

PATE'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL



An introduction to HIGHER EDUCATION OPTIONS

Name:.....

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook is designed to guide you through the process of finding out about higher education and finding the right option or university choice for you. Everyone is different: some people already know which career they want to pursue and others are not sure. Both are OK!

If you have a clear career goal this may well have implications for the short term decision. For example, Doctors do need medical degrees but lawyers often choose to read another subject first. **The majority of graduate employers usually require a good degree classification but do not specify a degree subject.**

It is really important that you realise very early on that this is **YOUR DECISION** and will be **YOUR APPLICATION**. It is you who must make decisions, the quality of which is largely dependent on your own efforts and research. Pate's staff can assist you and will give advice but we cannot make these important decisions for you. Allow yourself time to think about these issues and to consult with family, friends and members of staff.

How to be a good university candidate

The following are all relevant:

- GCSE and Year 12 exam results (these should show either consistency or a progression – getting better and better!)
- Good A level predictions (these will be dependent on Year 12 results and your work record in 6th form)
- The right choice of subject and a realistic choice of universities. (You must meet the course requirements – don't apply for a course for which you are not qualified)
- A good reference from the school.
- An interesting and well written Personal Statement on your UCAS form (We will offer help with this).

Detailed **subject reports** will be written by each of your Year 12 subject teachers. The reports are used together with all your results and predictions to write a reference for you. The reference is written with the following points in mind:

- Capacity for sustained independent study.
- Evidence of intellectual initiative – reading beyond the syllabus.
- Knowledge and understanding – including powers of analysis.
- Powers of expression: logic, creativity, accuracy and style.
- Effectiveness in discussion and enthusiasm for subject.
- Ability to meet deadlines and promptness of work in general.
- Practical proficiency, if relevant.
- Relevant wider experience.
- Potential and suitability for the course applied for.
- Temperament, sociability, likely impression at interview.
- Extracurricular activities and interests.
- Any special circumstances.

What to study?

You are allowed to name up to 5 university courses on a UCAS application form. Normally you will apply for the same, or similar, subject at all 5. You can apply to more than one course at the same university.

Almost every subject imaginable is available at some university. You could start by asking yourself:

- Which subject or subjects do I most enjoy at A level?
Do these subjects suggest a university course? (Check that your A level subjects are the ones required for the subject you wish to study – see ‘Looking beyond A levels’ below).
- If the subject you are interested in is new to you – find out as much as possible. Don’t choose a subject simply because of the career it appears to open up.

Vocational or non-vocational degrees?

Think carefully about what you want to study and why. You are far more likely to choose the right course for you if you are honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses. You are also far more likely to do well in your chosen subject if it is something you truly enjoy.

Vocational courses are courses like: Medicine and many courses allied to Medicine, Dentistry, Vet Medicine, Architecture, Engineering, and sometimes Law. These courses are all highly competitive and will require a record of extensive work experience. It is particularly important with vocational courses that it is **your vocation** – not your parents’ or friend’s!

The majority of university students study a subject unrelated to their subsequent career. Graduates with a good degree will always be attractive to employers – whatever subject they have studied. Any degree course will equip you with multiple transferable skills.

Research:

Find out as much about the subject area and courses available as possible. There is lots of information on **Unifrog** and in the **Careers Section** of the main School Library. Speak to subject teachers, look on university websites. Look carefully at course requirements and course outlines and try to get an idea of which courses might be the ‘best fit’ for you. Go to university Open Days and ask questions. There is also **lots** of information on the school VLE.

Useful websites:

www.ucas.co.uk

www.purepotential.org

www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk

Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

Universities look for evidence of that you will be capable of independent study and research and possess a passion for your subject. Completing an EPQ is a great way to provide proof of these skills and gives you lots of useful material to include in your personal statement and talk about at interview.

Where to study?

- **Be flexible:** Avoid preconceptions about which institutions or which parts of the country you are prepared to consider.
- Conditional offers of high A grades may indicate the popularity of a course rather than its quality; conversely a good course that is less popular may have lower entry requirements. (Modern Language courses are an example of this – some schools simply cannot offer languages at A level as a result there are fewer applicants for university places. Consequently, many good universities may make ‘lower’ offers – this is not a value judgement, just a question of supply and demand).
- **Include a range of universities on your application form:** Do not just write down the most popular and therefore the most competitive. There is a real danger that if you do this you may end up with no offers.
- **Location:** You may prefer a self-contained campus setting or a university which is part of a town – do your research and visit some to find out. Types of **residence** available will be listed on university websites – would you prefer catered or self-catered for example? Don't forget to allow for transport costs if you opt for somewhere far away. **A strong extracurricular interest:** such as music or rowing may affect your choice.

The Oxford and Cambridge Question

Questions to consider:

- With **course (rather than institution)** as your focus: Is Oxford/Cambridge the best place for the **course** I want to study? Do they even offer it?
- Have I secured mostly A* grades at GCSE?
- Do I regularly produce top grade work for my teachers?
- Am I on course for high A grades in Year 12 exams?
- Do my teachers expect me to achieve mainly A* grades at A level?
- Do I submit work promptly, regardless of other demands on my time?
- Do I thrive working under pressure and enjoy exams?
- Am I passionate about my subject and regularly read well beyond the syllabus? An EPQ can be the ideal way to extend your knowledge of an area of study.
- Do I enjoy working independently, thinking for myself and having my ideas challenged?
- Can I cope with the extra work needed for an Oxbridge application?
- Can I cope if I am not successful in getting an Oxbridge offer?
- If you are considering application for an organ or choral scholarship **YOU MUST INFORM THE MUSIC DEPT DURING YR12, as early as possible.**

Do your research!

www.ox.ac.uk

www.cam.ac.uk

Beyond A levels

Listed below are **some examples** of degree courses (this is by no means an exhaustive list), together with the A level subjects commonly required or expected.

It must be emphasised that rarely do all higher education establishments have the same requirements, and very rarely is there no flexibility at all. On the other hand you must recognise that if you apply with an unconventional combination of subjects for a particular course you may put yourself at a disadvantage with respect to other applicants. Some A level subjects will be listed as 'Required' and are essential and some listed as 'Recommended' and, although are not essential, may be qualifications held by the majority of people applying for that course. The most up to date information is usually on university websites and university Admissions Officers do not mind answering queries if the answer cannot be found on the website.

NB. Sustained and relevant work experience may be a requirement for some courses.

Archaeology

History, Geography, English and/or a Science subject may be preferred. 2 Sciences required for Archaeological Science courses.

Anthropology

Biology and Geography preferred for some biological anthropological courses (Social Anthropology)

Architecture / Architectural Engineering

Maths and/or Physics required or preferred for some courses. Art sometimes a requirement and a portfolio of art work often requested.

Art / Design

Art A level and portfolio of art work required by many courses. You may choose to complete an Art Foundation course prior to university.

Biochemistry / Biomedical Science / Genetics / Physiology

Chemistry required. Biology usually preferred, one or two Maths/Science subjects required. NB **Biological Sciences** does not always require Chemistry eg at Oxford.

Business and Management Courses / Accountancy

Maths is often essential or desirable. There is a wide range of courses, some show preference for Economics, Business Studies, Geography, English or a Foreign Language.

Chemistry / Chemical Engineering

Two Science subjects including Chemistry (Chemistry, Physics and Maths is a good combination with Further Maths for some courses).

Computer Science

Maths and Further Maths, with some preference for Physics. STEP used by some universities as part of conditional offer.

Dentistry

Chemistry plus Biology usually required. Another Science subject may be required or preferred. Proof of precision motor skills will be one of the skills required at interview.

Drama / Theatre Studies

English and Theatre Studies may be required. Extensive record of involvement in theatre productions often required. Not all courses involve acting – you need to check.

Economics

Maths and Economics may be required or preferred. Check university websites carefully for other preferred subjects.

Education Studies

A level in the main subject of choice required plus one or two other A levels.

Engineering

Maths and/or Physics usually required. Further Maths sometimes recommended, especially for competitive courses. Some universities may use STEP as part of conditional offer.

English

English Literature required, other subjects not usually specified. Modern Language required for joint courses.

Environmental Science

One or two Science subjects are usually stipulated. Maths may be required.

Geography

Geography with two other subjects. Maths or Science required for BSc

Geology

Maths / Science subjects usually required. Geography may be accepted as an additional Science. Chemistry, Maths and Physics often preferred.

History

History required, other subjects are not usually specified. Modern Language required for joint courses.

Law

A very high standard required in 3 subjects. Preference for at least one essay based subject.

Materials Science

Maths, Physics and/or Chemistry, possibly Further Maths.

Mathematics / Statistics

Maths and Further Maths, preference given to Physics. STEP may be used.

Medicine

Chemistry and Biology usually required. Most Medical Schools do not specify preference for 3rd subject. Other requirements vary – check university websites carefully. High grades, relevant work experience essential and an interview will be required. Additional admissions test may also be required (BMAT, UKCAT)

Music

A level Music plus instrumental grade usually required.

Natural Sciences

High grades in 3 Sciences (check individual course requirements, some like Maths as well).

Pharmacy

Chemistry and one or two other Sciences usually required.

Philosophy / PPE - Philosophy, Politics and Economics:

Usually 'No specific subjects required' but in our experience Maths is often very useful for PPE. History or another essay-based subject can give evidence of ability to expand on ideas.

Physics:

Physics and Maths (and Chemistry sometimes preferred). Further Maths highly desirable for some courses.

Physiotherapy:

One or two Science subjects required, often Biology.

Physical Education

PE required. Research carefully as some courses require science at A level.

Politics:

No subjects specified. History or English useful.

Psychology:

A Science subject usually required. Look carefully at individual course outlines – some more science based than others. 'Experimental Psychology' will be lab-based.

Sociology:

No subjects specified.

Town and Country Planning:

Geography may be specified.

Vet Science / Medicine : Excellent science grades essential. Extensive and varied work experience over a long period of time essential. (Work experience in as many different situations as possible – small / large animals, etc.)

Zoology / Animal Science:

Biology and Chemistry preferred or required.

The Application Timetable

During the Spring and Summer terms of Year 12:

- Talk to subject staff.
- Make an appointment with Mrs Lucas to discuss options.
- Research options by looking at Unifrog, the Careers Library, looking up university websites and visiting institutions.

At the end of the Summer term you will be given help to start drafting your Personal Statement and be able to log on to the UCAS website. You will be able to enter personal information and GCSE qualifications.

If you are thinking about an Oxbridge application you should see subject departments to get a reading list so you can start to extend your subject knowledge beyond the syllabus. You may be able to attend subject preparation sessions in Year 13.

Summer, Year 12: End of year exam results

- Think carefully about your plans and choices – in the light of exam results. Talk to staff and get advice.
- Finish Personal Statement over the summer.

Autumn Term, Year 13:

- Those who are applying to Oxford, Cambridge or for Medicine, Dentistry or Vet Science should complete their UCAS form on line and print off a paper copy for Mrs Lucas by **12 September**. (Forms will be sent to UCAS by 15 October deadline)
- All other applications should be completed in the same way – by **16 October**.
- Your reference cannot be written until we can see your choices and completed Personal Statement. Complete the form and press send – this sends it to the school (not the universities or UCAS). The form will only be sent to UCAS once the reference has been written and attached to the form.
- **Please be patient. Your reference will be written as quickly as possible.**
- Once your reference has been written it will be shown to you. This is so that you can correct factual mistakes (number of GCSEs for example) or typographical errors. **The reference is written after careful consideration of all your subject reports and is not negotiable.**
- Once your reference has been attached and the form has been submitted you will be able to follow progress via the Track section of the UCAS website. Some people may receive offers quite quickly, others will be waiting until the end of March. This is normal – do not panic.
- If you have applied to Oxbridge you may have to sit an entrance test, submit work and attend an interview.

Spring Term, Year 13:

- Most offers should be sent by Universities by 31 March.
- Your offers will be 'Conditional' (on A level results). You can choose 2, one Conditional Firm and one Conditional Insurance. This choice should be made by early May.

August, A level Results:

- If you meet the conditions of your firm offer you will be assured a place at your first choice university. If you miss the first choice offer requirements but satisfy those of your insurance offer you are assured a place at your second choice university. Either way you do not need to take any action.
- If you do not meet the conditions of either of your offers you can try to phone the universities concerned to see if they will still take you – or you can apply through Clearing – or you can opt to take a Gap Year and reapply in the following Autumn.

Gap Years:

Most universities support the idea of a gap year, especially if you have plans to do something useful. The only exception to this is if you are applying to study some very competitive Maths courses.

If you are contemplating a gap year you have 2 options. Either:

- Apply for deferred entry so that you can go on your travels knowing that you have a place to come back to. (**NB** Some Universities and very competitive courses do not offer deferred places – Check whether this applies to you!)
- Wait and apply during your gap year.

We would recommend the first option as it allows you to complete your application while you have the support of staff at school and gives you 2 opportunities to apply –(if you don't get an offer you want the first time you have a second chance)

We will offer all applicants as much support as they need whichever option you choose.

Personal Statement

Your personal statement is a very important part of your application so spend time on getting it right. You have 4,000 characters (including spaces), 47 lines of text. You are presenting evidence to show admissions tutors why they should pick you over other candidates.

Step 1: Research

You cannot write a convincing personal statement unless you have researched your subject and course. Find out as much as you can about the courses available.

- University departmental websites usually give a course outline. Compare the structure of different courses and decide what you want out of a University course. What is it that appeals? How flexible is it? Teaching methods used? Contact time? Exam methods?
- Check whether you will be qualified for the course you choose (based on course requirements, typical offers and your predicted grades). 'Required' means essential, 'Recommended' means you will be competing with others who have this qualification.
- Look at a map and weigh up practical issues – train fares, etc.

You must have good reasons for applying to the course and the University you choose. If you are applying for a vocational course (vet, medicine, etc.) you will need to show commitment to your future career. **Sustained work experience** is valued highly (regular time spent visiting a care home, mentoring younger students, working with disabled children or regular time spent on a children's farm or rescue centre for example).

Step 2: Drafting your Personal Statement

- Accept from the beginning that you will write many drafts.
- Going to University is a **personal** choice and the statement should be your chance to express that.
- Don't use over-complicated language, lies or someone else's statement. **Plagiarism will be found out. UCAS have very sophisticated similarity detection software.**

If you have done your research you will have identified the things that appeal to you about the course. Now it is your chance to show **evidence** that proves that you fit that course profile. Universities want to know that you are teachable and have potential, not that you are already an expert in your field!

Admissions Tutors look for **evidence** of:

- Subject interest
- Independence
- Self-motivation
- Wider reading and intellectual curiosity
- Time management, independent study
- Teamwork skills, leadership roles
- Initiative
- Maturity

SHOW, DON'T TELL.

REFLECT on your experiences and think about how they are relevant to your application. How have your interests helped you to develop the qualities listed above?

Your Personal Statement should be engaging and well-informed. It should show your enthusiasm and suitability for a course clearly and with confidence. It should be an accurate reflection of you, not the person you would like to be or think you ought to be.

Questions that may help when drafting your Personal Statement:

- What interests do you have within your current A Level courses and why? How might these interests have influenced your course choice or sparked inspiration or led to further reading or research?
- Have you completed an EPQ that you could talk about?
- If you have been on a Taster Course, what did you learn?
- If you have completed Work Experience, what did you learn?
- If you have played for a team or been part of a club or committee, what did it teach you?
- If you have a hobby, what qualities has it taught you?
- Think about how your hobbies, interests and social activities demonstrate your skills and abilities.
- **Every point you make should link back to the subject you have chosen.**

READ, RESEARCH, REFLECT, DRAFT, REFLECT, WRITE, CHECK THOROUGHLY....SUBMIT.

Dos and don'ts when writing your personal statement

- Do use your best English and don't let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your statement.
- Do show that you know your strengths and can outline your ideas clearly.
- Use words you know will be understood by the person reading your statement (an expert in the subject – do not teach them!) Use technical terms and language if appropriate.
- Do be enthusiastic – if you show your interest in the course, it may help you get a place. Be precise in your references to subjects, give specific examples
- Do expect to produce several drafts of your personal statement before being totally happy with it.
- Do ask people you trust for their feedback.
- Don't exaggerate – if you do you may get caught out at interview when asked to elaborate on an interesting achievement or a book you claimed to have read.
- Don't rely on a spellchecker as it will not pick up everything – proofread as many times as possible.
- Don't leave it to the last minute – your statement will seem rushed and important information could be left out.
- Don't be tempted by Personal Statements for sale on line – or by copying a friend's statement. UCAS has very sophisticated similarity detection software and will inform universities if this happens. **Universities will discard plagiarised statements.**

Student Finance

Student Finance is a matter for you, your parents and the Student Loans Company. The school is not involved in any way.

There are 2 types of loan available:

1. **Tuition Fee Loan:** This covers the cost of your course and will be paid directly to your University from the Student Loans Company.
2. **Maintenance Loan:** This is for living expenses and how much you get is means-tested. Everyone is entitled to borrow some money, the less your parents earn, the more you will be entitled to borrow.

There are a few really important things to remember about student finance:

- **No-one has to pay up front** (for fees)
- **You only repay the loan when you earn enough.** If you are ill or in a lower paid job you never repay anything www.studentfinancecalc.com will allow you to see whether it is likely that you'll be someone who repays.
- **Repayments** are taken from your pay packet (like tax) after you graduate and only if you are earning over £25,000 per year. The amount taken is 9% of everything you earn above £25,000. So if you earn £26,000, as it is £1,000 over the threshold you will pay £90 per year. Interest is added on regardless of circumstances.
- You don't have to take a loan – if your parents want to pay, for example, but you could end up spending more than is needed if you pay upfront because, if you do take out a loan, you might not have to pay it all back before the debt is wiped (After 30 years all debts are wiped).
- Once you know how much maintenance loan you are entitled to, work out all your other costs and stick to a **budget**. You may be able to supplement your loan with a part-time job, savings or money from your parents but you should know how much you will have so that you can plan and budget successfully.

Useful Resources:

www.moneysavingexpert.com/students

Key facts and figures about student finance and tuition fees. Martin Lewis chairs the Independent Task Force on Student Finance Information.

www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance

For details on applying for grants and loans.

Scholarships:

Some universities offer scholarships based on merit (good grades) or family circumstances. Some offer 'Access' schemes to encourage applicants from under-represented groups or areas. See university websites for further information.

Other scholarships are sometimes available – look on the university websites.

International Applications

Think carefully about your reasons for applying overseas. If you are interested in the breadth offered by a Liberal Arts degree have you considered the Liberal Arts courses offered by UCL, KCL or Birmingham? Or the Combined Honours course at Durham or Exeter? Or the breadth offered by a 4 year degree at a Scottish University?

There are many European options and over 4,000 universities and colleges in USA alone. You will need to do research!

For the USA a good place to start is the Fulbright Commission website and the Peterson's search engine (on the Fulbright website) that will help you narrow down the list.

Come and speak to us for further information.

Useful Resources:

www.fulbright.com

www.collegeboard.com

<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/studying-in-the-united-states>

<http://www.astarfuture.co.uk/>

European universities: www.eunicas.co.uk is a good place to start your research.

And in the School Library Reference section:

'Uni in the US' by Alice Fishburn

The Princeton Review of 'The Best 376 Colleges'

'Getting into US and Canadian Universities' by Margaret Kroto

'Top (World) University Guide' (uses QS World Rankings)

A Different Route / Employability / Apprenticeships

You may be interested in investigating Apprenticeships, Year in Industry www.yini.org or looking at companies who might offer sponsorship through university or internships and work experience in the holidays www.notgoingtouni.co.uk may be useful. There has been a rise in the number of Higher and Degree level apprenticeships available and taken up by Pate's students (Dyson, Jaguar-Landrover, CapGemini, PWC to name a few of the more popular schemes) Unifrog has lots of useful information on apprenticeships and an up to date database to search.

Please speak to Mrs Lucas if this is something you want to consider.

Notes on applying for Medicine, Veterinary Medicine or Dentistry

- Chemistry (Compulsory), Biology (Compulsory or very strongly advised for most), Physics or Maths (advised for some courses). Medical courses are predominantly science based. If you have fewer than 5 A* at GCSE you may find application more difficult – you must think carefully about where you apply and how you can strengthen your application in other areas.
- BMAT www.bmat.org.uk is a tough test and needs a lot of preparation. The test is taken 30 October at school. This is **after** the UCAS form has been submitted. A poor BMAT score could therefore jeopardise an application. Do not apply to more than 2 BMAT schools.
- UKCAT www.ukcat.ac.uk taken outside school (at the Driving Test Centre) starting in late June through to late September. You must make your own arrangements to sit this test and register in plenty of time (registration is open from 3 May). Different medical schools use the UKCAT in different ways in drawing up their interview list so use a good score to your advantage.
- Start preparation by looking on the test websites for practice tests and advice. There are also books with practice UKCAT and BMAT questions in the Reference section of the School Library.
- Decide what sort of medical course best suits your way of learning – traditional, systems-based or problem-based learning (PBL) but accept that most universities offer a mix or an ‘integrated’ approach.
- Work experience and voluntary work are essential (Not all work experience needs to be medical – or glamorous!) You must be able to reflect on your experiences and relate them to skills needed for medicine.
- Attend any relevant lectures, talks at the Science Festival and read up on current medical issues – BMJ, New Scientist, Radio 4, MOOCs, Ted Talks etc.
- Medicine is extremely competitive, no one is guaranteed a place and you must be prepared for disappointment. All the medical schools are high quality and there are no ‘soft’ options.
- Think carefully about a viable and realistic 5th choice subject.
- There is LOTS more information on the school VLE. Please look.