experiences you have had which also demonstrate your suitability for the subject or course. This will be unique to you(!) – but examples might include:

## **Work experience, employment, or volunteering**

- Particularly important if applying for a professional/vocational course where the University is looking for relevant work experience e.g. Medicine/Vet Med/Teaching/ health professions
- Also a great way to demonstrate key skills – time management, communication skills, leadership skills...

## **Personal life experiences or responsibilities**

For example a life experience that influenced/inspired your choice of career? Do you have family caring responsibilities? Have you had experiences that have helped you develop skills like resilience and empathy? **(Important!** Challenging circumstances can be included in the reference – you don't need to mention here unless relevant to your choices)

## **Hobbies and any extracurricular or outreach activities**

This could include music, sport, drama – any activities which demonstrate your particular skills and personal qualities – and explain why you'd make a great student.



# Personal statement: **Top tips**

- One personal statement for five choices
- Aim for all choices to have a common theme
- Max 350 characters per question (4000 character max overall)
- Limit includes punctuation, spaces and blank lines
- Plagiarism check (Copycatch) and beware of Chat GPT
- Draft and redraft!



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# Research

## Research chosen course(s) and key skills required

**University  
prospectuses, course  
leaflets, websites**

**Higher Education  
Exhibitions**

**Work experience/  
shadowing**

**Careers library**

**Open Days**

**Email universities with  
questions if necessary**



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# Any questions?

Email: [future.students@ed.ac.uk](mailto:future.students@ed.ac.uk)

## **Open Days 2026**

- Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September
- Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October