

HOW TO APPLY

FOR

HIGHER EDUCATION

2010
(entry 2011/ 2012)



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Section A

1 *Higher Education in 2010 and beyond*

Higher Education is never far from the headlines. Fuelled by the financial crisis and its resulting hole in the Government budget, we have seen even more news items about universities and colleges in this academic year than before. Many of the problems the university sector faces originate in the rapid increase in student numbers over the last 20 years; while in 1985 only one in eight of over eighteen-year olds was entering higher education, 43% of them did so in 2004, in part as a result of so-called 'widening access' and 'increased participation' by groups hitherto under-represented in the university sector. This increase was driven by successive Governments which have seen higher education as the panacea for skills shortages in the work force. Whatever the merits of this position, universities have had to accept more students to ensure continued funding of their courses and this, in turn, has led to a charge of lowering standards. It is certainly true, for instance, that classes in most universities have become larger and individual staff attention given to students has decreased. Now, to rein in student loan costs for example, the Government has put a cap on university places for the next academic year (and fining institutions if they exceed their allocated number); in addition, it has asked for £180 million 'efficiency savings' for 2011 and has cut HE funding by £600 million for 2012/13. The 23 % increase in applications this year – many by young people who failed to get a place in the last UCAS round – only exacerbates the problem

In order to tackle the funding crisis in universities, the Government several years ago abolished maintenance grants in favour of loans and introduced an annual contribution towards the cost of tuition which currently stands at up to £3,290 p.a. Sanction to charge these top-up fees is dependent on universities meeting criteria relating to 'wider access' to students traditionally under-represented in higher education. It is likely, however, that in the future universities will try to impose differential tuition fees, reflecting the differing costs of individual courses and quality of institutions. In the interim, prestigious universities, such as LSE, already rely heavily on capable overseas students who pay full fees but, inevitably, squeeze the numbers of places available to home and EU students. Other top universities are also slowly expanding their overseas intake at undergraduate level and increasing the number of fee-paying postgraduate students. Long term our universities would seem likely to develop along US lines with fewer research institutions, differentiated fee levels and scholarships for the very able from poorer backgrounds paid out of fee income and bequests.

It is interesting to reflect on how all these changes will affect the next cohort entering higher education from Sevenoaks. Achieving a place at a top university is certainly getting tougher. Financing their way through university **may** not be as much concern to them as to some of their peers, but larger classes, cramped conditions and perhaps a feeling of anonymity as the staff/student ratio continues to increase. While there is no evidence of discrimination against applicants from independent schools, the drive to widen access by encouraging applicants from non-traditional backgrounds, along with youth unemployment, has led to a significant increase of applicants to the top universities. For many future leavers from Sevenoaks, therefore, it will be harder to gain admission to the course and university of their choice.

The incentive to expand was much greater for the majority of the 'new' universities, or former polytechnics, who traditionally have placed their emphasis on teaching rather than research, and thus been forced to rely on the 'per capita' income they receive from the Higher Education Funding Council for each undergraduate they admit to finance their courses; they are also more likely to be affected by Government cutbacks. The more well established 'old' universities have, on the other hand, continued to sell themselves as primarily research institutions, in the knowledge that a significant and rising portion of their income will have to be generated by the research that they do. The results of the teaching assessments carried out in every department in every university in the country last year have confirmed a still fairly close correlation between research and teaching standards, confirming the 'old' universities' argument that teaching and research not only have a symbiotic relationship but one which provides the

resources to maintain the standard of undergraduate teaching of which they may rightly be proud.

We have thus still a premier division of well- funded and well-resourced universities, entry to which, for all subjects, is fiercely competitive and 'the rest', to which entry will be less competitive even for subjects like English and History. Employers are well aware of those divisions and are likely to give preference to those applicants who can boast a top degree from a top university.

Apart from existing GCSE results, prediction at IB is crucial for entry to competitive universities. The improvements in national A-level results have presented universities with further problems; so many students now obtain As that, as a newspaper headline stated, "over 10,000 Oxbridge 'rejects' went on to gain straight As". While IB students' results do not suffer from what is considered by many to be 'grade inflation', they are nevertheless competing with other applicants whose predicted A-level grades are not a good indicator of their true ability. Top universities have reacted to their inability to judge the quality of applicants by their (A-level) predictions by asking for AS unit grades to be supplied and by the introduction of entrance tests, such as the BMAT, UKCat (Medicine), LNAT (Law) and, at Oxford, other subject-specific tests taken before interview. IB applicants are caught up in the latter but there has been a dramatic change in the perception of the value of their qualification. Not only did the previous Labour Government endorse the International Baccalaureate as a qualification which should be offered to many more state-school students but UCAS has agreed a 'tariff' which places a much higher value on the IB than on A levels. The addition of an A* grade to A levels is also to our students' advantage as it means universities can now at least ask for this top grade alongside a 7 from IB candidates. However equivalences remain a topic for debate.

Before the planned swingeing cuts in funding have taken effect, higher education in Britain remains one of the best in the world. In contrast to the systems in other developed countries, still relatively few of those privileged enough to receive it appear to regret entering it, or drop out before completing their degree. It will certainly become more difficult in the future to obtain a place at a top university, even for Sevenoaks students. This booklet is designed to help them make the difficult decisions now confronting them and to place them in a position that maximises the chances of being offered a place on the most suitable course at the most suitable institution.

2 *UCAS Procedure*

The University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has a two-fold function:

- (i) In order to ensure freedom of choice for the candidates and freedom of selection for the universities, combined with the minimum of duplication, UCAS receives all applications for all universities (including medical schools) and higher education colleges. Copies are distributed to the universities of the applicant's choice. Replies from the universities are passed through and recorded by UCAS. Candidates apply through UCAS between 1st September and 15th January of their Upper Sixth year. However, it is quite acceptable for candidates to apply in the autumn following their IB and, after consultation with Tutors and Careers Staff, a significant number choose to do so. (See A4).
- (ii) For candidates who receive rejections from, or choose themselves to reject, all their university choices, UCAS operates a scheme in August following the publication of A-Level results which offers further opportunities to gain places. This is known as 'Clearing'. Qualifying candidates are contacted automatically, usually in June, with the relevant information. Applicants holding no offers at the end of February will be automatically invited to register for an early matching of places to prospective students known as UCAS 'Extra'. To qualify an applicant will have received no offers or been rejected after the publication of results in late August for those who fail to meet conditional offers when exam results are known.

It should be noted that UCAS will **NOT**: select candidates, set standards, give advice or enter into correspondence. UCAS's rules are simple and must be adhered to. It is highly automated. Any problem met with in dealing with UCAS should be discussed with the Head of Careers who can 'phone UCAS on behalf of an applicant.

The universities, on the other hand, are very human and approachable. For applications and replies they conform rigidly with UCAS's procedure, but in their methods of selection and in their requirements they vary greatly. They are usually ready to advise and to discuss individual cases. On these occasions, it is best to write or email the admissions tutor of the course in which you are interested (names are usually printed in prospectuses and/or brochures or on the UCAS and university websites) and you should not be afraid to do so at any time. Indeed, Oxbridge candidates are strongly encouraged to do so, especially in the Lent and Summer Terms of their Lower Sixth year.

3 *The Gap Year*

Few Admissions Tutors will hold it against a candidate expressing a desire to take a Gap Year between school and university; a typical view is expressed by York - '*such students are more mature at the beginning of their course*'. However, Mathematics departments in nearly all universities do not approve, suggesting that by the time the student returns to study, much of the Maths learned at school will have been forgotten. Musicians too are discouraged from delaying the start of their university studies. It is also clear that admissions tutors to some high demand courses are handicapping 'deferred entry' applicants, preferring to fill all places for the current year rather than some of the following one. The Arts Faculty at Edinburgh has for some time taken a cautious attitude towards requests for deferred entry as do some departments at Durham, notably Geography. Applicants to competitive departments of English, History, Modern Languages, Law and Economics should check carefully. As academics recognize the benefits of a 'year out' they often recommend applicants to apply at the start of the Gap Year rather than seek deferred entry. In contrast, some high profile departments of Engineering endorse the year out most positively and regard those with an interest in securing industrial experience as at an advantage. It is thus **strongly recommended** that applicants write to or email the appropriate departments (or College for Oxbridge candidates) as early as possible to ask if 'deferred entry' might in any way be likely to place them at a disadvantage. **All Oxbridge candidates must do so.** Applicants for deferred entry also need to check with [all 5](#) institutions as to the details of courses and qualifications likely to be required for their specific year of entry.

It is essential for the student who wishes to take a 'Gap Year' to have a clear idea of how the year is to be structured so that it can be used to maximum benefit. '*Back-packing around the world does not impress*' says Manchester, a view echoed almost unanimously by other universities. They would be particularly impressed if the candidate were to be occupied in an area relevant to the chosen course of study; this can be of crucial importance in admissions tutors' minds. An applicant who is called for interview should have a clear idea of what is planned for the 'Gap Year' and not only because an outline of how the applicant plans to spend the Gap Year has to be given in your Personal Statement on the UCAS form, whether the application is made before or after IB exams. If a Gap Year is to be spent constructively (and this is the acid test for those parents worried about the motives for their child wishing to take a Gap Year) advance planning is essential, for the vast majority of 'Gap' organisations consider applications in the early autumn (in some cases, e.g. Project Trust, earlier) of the previous year. So someone considering a Gap Year should start planning it as early as the summer between the Lower Sixth and Upper Sixth.

The Careers Centre has information on a plethora of 'Gap' activities offered by many organisations. These range from teaching abroad to conservation work and the acquisition of new skills (such as becoming a ski instructor or a teacher of English as a foreign language). Up-to-date costings for the various schemes can be researched in the brochures kept in the Careers Centre or on line. A world-wide volunteering data base can consult be consulted on www.wvv.org.uk. Other useful websites are www.gap.org.uk www.gapyear.com and www.yearoutgroup.org

As an alternative to working abroad in developing countries, several well-known banking/accountancy firms, such as Deloitte, PwC and Deutsche Bank, offer paid Gap Year placements, with the additional advantage of potential sponsorship at university. A **Year in Industry** (www.yini.org.uk) is for those

applying generally to science, technical and engineering courses and who wish to have a taste of employed work in an industrial firm for nine months in the U.K. Students are paid and the work is usually arranged at travelling distance from home; again it can lead to regular holiday work or sponsorship during university.

There are several sources of information available in book form in the Careers Library.

4 'Deferred entry' and application after IB

If you decide to take a 'Gap Year' you must also decide when you should apply for universities through UCAS and when you should inform the universities of your intention to take a Gap Year. There are four options available:

(a) You may choose the conventional method by applying in the autumn of 2010 for entry in October 2012, simply by following the procedure outlined by UCAS, i.e. indicating your wish to do so in the Choices section of the electronic UCAS form. If you have evidence that 'deferred entry' may place you at a disadvantage in the selection process you should say in the 'Choices' of the UCAS form that you would be happy to be considered for 2011 entry. You should have written to the Admissions Tutor of the courses you have applied for, especially if they are in 'high demand' as stated in A3.

(b) You may apply in September 2011 after your IB results. This method carries the advantage that you can apply for the courses whose entrance standards reflect the quality of your IB results, and you will have had a further year to think about which courses and universities to apply to. However, you may have to be available for interview between approximately December 2011 and March 2012, especially if you wish to apply to Oxbridge or for Veterinary Science/Medicine/Dentistry; this may affect any travel plans you have for your 'Gap Year'.

(c) Having decided on 'Firm Acceptance' and an 'Insurance' (see E8) (likely to be around April) you may write to the Course admissions tutors informing them of your wish to take a 'Gap Year'. You should state why, at this stage, you have decided so late on to take a 'Gap Year', what precisely you intend to do with it, and ask them if they will guarantee you a place for entry in October 2012. Do **not** assume that they will, but this method overcomes the problems outlined in A3 provided the university can be assured your plans have genuinely undergone a change. The university may refuse your request.

(d) Wait until the IB results have been published and you have decided which university you wish to go to. Then write **immediately** to the Admissions Tutor and follow the same procedure as in (c). It is vital that you write as soon as you can after your results have been published because the place that will have been kept for you for entry in October 2011 can then be offered to someone else. The university may refuse your request, especially in high demand areas.

Which of these four options you should follow needs careful consideration so that you do not affect your chances of being accepted. Having made a deferred entry application for entry in 2012 it would not be possible at a later date to be given a 2011 entry. If after careful consideration of the above you are still in doubt as to which option suits you best, consult the Careers Department.

N.B. You may apply TWICE to universities through UCAS, once in your final year of school and once after it. This quite often occurs when an applicant gets unexpectedly good or bad IB results. However, you may not retain offers made to you in your first year of application into your second; you must withdraw completely from the procedure and start again. But you may apply to the same institutions but must indicate that you are doing so on the new application. Although applying twice creates extra work for you (and the school!) it is an option worth considering if you are unsure if you are taking a Gap Year, or you have a change of mind about the course you wish to follow or institution you wish to go to, or your exam results are unexpectedly good or poor.

5 *Work Experience*

The value of Work Experience for its own sake, especially if a Sixth Former already has an eye on a particular career, is obvious, and many will have benefited from the compulsory week Sevenoaks year 11 students complete immediately after their GCSEs. In addition, the importance of gaining further work experience in the Sixth Form in order to enhance the prospects of gaining admission to higher education has been growing for some time. This is now especially true for applicants to the usually highly competitive vocational courses like Veterinary Science, Law, Medicine, Physiotherapy and Engineering. Indeed not to have completed work experience, the initiative for which should largely have come from the applicant, will now place him/her at a disadvantage in the competition for places as admissions tutors search for additional criteria on which to award offers.

The best form of work experience would be one where the applicant has not only taken the initiative to organise it himself/herself but also been at the heart of the organisation and had as much variety of experience as possible. Work experience with small local firms is often as valuable and sometimes more illuminating than experience in the outwardly more glamorous but highly specialist departments of global organisations. The potential to demonstrate self-reliance and team-working skills can be gained from a wide variety of opportunities; it has been suggested by some selectors for medical school that a spell stacking shelves in Tesco can be as valuable as a period of observation in a hospital and more likely to develop an individual's communication skills and social awareness. The best time to gain work experience is clearly in the summer holidays between the Lower and Upper Sixth. It would also enable an applicant to record on the UCAS form that it has already been completed, which is obviously better than writing that is hoped such experience will be completed some time in the future.

It is hoped that parents may have contacts they may be able to exploit to help their children though the careers department can also supply a few addresses. Work experience has really become an essential precondition for applications to several courses.

Section B - Timetable for University Applicants

It is emphasised that it is the responsibility of pupils to complete application forms on time so that the School can despatch them to UCAS well before the deadline.

Year prior to entry

1 May*	Start of registration for UKCat (medical test)
7 July to 9 October*	UKCat Medical Test (to be taken at test centre)
1 August*	First day of registration for LNAT (Law Test)
1 September	UCAS application season opens (until 15 January 2011)
4 September (Saturday)	<i>Deadline for the handing in of all holiday assignments by prospective Oxbridge applicants</i>
18 September (Saturday)	<i>Internal deadline for all Oxbridge candidates' UCAS and College applications. Internal deadline for all UCAS applications for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science</i>
25 September*	Deadline for applying for UKCat
30 September	Deadline for applying for BMAT
9 October	<i>Internal deadline for all Oxbridge candidates to hand in to relevant Heads of Department all written work required by colleges for submission – and to mail them to first choice college</i>
10 October	<i>Pre-interview Seminars by subject (with 'Oxbridgeinterviews')</i>
15 October	External deadline for all applications to Oxbridge and applications for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science to reach UCAS
<i>Half-Term: Friday 15 October (13.15) – Monday 2 November (8.30)</i>	
1 November*	Deadline for Oxbridge candidates taking LNAT
3 November	BMAT (Medical Test) and Oxford Entrance Tests
7 November (Sunday)	<i>Oxbridge Interview Practice with 'Oxbridgeinterviews' (www.oxbridgeinterviews.co.uk)</i>
10 November	Deadline for all submitted work to reach Oxford
Saturday 14 November	<i>Internal deadline for the submission of all UCAS forms (Applications submitted in the Christmas and New Year periods will be likely to be delayed at the UCAS processing stage)</i>
December	Oxbridge interview season

15 January 2011 Deadline for all applications to reach UCAS
20 January 2011* Last day of LNAT for non-Oxbridge applicants

Year of entry
Spring 2011

UK applicants obtain the Student Support Application Forms (PN1) from their Local Authority in February/March 2011 or on-line from www.studentfinanceengland.co.uk and return these to apply for a loan and/or ensure that they do not have to pay overseas fees.

Note: Those taking a Gap Year should apply to the LA in the year of their entry to University.

Candidates receive offers from universities (sometimes after interview).

When all 5 institutions have made a decision about an applicant, (4 for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science) he/she will receive a statement from UCAS.

Late April 2011 Deadline by which all applicants must have informed UCAS of their conditional first choice and conditional insurance offers, provided institution have made their decisions. (Failure to meet the deadline means offers are forfeited).

May 2011 IB Exams

Early July IB results

Mid August A Level results

Conditional offers are confirmed by universities.
Clearing opens for candidates still in search of courses.

15 October 2011 *Internal deadline for PQA (leavers') applications*

*Last year's dates. 2010/11 dates not available at date of publication.

NB

The fee payable to UCAS is currently £19.00; this is paid online by credit or switch card (can be parent's card number) as part of the general application.

The closing date for all other applications to reach UCAS in 2010-11 is 15th January 2011 but candidates are advised to complete their applications by the end of October/early November. Late applications until 30th June 2011 will be considered at the discretion of the institutions.

A note on interviews

Most Oxbridge interviews take place in early December. Some Cambridge applicants fail to get into their chosen college and are placed in a 'pool' for consideration by other colleges one or more of which may interview them in early January 2011. (Oxford candidates are interviewed by several colleges in December.) This may affect holiday plans. See Section E4 for more information on interviews, and C4 for Oxbridge information.

Section C - Choosing

1 Introduction

Before filling in the UCAS form, two chief decisions have to be made: (i) what course to read; (ii) what institutions to apply for. Which of these two should have priority is becoming an increasingly debatable point. When in 1992 the distinction between polytechnics and universities was abolished, the objective was to ensure a parity of esteem across all institutions. Market forces and the decision to introduce 'teaching' and 'research' rankings have, however, led to the creation of an unofficial elite from which some companies do their recruiting, although inclusion varies from profession to profession, even between firms and is not restricted to older universities. Many 'new' universities have centres of excellence, global organizations recruit globally and an ever-increasing number of graduates commence their working careers in small firms/organizations. These developments have affected entry conditions: the old vertical distinction between humanities and social sciences with high entry standards, and science and engineering, with lower entry requirements, has been replaced by a horizontal one between universities, so that popular and prestigious universities have high standards of entry across the full range of their courses. Some universities select applicants, others compete to recruit and retain, especially in subjects where the supply of places outstrips demand. However, we would still argue that choice of course remains the applicant's priority. Even if one gains admission to the most prestigious university in Britain, but does not enjoy the course, misery may ensue. If one is not interested or motivated by the course, a poor degree result may also be the outcome, and with that a disadvantage when completing for jobs with better qualified graduates from less prestigious institutions.

2 Choice of Course

There are several considerations here:

(a) Your interest in the subject and your subsequent career. At university you are free to study as and when you will; interest in your work must be strong enough to make you work without other incentive. Research suggests that over 40% of graduates who go into employment do so in a career quite unconnected in content with the degree course they were studying. It would appear employers are more interested in what standard of degree has been awarded or is predicted and, incidentally, IB performance in the selection process. To see a higher education degree course **solely** as a means to an end (i.e. employment) is an attitude to be discouraged, not so much for reasons of principle, but because the prospect of employment may not be enough for the student to immerse himself in the course and emerge with a standard of degree that accurately affects his potential or ability. Rapidly changing patterns of employment suggest that the qualities employers will value in the future will be less associated with specialist knowledge and more with personal development.

(b) Are you applying to higher education because you **partly** see it as training for a career you have in mind? If this is the case you should be considering a vocational course, perhaps with a 'sandwich' (see below) element to it. You may, on the other hand, mainly wish to go into higher education to pursue only an academic interest in a subject; in which case you should not worry too much that it does not provide you with an obvious route into a career, for, as stated above, employers look for graduates with good academic degrees and developed 'transferable skills' as much as those suitably 'trained' in a preparatory skill.

(c) Since the setting up of the Quality Assessment Division by the Higher Education Funding Council in 1991 every department at every university in the country has been assessed for the quality of its research and its teaching. The criteria by which both have been judged have been criticised but the result has been that the funding of each department has partly been dependent on the research ranking and teaching assessment. At a time when the purse strings are tight and the

morale of a department may be at stake, this is an important issue. Results of teaching and research assessments are published on line but these have to be treated with caution as all such attempts to quantify the achievement of highly diverse institutions result in simplifications. Many of the teaching and research assessments are now out of date and say nothing about the quality of the university experience as a whole.

(d) The content of a course. Do not be misled by 'labels', i.e. what names institutions give to their courses: these may be chosen as a marketing device rather than to provide a reliable indication of what the course consists of. The study of Business Studies, for example, may vary enormously between institutions despite the courses being called by the same name. Another example: 'French' at one university could be strong on literature, with little about modern-day France, its economic base and political system. At another it could be a course about contemporary France, its political, social and economic development, taught in French, but with little French literature. Course titles may be misleading at best, meaningless at worst.

(e) Because entry is often competitive, some courses' **declared** standards of entry may be misleading. They serve to cut off the weakest or attract the strongest candidates (for example those who are predicted very high grades at IB). Between these limits institutions collect the best candidates they can. In social science and humanities subjects, especially those in highest demand, a higher predicted or actual IB score than the one published *may* be needed for the standard offer to be made. *Universities regard information available about the level of conditional offers to constitute guidance for applicants and universities are free to change the level of such offers in response to circumstances.* To these academic needs should be added the varying importance attached by institutions to a student's school record, performance in interview, and the reference, which includes IB predictions, drafted by the House Tutor. Except at the lower and upper limits, then, any exact description of, or confidence about, what predictions or results will land a place, is not possible. But it is nevertheless important for the applicant to match his/her IB predictions to the publicised standards of entry for each course. Applicants should not apply to institutions/courses where their predictions do not meet the published conditional offers. Brian Heap's annual publication *Degree Course Offers* published by Careers Consultants, which is available in the Careers Centre, is a useful guide, as are the UCAS/Trotman guides. University websites often give useful information and in more detail than in the printed prospectus; the UCAS website also publishes standard IB offers for all courses.

(f) The structure of the course. It may start on a very broad basis (for example at Scottish universities) and you may only specialise in your last year. Increasingly, courses are becoming less specialised and more 'modular'. You need to look at how the course is structured over the full three/four year period and work out exactly how the various modules are pieced together to make up the degree. How many subjects can you take in each year? Can you change subjects within the course? At what stage? Is there built-in practical experience? If so, when? The principle behind modularisation is to provide the 'customer' with a wider range of choice, so see what choices there are available to you.

(i) Sandwich courses. These were pioneered by the polytechnics but more and more of the 'old' universities have now adopted them (Bath, Lancaster). They are usually four-year courses in which usually the third year is spent in industry or commerce. Technical, scientific and engineering courses are most likely to have a sandwich element and not only offer financial advantages but provide good contacts for future employment. It is important to find out how much the university helps to find a placement and how strong its contacts are.

(ii) Integration of higher education courses between Britain and the continent. Although the vision of a completely integrated higher education system for Europe is as yet a long way off, this is where change in the content and structure of courses in the UK may be most marked. This is not because universities are committed to the ideal of closer co-operation but for more prosaic reasons: the development of modularisation has removed some of the practical obstacles in the way, and, probably most importantly, the universities recognise how attractive the prospect of spending one or

two years of a degree course abroad is to their potential 'customers'. Many of these student exchanges are part of the SOCRATES/ERASMUS programmes of the EU which subsidises the expenses involved. Most of the contacts in Europe for U.K. students take the form of the third year of a four-year course being spent abroad and are not confined to students studying for a language degree. (In fact for such students there is an alternative scheme, 'Lingua', set up for this purpose). Exchanges are offered in a wide variety of courses, especially Business Studies and other vocational courses. Some outstanding examples are the Law Department at King's College London, one of whose four year courses offers two years study at King's and two at the University of Paris or Humboldt University Berlin with the graduate emerging with a Law Degree in France/Germany as well as England and Wales and the Portsmouth Business Programme, again a four- year course offering two years study of Business at Portsmouth and a further two years at universities either in Caen, Madrid or Münster. An IB qualification in the appropriate language is a precondition of entry to these courses. Competition for courses offering a year in the USA is intense.

(g) Find out about the amount of work required for the degree course and the 'contract time' you would have with the departments; there is often a big difference between Arts and Science courses here. How large is the department in proportion to the size of the university? What is the staff/student ratio in it? How much personal supervision, if any, can you expect? How large are the tutorial groups? How are you examined? Is there a system of continuous assessment? Some good questions here to ask in interview or on Open Days.

(h) Applications for a wide variety of courses to different universities should be avoided: Consistency of choice demonstrates seriousness of purpose. Medical, veterinary and dental schools limit their applicants to a maximum of four medical schools only and will not place applicants at a disadvantage if they apply to one other academically related course such as in Biochemistry or leave the last slot blank. Whatever your subject, you should apply only to courses that, in the final analysis, you would be prepared to study, and not simply to fill the spaces. If there are any choices left on the UCAS form, leave them blank: this will not be held against you. However many courses you apply to there must, unless there are exceptional circumstances, be a thread of consistency running through your choices, not least so you can present a convincing argument your Personal Statement on the UCAS form for wishing to read the chosen area of study. Individual institutions are not be able to see the list of other courses to which applicants have applied and this encourages selectors to pay particular attention to the Personal Statement for evidence of commitment. Applicants are unlikely to be able to write convincingly across a broad spectrum of academic disciplines. So, for example, a sensible list of choices might be: (1) Politics Philosophy and Economics at Oxford (2) PPE at York (3) PPE at East Anglia (4) Politics and Philosophy at Newcastle and (5) Philosophy and Economics at Durham. An unwise list of choices might be, to use an extreme example (1) English at Oxford (2) History at Manchester (3) Arabic at SOAS (4) Marine Engineering at Bangor (5) Earth Sciences at Exeter. You may choose up to **five** courses unless you are applying for Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Science where you will be limited to four applications to these specific and competitive areas and may include one other course.

The Careers Centre has several sources of information on the structure and content of degree and HND courses. The most obvious one is the institution's prospectus. There are also the 'Degree Guides' published by CRAC, 'Which Degree' books published by Newpoint, 'How to Choose your Degree Course' by Brian Heap, published by Trotman, and, probably the most comprehensive of them all, the UCAS website (www.ucas.com). Once you have found a course of interest, you can write to the admissions tutor, whose name is usually included next to the details of the course in the prospectus, for more details.

3 *Choice of Institution*

Press coverage has been prolific in highlighting the suggestion that certain highly popular departments at prestige institutions have been favouring pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and, by implication, discriminating against the product of independent schools. Undoubtedly certain institutions would welcome a greater social mix but academics are not in the business of remedying any perceived shortfall in the school system and are keen to recruit the students whose enthusiasm and commitment will make them rewarding to teach. With applications at highly popular departments of English, History, Law and Economics running at between 20 - 30 per place the picture is more complicated than some appreciated when the charge of discrimination first hit the headlines. Would-be applicants in over-subscribed areas should reflect carefully on the potential risk of being rejected if they apply only to those institutions that can now select on a par with Oxbridge because of market forces. It is important to bear in mind that many very strong applicants are not interested in Oxbridge.

Your first job is to eliminate those institutions whose courses are unsuitable and those whose course requirements you have no hope of meeting. Having drawn up a short list, obtain or consult prospectuses and check out the websites. Now, in addition to the academic side consider the geographical, social and accommodation aspects (see below). It is advisable to send direct for your own copy of the prospectus of any institution you are really interested in. First use the prospectuses housed in the school's Careers Centre together with the *Times*, *Guardian* and *Virgin* university guides and alternative prospectuses, the latter written by students and containing a wealth of practical advice and some widely canvassed opinions, some highly prejudiced! The others provide a less partial and more down-to-earth guide to the institutions. In short, find out as much as you can about a chosen university. Consult present students, staff 'in the know' etc. Visit if at all possible. Most universities offer Open Days in the Summer Term. When you visit one, make yourself known to the Admissions Tutor of the department so when he/she receives your UCAS form he/she may be able to put a face to it. Some further sources of information are former pupils, staff, parents, and speakers from Higher Education at Friday 4 talks in the Summer Term of the Lower Sixth.

Apart from selecting a university the course of which suits your qualifications and IB predictions, you ought to consider -

- (a) Situation of university. Look on a map. Find out about coach and rail fares and the road network. Research journey times and costs. Then look at the environment in which the university is placed. The entertainment in a large city, or the more corporate life of a university in a small town or on a campus with a lively '*student union*', is likely to be an important factor in deciding where to apply.
- (b) Its size and proportion of residential places offered. Go for the pattern of living which suits you. Size also has direct bearing on the range and variety of subjects offered. Consider type of accommodation offered - mainly residential (Keele), student house (York), campus (Nottingham), hall of residence (London). It is strongly advisable to **begin** in a hall of residence so that you can integrate more quickly into university life. You can move into a flat, a house or 'digs' later.
- (c) Are your extracurricular interests, sports and hobbies well represented at the university? For example 'Will I be able to continue my rowing at the university?' or 'Is there a strong orchestra?' or 'How strong is the Debating Society?'
- (d) How well the institution is financed and run has become an important issue in your choice of university as they have all had to search for funding from sources other than central government, some more successfully than others. The wealth of the university as a whole as much as its individual departments is partly dependent on the research and teaching rankings - see C2. A university's place in the 'league table' is chiefly dependent on how good its teaching and research rankings are overall, although the way the data are collected and assessed means that rankings are a very blunt instrument with which to judge the merit of individual institutions.

4 Oxbridge

Entrance to Oxford or Cambridge represents, for many, the pinnacle of their ambitions in education. The attractions of the two universities are clear; not only are they two of the most revered institutions of higher education in the world but also beautiful environments in which to study. As other universities are forced to retrench and widen their staff/student ratios, Oxbridge manages for the moment to hold on to a ratio the rest must envy, largely because of its wealth. (However, moves are afoot to increase income at Oxford by accepting more postgraduate and overseas students.) If you are considering applying you should nevertheless temporarily try to discard these considerations and confront yourself with a very fundamental question: Is Oxbridge the right place for *me*?

(a) Reasons for applying

The notion that Oxbridge is a passport to entrance to the establishment, in social and professional terms, may still hold some truth, though this should not be a strong influence on your reason for applying. That both universities are superb aesthetically is not a sufficient reason to apply either. First and foremost you must look at the structure and content of the courses, which are, on the whole, traditional and 'academic' to see if they suit you. Both universities hold on to the perhaps old-fashioned belief that education is an end in itself and not the means to an end or training for a career. You will look in vain, for example, for a vocational Business Studies course at either university but if you are looking for a traditional, highly academic degree with no frills Oxford or Cambridge may be the place for you. If you are not, do not be tempted, for you would be happier at a place that caters for your particular requirements.

(b) Oxford or Cambridge?

There are many differences between the two, differences which need to be considered when choosing. Only those applying for an organ scholarship can apply to both universities. Here are some:

- (1) Cambridge is a provincial town; Oxford has more of a 'city' atmosphere.
- (2) Cambridge's greatest selling point is the breadth of courses it has to offer, as well as the flexibility of choice of course provided by the 'tripos' system. Oxford tends to offer more specialised courses than Cambridge, and having entered a particular course there, you are 'locked into' it for three or four years.

(c) Oxbridge's Admissions System

Having differed over the application procedure for many years, Oxford and Cambridge have, for the time being, recently converged in their admissions systems. The success of one's application now depends, for both universities, on:

- (i) The quality of the UCAS application, including the applicant's 'personal statement' and the school's reference in which the IB predictions are included. The latter are crucial: see (d).
- (ii) For some university faculties at Oxford and some departments within colleges for Cambridge, the submission of a piece of school work on which the decision of the college to issue an invitation for interview may partly depend.
- (iii) Both universities set a specially designed test for Medicine (BMAT), which applicants sit at their schools at the beginning of November. Similarly, Oxford, besides requiring the LNAT Law test, has introduced a whole host of pre-university tests for History, English, PPE, Economics and Management, Physics, Computer Science, Physiology and 'joint schools'. Many Cambridge colleges set a Thinking Skills Assessment at interview. Details can be looked up on the universities' websites.
- (iv) Performance in interview at which the submitted piece of work and/or the answers to the written test may be discussed.

Only for entrance to read Mathematics do Cambridge Colleges now demand the completion of a Sixth Term Entrance Paper (STEP) in addition to the IB, at the end of the Summer Term (see the Cambridge Prospectus).

(d) **Grade requirements**

The basic matriculation requirements can be found in the prospectus, but broadly speaking, you need either to be doing the IB, or to have passed (i.e. grades A to C) GCSE in five subjects, four of which must be English, another language, Maths and another science, and two A Levels. These are of course the minimum requirements. In practice, those who receive offers are likely to have an impeccable record of A* at GCSE across the academic spectrum and predictions of at least 40 IB points overall with 776 in Higher Level subjects. In all subjects selectors are looking for **evidence of intellectual curiosity and commitment** beyond the scope of a general school-leaving qualification.

To be considered for Oxbridge by the school you will have to do very well in your Lower Sixth summer exams (40 points plus), though potential for improvement is obviously considered here, as it is when your UCAS grade forecasts are made in September. The latter are of crucial importance in influencing the two universities when making their decisions. On the whole, anyone predicted less than 38 points and 7s in their HL subjects is very unlikely to be given an offer. It is well known that most applicants who have been rejected by Oxbridge have gone on to gain 3 A grades at A level at least (old system examinations) and 40 plus points in the IB.

(e) **Choice of College**

Both universities are distinguished by those who go there belonging to a college as much as the university. Applications are considered and processed by the college. Colleges may vary enormously in size, character, function, intake and competitiveness of entry, so it is essential that you do the necessary preparation to choose the college that suits you and which maximises your chances of gaining admission. As a general guide large traditional colleges with sizeable endowments tend to be more highly sought after than newer less centrally located colleges. On the other hand, being interviewed by several colleges at Oxford and the 'pool' at Cambridge allows candidates another bite at the cherry if they have opted to apply to a particularly competitive college.

(f) **Preparation for entry**

Research into choice of university, college and course must start as early as the Lent Term of your Lower Sixth year. Those who do the necessary amount of research, early enough, are bound to be at an advantage. So write to admissions tutors, research into courses, visit colleges on their Open Days and ask advice from members of staff here as early as possible. All Oxbridge applicants are required to complete a piece of written work or other extra work over the summer holidays; this may be submitted to the chosen college as part of the selection procedure. (See [c]).

(g) The process of application at school

In the summer term those students who consider their results and general academic performance sufficiently strong to win the support of their tutors and subject teachers may present themselves for consideration as potential Oxbridge applicants. The result of the summer exams will influence the opinions of the tutor and subject teachers in relation to a student's suitability. Serious applicants will be expected to have chosen their course and college by the end of the Summer Term. Each will be attached to a relevant academic department which will set the summer holiday assignment (see 'f' above). Only in very exceptional circumstances will anyone be considered who first expresses a wish to apply at the start of the Upper Sixth Year.

At the start of the Autumn Term the UCAS form is completed on line and must reach UCAS by October 15 at the very latest.

The Oxford prospectus provides information about the requirement for examples of schoolwork to be submitted to an individual's chosen college by 10th November. Cambridge Colleges do not have a commonly agreed deadline. At the start of December the majority of Oxbridge applicants are called for interview. Written tests (see (c)), as well as oral cross-examination, may be conducted. Oxford Colleges inform applicants of their decisions usually before Christmas, Cambridge over the New Year period. Remember - if the school does not feel it can recommend you for Oxbridge or if you are rejected by the college you apply to, the choice of applying again to another college, or the other university, on the strength of some excellent IB results, is always there.

5 Open Days/Taster Days

- 1 Most universities have one or more 'Open Days' to which prospective applicants are invited and at which all doors, from those in Halls of Residence to academic departments, are opened and staff make themselves available to answer questions.
- 2 Some Open Days are by invitation when applicants have been offered a conditional place at an institution.
- 3 Many organizations offer 'Taster Days' aimed to enable prospective applicants to find out about a degree area and the opportunities for graduates.

The school strongly encourages Sixth Formers to attend such events during holiday periods so that the minimal amount of teaching time is lost. Sixth Formers are expected to make their own arrangements for attendance and transport, having first received the consent of those members of staff affected by his/her absence 2 clear school days before departure.

There are various publications, available in the Careers Centre, which outline when each university has its Open Day/Taster Day, and what procedure to follow when applying; the same information (often more up-to-date) can be obtained on line. It is up to each Sixth Former to take the initiative to go on an Open Day/Taster Day. Members of the Careers Department are available to offer guidance to individuals. For permission to miss a day of school the sanction of the Divisional Head is needed.

In order to cause as little disruption as reasonable to academic work and school attendance, it has been agreed that a Sixth Former should be allowed to attend up to two pre-application open days in term time. Permission to attend additional open days in term time will be at the discretion of the Divisional Head. Where an open day visit has been made to a university before application, permission will not be granted for a second visit to the same university post-application unless the invitation is to a formal interview which may result in an offer.

Permission to attend Taster Days or courses is at the discretion of the Divisional Head.

During the period of IB Lower Sixth examinations, and in the preceding week of revision, permission to attend Open Days will not be given unless under exceptional circumstances. Every effort should be

made by members of the Upper Sixth to avoid having to attend open days in the Summer Term.

Divisional Heads expect that the signatures of all staff from whose classes a pupil will be absent to attend a university/taster day event will be obtained on the appropriate leave of absence form two clear school days before the day of absence.

Section D - Filling in the UCAS Form

All Sevenoaks candidates apply via 'UCAS apply'. This on-line system allows students to apply from any computer connected to the internet; a 'buzzword' is issued to the applicants by the Careers Department to identify them as member of Sevenoaks School.

1 *Preparation and Presentation*

During the summer term students are given an introduction to writing a 'Personal Statement', followed by workshops. A first draft should be shown to the tutor and a second one done over the summer holidays. Once the Personal Statement is satisfactory, the tutor will sign it. From 1 September you can start filling in your UCAS form on *ucasapply*. (See www.ucas.com/students/apply for instructions). When you have finished the form, print it out for your tutor to check and sign. A member of the Careers Department will approve the final version once it has been sent electronically to the Examinations Office from where it will be forwarded to UCAS. **Make sure all your spelling is correct.** *ucasapply* does not have a built-in spell-check, so it is advisable to write the Personal Statement as a word document first and then to transfer it. Time and again admissions tutors comment on the poor spelling of many applicants.

2 *Personal Details*

Make sure you put in the correct date of your birth: 8% of all applicants do not! All UK students will have the bulk of their tuition fees paid for by their Local Authority. (The top-up fee of £3,290 is to be paid by the applicant once he has finished university and is earning money above a specified level.) Those in this category should enter '02' in the box by 'Fee code' and write in the name of their LA in the box entitled 'Area of Permanent Residence'. EU students, who are also entitled to have the bulk of their fees paid by central government, will write their home country; their status appears in the next entry (Residential Category) as EU National. All applicants must complete the declaration about criminal convictions without which UCAS will not process the application.

3 *Additional Information*

You do not **have to** fill this section in, but it would be of great help to UCAS if you do. The information will be recorded by UCAS and not passed on to the universities.

4 *Choices*

Check that you will fulfil the **general** entrance requirements **and** the **special** course requirements for each course. Ensure that you code the universities and courses (and campus where there is a choice) correctly and that. Remember individual universities will not see this section and will not be able to know to which other institutions you will be applying. Read advice given in C2 about number of choices very carefully. If you wish to defer your entry until 2011 at this stage, indicate so in the box provided. Previous applicants to a university included in the reapplication should also write the UCAS number they were given last year in the first box at the bottom of this section.

5 *Education*

Consult the 'memo' available in the Careers Centre to help you fill in your GCSE subjects. Do not forget to fill in all your IB subjects plus Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge, even if the grades are (as is usual) still pending.

6 *Employment*

If you have received paid employment in any job, however menial, since you were eleven, record it here. If you have done more than five jobs list the five *least* menial.

7 *Personal Statement*

This space, for personal details and further information, needs considerable thought and work. Have as many 'trial runs' as necessary as this is your chance to 'sell yourself' which, especially for high demand courses, may be crucial in influencing an admissions tutor's decision. Bear in mind that it is the chief source on which an interviewer will base his/her questions, so do not lie or exaggerate. It is more common for someone to be too modest than too conceited. Avoid bland statements, clichés (e.g. 'I like reading' and 'meeting people') and florid phrases. Keep the content concise, unpretentious and as informative as possible. The need to be articulate and spell correctly is essential, whichever subject you are applying for. Full sentences should be written. Most of the content should revolve around your reasons for applying to the course and *not* a diary of your life's achievements. An admissions tutor is looking for a justification for offering you a place on the course, first and foremost. So start by providing him/her with that justification. This can be done both directly and indirectly. Now that your other choices will not be visible to an individual admissions tutor it will be very important to use your personal statement to demonstrate your level of commitment to an academic discipline. Do make sure the phrasing is your own and not that of a committee around the kitchen table or something off the internet, academics can spot this kind of writing. UCAS even run a detection program to spot plagiarism.

- (a) How do your IB Level choices support your choice of course?
- projects, individual studies and Extended Essay
 - fieldwork at GCSE or IB
 - relevant preferences within the subject – e.g. organic chemistry, statistics.
 - reading: specific subjects related to the degree course, with authors
- (b) How do your personal experiences outside the academic area support your application?
- relevant travelling - cultures, societies, languages
 - work experience (including V.S.U.) especially important if it is supporting a vocational degree course e.g. care of the elderly if applying for Medicine, a week with IBM if applying for Computer Studies, time in a solicitor's office if applying for Law.
 - social experiences
 - hobbies and interests
- (c) What do you hope to do with your degree? What skills do you anticipate acquiring?
- how will your choice of course help towards your career? (Especially important if it is a sandwich course, or a year abroad is part of the course). Do remember many degrees do not lead to specific careers and are studied for the intellectual challenge they represent.

The rest, but certainly no more than a third, of the Personal Statement may contain an outline of your achievements outside and inside school, so you give the impression of being a rounded individual for whom academic achievement may be a priority but is not the only thing in your life. Be careful to list only those achievements that are really significant: under water tiddlywinks champion at primary school or passing your driving test is not.

If you have applied for 'deferred entry' say why, and to what use you are going to put your 'Gap Year'. This is very important.

If there are unusual circumstances about your application (e.g. you have spent three years doing your IB), explain why.

Finish with a strong sentence to persuade the Admissions Tutor that you are the one for them, but avoid

making unrealistic claims. Avoid using quotations unless you know how to do so appropriately.

It is not necessary to fill all the space in this section, but make sure you use it wisely.

It is vital that you keep a copy of your Personal Statement so that in preparation for interview you can revise what you wrote and consider what questions your interviewer might draw from it.

8 *On Completion of the Online Form*

Once you have completed filling in the form online, check very carefully all the details on it; then run through your Personal Statement with your parents and House Tutor, to make sure you have not made any errors, that you have followed the guidelines above and those laid down by UCAS. Once your tutor has signed a hard copy and the Careers Department has approved it, you should add your (parent's) credit or switch card details and send your form electronically to Mrs. Henry in Claridge House.

Section E - After Application

1 *Despatch of UCAS Form*

The school will send your form electronically to UCAS from where it will be sent simultaneously to all the universities you have listed. The later you send it in the season the longer it is likely you will have to wait to hear from the universities: another reason to despatch your UCAS form in the first half of the long season (1st September - 15th January).

2 *Acknowledgement*

UCAS will email an acknowledgement and issue you with a UCAS number. Note your number and use it in all correspondence with UCAS and the universities.

3 *Keeping track*

Make sure you have made a note of your UCAS Apply username and password.

4 *Interviews*

Though interviews are now the exception rather than the rule, there is no uniform policy within each university about interviewing prospective undergraduates, and policies vary enormously from department to department. York summarises the situation - *'Some departments interview all applicants, some departments interview no applicants, and some interview those that they consider to be serious applicants'*.

For those who are interviewed Durham offers some sound advice. *'We do not look so much for knowledge as a sense of excitement'*. Generally interviewers are looking for applicants who are well informed about the course for which they have applied, clearly interested in the course, and intelligent in their discussion of subjects being studied at school. Liverpool suggests that *'a candidate who arrives with a clipboard and a series of questions is impressive'* and Durham again recommends *'the candidate should also interview us'*, showing the importance of an applicant having at least one question ready.

When you are called for interview (usually some time between January and March for non-Oxbridge applications), inform the Head of Careers or the Head of Department whose subject most closely resembles the course you are applying for. He/she will try to arrange a practice interview for you before you go. In addition, Interview Training Courses are organised in the Michaelmas Term and are popular with applicants, especially those applying for Oxbridge. Details of these will be circulated to your parents by the Careers Department at the end of the Summer Term. Also look at the 'Preparation for Interview' box in the Careers Centre where there are some useful books.

When you return from an Oxbridge interview or one for Medicine/Dentistry/Vet. Science, please record your experience on the School's intranet in the 'Oxbridge Feedback' section. A hard copy will be kept in the Careers Library as well.

Footnote: Some universities have dropped the formal interview procedure and asking applicants to come up to see the university in a 'Visit' or 'Open' day at which time they would be introduced to the department as well as the university and have, usually, an informal interview. It is unlikely, if you are invited to one of these days, that you will not be given a conditional offer either before or after it. Oxbridge retains the formal interview procedure as a vitally important part of its admissions procedure.

5 *University Decisions*

They will come via UCAS in any order and may be:

- (a) Unconditional offer (if you already have your qualification).
- (b) Conditional offer (e.g. overall IB points with specific subject requirements)
- (c) Rejection

The universities may respond any time between about two weeks after you despatch your UCAS form to as late as the beginning of May 2011. If you do not hear early it does **not** mean you will receive a rejection. Anyone who believes that they have offers outstanding in mid-April should ring UCAS to check their position.

6 *Your replies*

- (a) You are not required to reply to any offers until you have received all your university decisions, but
- (b) you may earlier firmly accept one offer from a university if you are sure that this is what you want, and you may decline any offer which you are sure you do not want. If you decline all your offers you may still enter Clearing, or withdraw from the UCAS scheme altogether for this year.

7 *Rules for holding offers*

With your last university decision UCAS will send you a statement of all the decisions made on your application and any replies you have made. You should reply to UCAS within their given deadline (unless you have been invited to visit the university, in which case you only delay replying to any offers until after the visit).

8 *Acceptance of offers*

If you have been made offers you must finally accept one offer from a university, or decline all offers. If you firmly accept a conditional offer, you may accept one other offer from a university as an insurance. You must decline all other offers.

A typical candidate's record might read as follows -

FIRM ACCEPTANCE	UNIVERSITY X - IB 35 points, 655HL
INSURANCE ACCEPTANCE	UNIVERSITY Y - IB 32 points overall

It is important that your 'insurance' acceptance is a university which has given you a conditional offer demanding lower, and in some cases where IB performance is unpredictable, much lower, grade. Bear in mind that if you meet the conditions of your 'firm acceptance' university you cannot go to your 'insurance acceptance' university nor enter Clearing (see E11): your only alternative is to withdraw from UCAS completely and re-apply the next season. Whichever two universities you choose you must be prepared to go to them. Do not choose a CF or CI university unless you are fully committed to spending the next three or four years of your life there. The normal deadline for replies is the end of April 2011, and all replies are final. You may decline all offers at this stage. This qualifies you to enter "Clearing" [See point II)

9 *Audit Notice*

As soon as you have declared your replies to offers, UCAS will confirm this on 'UCAS track', giving your final position as shown on their records. Check this carefully.

10 *Confirmation of offers*

This takes place in August when universities receive your examination results and determine whether or not you have met the conditions of their offer. An offer will automatically be confirmed if you have obtained the grades required. You will receive from UCAS a letter or email indicating one of the following:

- (a) You have been placed at your main choice of university
or
- (b) you have been placed at your insurance university, i.e. you were unsuccessful at your main choice,
or
- (c) You were unsuccessful at both universities and are eligible for 'Clearing'.

If you do not intend to take up your place, you must notify the university at once, and withdraw from the UCAS procedure for the current year.

11 *Clearing*

Clearing operates from August through September and is available to:

- (a) Applicants who were unsuccessful with their original choices of university or who were not placed at Confirmation of Offers.
- (b) Applicants who rejected all the offers they received but remained in the UCAS scheme in the hope of finding a more suitable course in Clearing.
- (c) Applicants whose UCAS forms are received by UCAS after 30 June 2011.

More details on Clearing are sent by UCAS to all eligible candidates in August. High demand courses and popular universities are unlikely to be recruiting students in Clearing.

12 *Correspondence with UCAS or universities*

When you contact UCAS or email the admissions tutor of a university you should quote the following:-

- (a) Your full name
- (b) Your UCAS number
- (c) The course code
- (d) The course name

Applicants can take advantage of the UCAS *track* system to check on the progress of their application.

Tell both UCAS and the universities, if :

- (a) You change your correspondence address (especially appropriate for boarders)
- (b) You change your examination arrangements
- (c) Your fee status has changed.

Section F - Art/Design Foundation Courses and Other Colleges in the U.K.

1 *Foundation Courses and Colleges in Art and Design.*

In the vast majority of cases a precondition of entry to a degree course in Fine Art and the non-technical side of Design (e.g. Graphic Design) is the completion of a one-year Art Foundation course. Although some of these courses specialise in a particular aspect of Art or Design most are 'diagnostic' i.e. they are structured to enable the student to explore a wide range of forms of Art/Design to find a particular strength or interest. If you are under the age of nineteen on August 31st prior to the start of the course your tuition fees will automatically be paid for by your Local Authority, excluding the parental contribution (you will need to check the current cost), and you may be entitled to some travel expenses. The University College for the Creative Arts is the main local institution that offers such a course, though courses in London are also a popular destination for many of our leavers. Application to Foundation Courses may operate outside the UCAS scheme and to different deadlines. Potential applicants need to discuss their individual interests with Mr Chris Thomas, Head of the Art Department and contact individual colleges directly for the relevant application forms. Mr Thomas will work closely with applicants in Art and supervise the completion of the application forms. Several of the London colleges have merged to form the University of the Arts London and use a common application form. Manuals on the range of courses available are in the Careers Centre. It is highly unusual to gain entry to a prestigious Fine Art degree course without completion of the diagnostic Foundation Year.

In previous years, there were two routes into Art and Design. For courses starting in 2011, students apply through the normal route. UCAS sends the applications to each of the chosen universities and colleges, and applicants can wait until they have received a decision for each choice before replying to any offers.

There are two application deadlines for Art and Design courses. Universities and colleges decide which deadline to use for each course - it will be either 15 January or 24 March. Check the UCAS website for more information.

2 *Other Colleges*

Degree Courses are offered at many other institutions other than universities such as The Royal Agricultural College and Colleges of Higher Education.

Most of the Colleges of Education (Formerly Teacher Training Colleges) provide courses for the degree of B. Ed. for those wishing to qualify as teachers, though there are alternative routes into the teaching profession.

Lists of establishments and of courses, and many prospectuses, are available in the Careers Centre.

Service colleges (Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, Cranwell) are approached direct, rather than through UCAS.

Some Performing Arts/Music/Drama Colleges are approached direct and some through UCAS/CUKAS (consult the literature in the Careers Department).

Section G - Higher Education in the USA

1 Introduction

Students interested in applying to university in the USA are faced with a challenging task not only in terms of selecting a suitable institution from the huge number and diversity of those on offer but also in terms of the application process itself which is both time-consuming and complex.

Unlike the UK there is no one centralised system of admissions similar to UCAS although increasing numbers of leading institutions are now using the Common Application system which is a standardised form. Moreover, in order to be considered for admission, pupils are required to take SAT 1 (Scholastic Assessment Tests) and in most cases SAT 2 tests as well which they can only sit at specific times of the academic year. This means therefore that potential applicants to the US need to start embarking on the whole application process much earlier in the Lower 6th than pupils who are merely applying through UCAS.

2 Choosing a US undergraduate degree

First degrees in the US are underpinned by a Liberal Arts Philosophy designed to make students well-rounded in their undergraduate education. This means that they are far more flexible and interdisciplinary in nature than those on offer in the UK. Consequently, students are not required in their initial application to specify which subject(s) they wish to specialise in but can instead take a wide variety of courses in a whole range of different subject areas before deciding on their area of specialisation at the end of their second year.

Bachelor's degrees are usually completed in 4 years although unlike the UK, there is no fixed time scale. Instead, a specified number of credits are required and the degree is awarded on their completion. With the exception of engineering and nursing, it is *not* possible to study for professions such as law, medicine, dentistry or architecture in the US without completing a bachelor's degree first.

3 Choosing a US college/university

There are over 2,500 institutions of higher education in the US offering 4 year degree courses with a further 2,000 'junior' or 'community' colleges offering 2 year programmes culminating in the award of an 'associate' degree. The one significant difference between colleges and universities is simply that the former offer Bachelor degrees only whereas universities offer postgraduate and professional degrees also. Consequently Bachelor's degrees awarded by prestigious colleges such as Amherst or Wellesley are as much sought after in the US as those from universities such as Yale, Harvard or Penn.

Whilst many potential applicants to the US tend to think only in terms of Ivy League universities (comprising of Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton and Yale), you need to bear in mind that competition for entry to any of these places is fearsome and it is advisable therefore to give consideration to other institutions (both privately and publicly funded) which may not be so well known in the UK but whose facilities and calibre of undergraduate education are second to none.

When looking at where to study, you should bear in mind the following factors, all of which should be taken into account in your final decision:

- academic subjects on offer and degree of student/professor interaction
- location and climate (e.g. urban v. rural/ California v. Mid-West)
- size of institution in terms of student population (this can vary from around 1,000 to 60,000 students!) and social composition
- student social life and extracurricular activities
- costs (which can range from around \$35,000 to \$50,000 per year depending on tuition fees and location)
- availability of financial aid/scholarships to international students

- last but not least, competitiveness of entry.

Given the large investment which a university education in the US represents, it is highly recommended that you try and visit the US in the spring or summer holidays of the L6 year to tour a number of university campuses. This way you can make a more realistic assessment of the type of institution that is likely to suit you best.

4 *Application decisions and deadlines*

Once you have made your choice of the institutions you want to apply to and providing you have taken both the SAT 1 and SAT 2 tests, you need to start the application process in October of the U6th year. Over 340 institutions now use the Common Application system which can be completed on line. However there is a sizeable minority of universities which still use their own (paper) application forms so it is important to check this as well as the closing dates for submission of applications which may vary also.

If you are keen to gain entry to one particular institution, you may wish to apply under the Early Decision programme which means that you submit your application to one university approximately two months (usually by the end of October) before the regular deadline (usually 1 January). If you are offered a place under this system, you are *legally bound* to accept it and to reject all other offers including any made under UCAS.

Applicants who apply under Early Decision will know the outcome of their applications by mid December whereas the result of all Regular Decision applications will not be known until the end of March.

All offers are unconditional and are made on the basis of:

- SAT test results
- a secondary school report and two teacher references
- an application essay/personal statement written by the applicant
- a school record (or transcript) of achievement grades from the previous 4 years

In addition to the above, US universities place huge emphasis on extra-curricular activities (sport, music, art, voluntary service etc.) so it is important for you to get involved in as many of these things as possible as soon as you enter the Sixth Form.

5 *Careers Department Support*

The Careers Library houses a large number of US university prospectuses and higher education reference books as well as sample SAT test papers and information on test date sessions.

For further information or guidance on US colleges and application procedures, you should consult Mrs Douglas (jd@sevenoaksschool.org).

Section H - Financial Matters

The rising number of young people going into Higher Education in recent years has forced the Government to confront the serious issue of underfunding that affects all institutions to a greater or lesser degree. The system of requiring students to pay an annual contribution at the start of the academic year towards the full cost of tuition was first introduced ten years ago following the Dearing Report of 1997.

1 *LA Payment and Student Tuition Fee Contribution*

Tuition Fee Contribution

All new UK and European Union students will be expected to make this annual contribution (set at £3,290) which is to be paid **after** graduation and deducted directly from the salary. The bulk of the tuition cost continues to be funded centrally (the average cost of a full time course is around £12,000 rising to about £20,000 for Medical study in London). It should be noted that those entering the Scottish system of four year courses from a home address in England, will be asked to contribute towards tuition costs for all four years of the course while those resident in Scotland who attend Scottish universities and non-UK EU students will not be charged.

All UK students should apply to their LA and complete the relevant paperwork in the spring before their university course commences. It is the LA which verifies a student's eligibility for grants; for more information see www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance. Even where there is no expectation of help with the fee payment or maintenance home students must apply to the LA to gain eligibility for entry to the student loan scheme. Those who have applied for a deferred entry place should apply in the early spring of their Gap year.

2 *Eligibility for Financial Help*

Student Loans

Students studying at universities in England, Wales or Northern Ireland that are charging variable or flexible tuition fees up to a maximum of £3,290 p.a. will be able to take out a non-income assessed Tuition Fee Loan. Those studying at a university in Scotland can also apply for a Tuition Fee Loan to cover the amount of tuition fees charged.

A Maintenance Loan can be taken out to a maximum of £6,928 p.a. (for students studying in London). Repayment of loans will start after a student has graduated and earns at least £15,000 p.a.; this will be cancelled only by death or permanent disability before the age of 65.

EU students are expected to contribute the same parental element annually as Home students, i.e. £3,290 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, though tuition is free for EU students in Scotland. EU students are also eligible for student loans.

For overseas students the costs of university study in the UK are steep as the full tuition fee will be charged at the enhanced overseas rate and all maintenance costs must be met. Universities will ask for evidence that there is sufficient funding available from the outset to ensure students can complete a 3 or 4-year course. Each university sets its own fee structure and for 2010 entry a typical university (UCL) was charging overseas students £12,770 per year for a Humanities course, £16,725 for a science or engineering course and £24,940 for a clinical course (Medicine). For further information see the website of UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs).

The decision as to whether you pay home or overseas fees rests with individual institutions. They use the Education (Fees & Awards) Regulations 1983 to decide a student's fee status. These state that to be

eligible for home fees you will need to be in one of the following categories –

either

you have been living in the UK for the three years immediately before the start of your course, and your main reason for living there has not been to take full-time education

or

you are an EU national, or the child of an EU national, and you have been living within the community for the three years immediately before the start of your course

or

you would have been living in the EU (for EU nationals) or UK (for non-EU nationals) for the three years immediately before the start of the course if you, your spouse or parents had not been temporarily employed outside the EU or UK

or

you have been granted refugee or asylum status in the UK, or are the spouse or child of a refugee

or

you are a recently settled immigrant who previously had never had the right of abode in the UK and whose settled status was granted by either 1st September, 1st January or 1st April, whichever is the closest to the start of the course

or

you, your spouse or parent, have been granted exceptional leave to remain in the UK.

It is clear that the crucial issue for most at Sevenoaks whose status is in doubt is whether you can successfully claim that your parents have been **temporarily** employed outside the European Union or United Kingdom: on that everything may hinge. You should make all the necessary facts available to the institutions you apply to as this will help them make a fair decision.

Whatever status is accorded to future students, 'home' or 'overseas', what is clear is that individuals and their families are to be expected to shoulder more of the real costs than in the past. In recognition of the financial hardship many may experience in entering university under the new financial arrangements many institutions are establishing competitive bursary schemes designed to ensure that the most able are not put off a commitment to degree study by money worries.

In the academic year 2010/2011, the tuition fee to be paid by students rose to up to £3,290 p.a. in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, while in Scotland they pay £1,820 (£2,825 for Medicine). Payment of the £9,870 (plus inflation) fee in England will only be required **after** graduation and when a certain level of income has been reached (see above). The ceiling of £3,290 (plus inflation) is set to last for the duration of this parliament, i.e. it is likely to change after the General Elections.

3 Industrial Sponsorship

The amount of sponsorship available for university has declined in recent years and competition for it is fierce. Because of the shortage of Engineering and Science graduates, companies in those sectors are the most likely sources of financial help.

4 University Entry Scholarships

A small number of universities offer scholarships to students with exceptional academic credentials on entry to certain subjects. There are also a few universities who award scholarships for co-curricular excellence unrelated to the course applied for, such as in Music, Drama and Sport.

5 Closed Awards

Only Sevenoaks students are eligible. They are awarded to leavers at the Head's discretion on the criteria of outstanding academic success at Sevenoaks and entry to higher education.

- (a) *The Linger Scholarships*, worth £200 pa at Cambridge Colleges. Four awarded each year.

- (b) *The Johnson Scholarship*, worth £300 pa. Restricted to entrants to St. John's College, Oxford. One awarded each year.
- (c) *The Plender Scholarships*, worth up to £200 pa. Two awarded each year.

6 *Forces Scholarships*

These have dwindled in recent years but some sponsorship remains available - ask the Head of Careers for an appointment with the relevant Forces' School Liaison Officer.

Section I - Disappointing IB results?

In May of their children's Upper Sixth year all parents are sent a letter outlining the procedure to follow if unexpectedly bad (or good) exam results are achieved, or if they simply do not know what to do next on receipt of their results. In addition a back-up service is provided at the school when the results are published. The Head of Careers, Academic Deputy and Div. Heads will be in school in the days following the publication of IB results in early July and the Head of Careers and other staff will also be available for consultation after A Level results are published in August (when decisions on the 'narrow IB misses' are taken by the admissions tutors.) Needless to say, parents and pupils should not hesitate to get in contact if help is needed.

Those who fail to meet either of the conditional offers are eligible for Clearing. A 'Clearing Number' is displayed on their 'welcome' page and 'choices' page in Track. A student can contact a university which has vacancies directly and quote this number as proof of eligibility. The university can then view the complete application immediately on the UCAS online system.