

The MyTutor

Guide to University

How to know if it's right for you, how to pick a degree and how to apply.



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Introduction

There are lots of different things you can do when you finish school, and one of them is to go to university. If you're interested in going, you've got loads of choices (so many that it can be overwhelming!).

This guide is here to help you get a sense of why you should (or shouldn't) apply for uni, what it's like when you get there, and how to make some of the big decisions about where to go and what to study.

Then we'll get down to the practicals of how to decide which courses and unis to pick, how to fill out your UCAS form and how to write a cracking personal statement. Let's go!



Chapter 1

Why university?

Sometimes going to university is talked about as the only path you should take after school - and sometimes it's not even mentioned as an option! If you're interested in applying, it's good to have a think about why it is you'd like to go. There's no right or wrong answer here, but knowing where a degree might lead you to, what the university experience will be like and what you want to get out of it is a great place to begin before you start making big decisions - and packing your bags.

Let's start with the basics.

What is a degree?

A degree is a qualification that shows that you have knowledge and skills in a particular subject or subjects. Sometimes you need a specific degree to do a particular career (like Midwifery to be a Midwife or Architecture to be an Architect). Sometimes though, you get a wide range of skills and knowledge from a degree, which can set you up to go into a wide range of professions (someone who studies an English degree, for example, could be a journalist, charity worker, lawyer, advertising exec - the list goes on).

What are the benefits of having a degree?

One benefit of getting a degree is that it can be the starting point of your career - although this isn't a hard and fast rule. These days, many employers ask for a degree as a minimum education requirement for an entry level job. This is actually becoming less common though, and lots of jobs don't require a degree any more. If there's a subject that you love to study, a degree is a fantastic way to become an expert in it. This could be a school subject like French, or something brand new like International Relations. You can also study for a specific skill like Nursing, Physiotherapy or Teaching.

What are the potential draw-backs?

Studying isn't for everyone, and you might be happier going straight into work or going down the apprenticeships route. Also - it costs! Since 2011, university fees have been £9000 a year. You can get a loan for this, which you'd pay off in the years after your degree. The fees shouldn't put you off going altogether, as the loan means you won't pay for it until you're able to. As it's a pretty big debt you'll end up with by the end of your degree though, you should have a clear understanding of what you want to get out of it, whether you'll actually enjoy yourself, and how it will help you in the long term.



How to work out if university is for you

Here are some questions to ask yourself...

- 1.) Is there a subject you love that's offered at university that you're excited to learn more about?
- 2.) Will this degree lead me down a potential career path that I'm excited about?
- 3.) Does this degree leave my options open for when I graduate?
- 4.) Does the idea of being a university student get you excited?

If your answer to any of the above is "yes", or "maybe", let's dig a bit deeper and find you the best route.

And remember, the most important thing is to go to university only if you really feel that it's the right thing for you. The decision is yours.

Before we continue - what can you do apart from go to university?

The short answer is - lots! Here are a few of the non-university routes you can take when you finish school. This guide is mainly about university, but if any of the below interest you, you should ask your school careers guidance teacher (and check out the resources we've linked to at the end of this ebook) for some more info about them.



Apprenticeships

This is an awesome - and increasingly popular - way to learn on the job, get paid for it!, and get a qualification by the end of it. You can apply straight to employers who offer apprenticeships, or you can find one through a platform like Multiverse.



Straight to work

For jobs where you don't need a degree, you can also work your way up from when you leave school. You'll get a head start compared to those who go to uni. If there's a job you want to do that doesn't require more than school qualifications, you can just go for it.



Gap year

Making a life decision and finishing your A Levels can be, well, a lot. Lots of school leavers like to take a year out after school to travel, work and give themselves more time to decide what to do with their lives. You can apply to university, apprenticeships and jobs while you're on a gap year too (and you can spend your first year telling everyone about the great times you had travelling).



College qualifications

If there's a specific job or skill you'd like to get, there are loads of qualifications other than university degrees which will set you up for success. Have a look at the prospectus of your local college, or ask your school guidance counsellor for some pointers.

The squiggly life

5 successful people and the paths they took

You can plan your life all you like but ask any adult if they ended up following the path they made when they were 17, and they'll probably say "no!". Here's a few examples of successful people whose careers have gone in twists and turns, plus a piece of advice they'd each give to their 17-year-old self.

Sophie, 29



2012:
Graduated uni with a
BA in History

2012-2015:
Corporate
graduate scheme

2015-2016:
Ski instructor

2016-17:
Account Manager
in Advertising

2017-19:
Moved to Sydney: did an
MEd (Master of Education)
to be a secondary History
teacher (while being a tutor
& barista)

2019-20:
Account Manager
in an EdTech company

2021:
Account Manager for
MyTutor's Schools Programme!

// Don't judge yourself against other people's achievements. You have no idea how happy they are or the motivations they have. Instead, focus on doing what you enjoy, listen to the interesting people that you meet and take hold of all the different opportunities you're given. //

Mervyn, 61



1977:

Started a BSc in Marine Biology in Melbourne (turned out to be actual hardcore science)

1983:

Graduated with a BA in Law

1983-86:

Worked as solicitor in Melbourne

1987:

Went travelling including London. Stayed in London for good.

1989:

Switched from solicitor to business development role for a US bank, working in the bank's real estate sector

1998:

Head of Acquisitions for a Canadian real estate company

2001:

Joined an international property management firm

2013:

Set up his own consulting firm, which provides advice to other real estate managers

/// Be curious and don't be afraid to ask older people for advice and to explain what they do. Most people are willing to help and if they aren't, you haven't lost anything. //

Florence, 31



2011:

Graduated with a BA in Politics

2011-'12:

Au Pair in Paris

2012-'17:

Project Manager for an insurance broker

2017-'18:

Completed an MBA at Henley Business School

2018-'20:

General Manager at Lime (an e-scooter company)

2021-present:

Head of Strategic Projects at MyTutor

/// Try not to worry about the grand plan - just keep trying new things, saying yes, meeting new people and it all comes together. And make sure you're happy - don't just do things because other people expect them of you! //

Andrew, 61



- 1978:** Youth worker in Liverpool
- 1979-81:** BA English (worked as a Painter & Decorator to fund himself)
- 1981:** Trainee accountant at PwC
- 1986:** Qualified as an Accountant (after failing accountancy exam 5 times!)
- 1987:** Financial Manager at Olympus cameras
- 1992:** CEO for a microscope company within Olympus
- 1993:** CEO of Olympus Switzerland
- 1999:** CEO of a Medical Tech company
- 2005:** Made redundant
- 2006:** Started coaching CEOs for a coaching company
- 2008-present:** Runs his own business coaching consultancy

/// The idea that you should know what you want to do is ridiculous. You can't know you like something until you try it! ///

Cat, 39



- 2003:** Graduated with Master of Physics
- 2003-'05:** Graduated from RADA in Theatre Arts
- 2006-'10:** Theatre Director in London's West End (director on major productions inc Andrew Lloyd Weber's Evita)
- 2010:** Brand Consultant for a London brand agency
- 2011-12:** Postmistress in Antarctica!
- 2015-'20:** Freelance Brand Consultant for brands including Deliveroo, MOO & Moonpig
- 2021:** Scaleup Founder Coach and Brand Expert

/// Try everything, say yes to everything to start with, but also take regular pause moments to ask yourself what you're truly enjoying, so that gradually you only say yes to the right things for you!



Chapter 2

What it's like

The best way to find out what any experience is like before you do it is to ask someone who's been there. At MyTutor, all of our tutors are from UK universities, and they love helping teens find out about university life, what their degrees are like and more. Here we caught up with 4 of our awesome tutors who told us about their uni lives so far.



Jameela is a 3rd year Biomedical Science student at King's College London, and she tutors Maths and Science with MyTutor.

What A Levels did you do?

I studied Biology, Chemistry and Maths at A level.

What made you want to study your subject?

At KCL, all the bioscience degrees do the same first year so I was originally studying Biochemistry actually and switched to Biomedical Science at the end of first year. For me, Biomedical Science offers me the ability to study a wide range of areas like anatomy and neuroscience whilst still going into a lot of depth. It was the perfect fit for someone who was still discovering their scientific niche!

What made you choose King's College London?

Studying at KCL means I have access to many of the experts doing cutting-edge research. Studying in London allows me to be in my favourite city and be close to home.

What's your favourite thing about university life?

My favourite thing about university life is the societies. Whilst you may not find your BFFs in your first week or on your course, joining societies is a great way to immerse yourself in university life and meet different people who you may have never encountered. You quickly find like-minded people and it's incredibly affirming!

What's your favourite thing about your degree?

The fact that I can learn anatomy from dissecting real-life cadavers. Gross and very haunting at first but a very cool experience I'll never forget!

And the most challenging thing?

I would say that my degree is hard but I think what has made things most challenging is struggling to organise myself at times and feelings of imposter syndrome. Having neared the end of my degree, I definitely think these aspects have improved as I have consciously worked on it!

What do you wish someone had told you before you started university?

I wish I had known that I don't have to have everything figured out because things can change. Regarding my course, (especially as a first year) I wish I had known that support is there if you're stuck or overwhelmed and it's okay to ask for help! After graduating, I'm going to take a gap year and apply for graduate-entry medicine. As a doctor, I will then specialise in paediatric psychiatry or endocrinology.

And your number 1 tip for teens applying?

Research! Universities have different course outlines for Biomedical Science, so it's important to know what you're getting yourself into!



Frances is a 3rd year Law student at Exeter University, and she tutors Maths, English and Law with MyTutor

What A Levels did you do?

Maths, History and Music. I was lucky that for Law you can basically just take the A Levels that you like.

What made you want to study your subject?

I joined the debating team in Year 12 and really enjoyed the fact that in many of the scenarios presented to us there was no one 'right answer'. Law is very similar to this and I've really enjoyed using my debating skills to persuade others to join my side of thinking.

What's it like to study in Exeter?

Although some might say we are not as busy as London or other larger cities, this doesn't mean we are quiet! There is plenty to do in Exeter, including tons of coffee shops, beautiful locations to go for walks or meet friends and a wide variety of sports activities. Another thing that sets us apart from other campus based Universities is that by your second year you often live very close to the city centre, meaning that you start to truly feel a part of Exeter as a city.

What's your favourite thing about university life?

I am always up for trying new things and Exeter has really allowed me to do this. Over the years I have had a go at a variety of different sports that I had never played before such as Ultimate Frisbee (love) and Lacrosse (never again). Many of the societies don't charge a fee for the first few weeks so it is a great opportunity to push yourself outside of your comfort zone.

What's your favourite thing about your degree?

Being able to argue really well! Through a Law degree you start to learn how to present an argument in the most persuasive way possible. The ability to convey your viewpoint to others in an accessible way is a transferable skill that will always come in handy later on in life.

What's the most challenging aspect of your degree?

The reading! There is just so much of it! I will not lie, if you take up a Law degree the chances are that you will become best friends with your uni library.

What do you wish you'd known about your course or university life?

That Law might feel competitive, but it doesn't mean you have to be. In my first year there seemed to be a real pressure to pretend like you understood everything... when we all knew that really wasn't the case! But once I was open with my friends, we all realised that we would do so much better if we worked together, shared resources and let each other know when we were stuck.

Do you know what you want to do for a career when you graduate? If Law, do you know what type of law yet?

My ultimate goal is to be a human rights barrister, but if all else fails I may just convert to my other dream of being a barista!

What's your 1 top tip for teens considering applying for Law?

Find a work/life balance. Law is one of those subjects where you really could just keep reading forever, but you have to know when it is time to take a break and enjoy all the other facets of the university experience. With good planning you will still get good grades but also experience everything else that makes university life so great!

Any extra points worth mentioning?

So I was actually rejected by Exeter University the first time around because I didn't quite get the grades (I ultimately got in with Clearing) and this made me feel like such an imposter when I first arrived. However, especially with Law, I found once I got there that because everyone had done such wildly different A-Levels, my grades were more of a stepping stone to university, rather than a prediction of how well you would do on the course.



Fiona is a 3rd year French & Russian student at St Andrews University, and she tutors English and French with MyTutor.

What A Levels did you do?

I took French, English Literature & Latin at A-Level, as well as Russian GCSE at the same time.

What made you want to study your subject?

I have always loved languages and since I plan to live abroad in the future, I was excited by the opportunity to explore new countries and cultures through my degree. French had always been my favourite subject, and I was fascinated by the complexity of Russian so I wanted to delve deeper into the linguistic and literary worlds of each language at university!

What's it like to study at St Andrews?

St Andrews is fantastic - the historic town has three gorgeous beaches where students are always having bonfires or dipping in the North sea! It may be small, but that means you always see a friendly face whenever you're walking through town. It also has a huge number of pubs in which to take a break from studying...

What's your favourite thing about your degree?

My favourite thing about my degree is that I am learning so much more than just the language - I love the range of cultural knowledge that I have gained, from 18th century French art and philosophy to Russian children's literature during the Revolution. Next year I have the chance to go to Russia (covid permitting!) and I'm very excited to put into practice everything that I have learnt!

And the most challenging aspect of your degree?

The hardest thing by far is definitely Russian grammar! There's always something new to learn and it takes time and effort to make sure I'm confident with it, but it's always worth it in the end. I always find that talking things over with my friends from my degree helps us to work it out together.

What do you wish you'd known about your course or university life before you started?

I think everyone should remember to take time out for themselves. Your degree and your social life are both very important, but your mental wellbeing should be a priority - it's okay to have a night in yourself to relax and recharge! No-one is judging self-care, and the library and the pub will both still be there tomorrow!

Do you know what you want to do for a career when you graduate?

I want to have a career where I use my language and communication skills everyday. I'm currently exploring options in diplomacy and foreign office work. I would love to live and work abroad and experience life in a different country!

What's your number 1 top tip for teens considering applying for Modern Languages?

Firstly, I would say always choose to study a language you feel passionately about because a language degree can be a lot of hard work and effort, so you need to really love it! Secondly, immerse yourself in it as much as you can - watch shows on Netflix and read books in the language and you'll see yourself improve whilst having fun!



Matthew is a 3rd year Medical student at Liverpool University, and he tutors Maths, Science and Personal Statement Mentoring with MyTutor.

What A Levels did you do?

I studied Biology, Chemistry and Maths at A Level and achieved A*A*A, although it was a tough choice to decide between Maths and Music! By the end of my A Levels though, I was pleased with how well each subject complemented each other.

What made you want to study Medicine?

Up until about Year 10 in school, I really wanted to study Law. I enjoyed debating and liked the idea of solving complex problems. However, I soon began to realise that I enjoyed science too much to not have this as part of my future career. I knew that I didn't want to study a 'pure science' course though, as much as I would have found it interesting. Working with people is important to me, and through volunteering at a care home whilst at school, and working as a healthcare assistant in a local hospital, it became clear to me that Medicine was the perfect course that marries science with humanities - it's a cliché but completely true.

Through organising various work experience placements, I saw the tangible difference that doctors can make on the lives of so many people. Medicine is an extremely broad discipline and there are many different career options; I'm excited to see what the future holds.

What's it like to study in Liverpool?

I decided to study Medicine in my home city. I'm from Liverpool and honestly wouldn't want to study anywhere else, despite having offers

to do so. Liverpool is a great place and, especially as a student, has many great advantages. As well as being affordable, Liverpool is a vibrant city with so much going on. The people of Liverpool are proud of their medical school and this makes being a medical student here an extremely privileged position to have.

What's it like to study in Liverpool?

Make sure you know that Medicine is definitely for you - don't just apply because other people think you'll do well. When you come to university, it'll be you putting in the work to pass exams, so you need to know that studying Medicine is the right decision. Perhaps organise some work experience to help you make that choice. extremely privileged position to have.

What's your favourite thing about university life?

Liverpool is a fantastic Russell Group university and is surrounded by an amazing clinical network of nationally recognised centres - why would a medical student want to study anywhere else?! University is more than just about academics, and the medical school have a fantastic MedSoc called the LMSS that caters for a wide range of interests. I personally enjoy being part of 'Artefacts', Liverpool Medical School's Performing Arts Society. If this isn't for you, there are plenty of other societies to get involved with. You'll simply never be bored.

What's the most challenging aspect of your degree?

It goes without saying but Medicine is an intense degree. However, it's completely manageable to have a work-life balance; in fact, it's encouraged. Planning time to attend lectures, seminars and placement can be difficult, as well as balancing revision with learning new information. However, I feel completely supported by the older years in the medical school, and also by my university tutors, who are always readily available to offer advice and help.

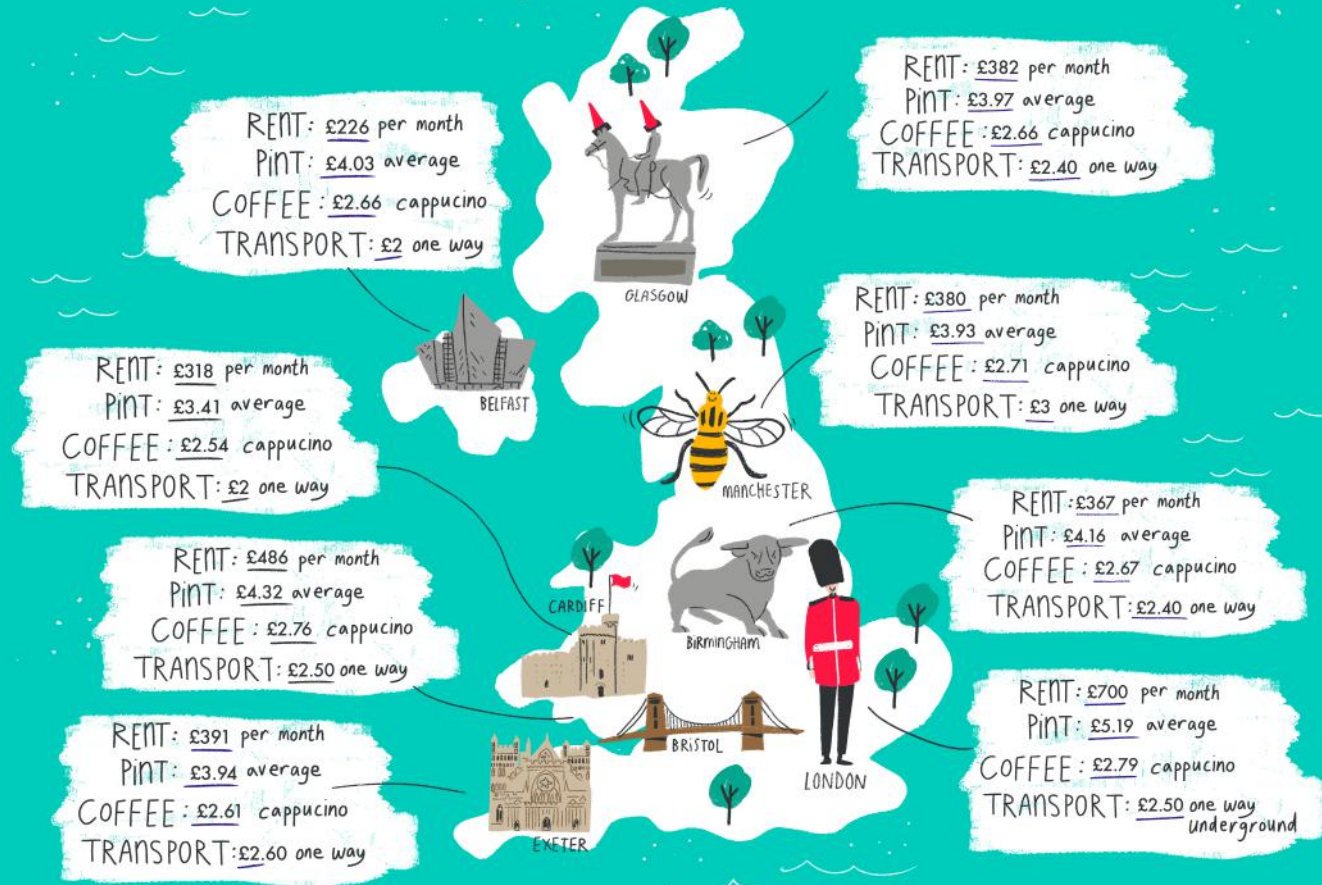
What do you wish you'd known about your course or university life before you started?

The workload doesn't mean that you won't have a life outside of medicine! As I said earlier, having a work-life balance is both manageable and encouraged. There are plenty of opportunities to make the most of your degree, and you should take each and every one of them.

Map of UK University living costs

You shouldn't pick a university purely on the cost of a bus ride (or a latte), but having a look at what your cost of living will be can help you imagine the sort of lifestyle you'll be able to have there. And being financially aware is just a smart thing to do. Here we've made it easy for you with a comparison of 8 popular universities, and the average cost of rent, a pint (a common student currency!), a takeaway coffee and a ride on public transport. This is just a snapshot, and if any universities you're interested in aren't here you can investigate online yourself.

Student living costs across the UK





Chapter 3

Getting in

How to choose what courses to apply for

If... you have no idea what you want to study

Firstly, don't panic! Almost everyone who has gone to university was in the same boat as you at some point. Step number one is to research, research, research. There might be courses and subjects out there that you haven't even heard of yet, and you can discover these in the prospectus of each university out there. As you read through the summary of what each course is about, see if you come across any which get you excited. You can then explore these more deeply online, watch videos about it on YouTube, read a book or some articles related to it and see if your interest grows - or comes to a dead end (which is also fine!). As you're exploring, you can also reach out to any teachers, parents, tutors, older siblings, parents of friends etc who might know a bit more about a particular subject, and they can point you in the direction of some more reading or another person to talk to.

Another way to pick a degree is to find a career, group of careers or industries that you're interested in working in, and work backwards from there. Have a look at the careers of people who you look up to, and see where they started - if they even went to university.

If... you're torn between lots of courses

As frustrating as it can feel, this is a good position to be in! Again, researching as much as you can about each subject should eventually make it clear to you which degree will suit you best. Try by making a list of the following:

- What you like about each course you're keen on
- What sort of skills you'll learn in each degree, and what sort of careers these could lead to - then compare and think about which path you feel could suit you better as a person

Once you've done some more exploring, reasoning, thinking and speaking to people about all your different options, see if you have a gut feeling about what's best, and listen to it.

Another key thing to bear in mind is that some universities let you study more than one subject at once, and some let you switch mid-degree, so you don't even have to choose! You can find out what subjects you can study together by reading through uni prospectuses, and you can also email any university's admissions office with questions like these - helping you find that info is what they're there for.

Good ways to choose your universities

The syllabus of the course you're going to study. This is what you'll spend your days (and maybe a couple of nights) immersed in, so it's best if you're passionate about what you're learning. Degrees in the same subject can vary a lot from uni to uni, so it's important to check what's in the course - you can find this out on the university's website.

If they have a year abroad or year in industry option. Would you like to study in a different country for a year or a term? Or would you like to get a taste of working life while you're still a student? This info is available on the course pages for each degree at each university.

If they're flexible with you changing courses. If you're not absolutely 100% set on a particular course, you might want to go for a university that will let you change - or take more than one subject at a time - throughout your degree.

If the lifestyle suits you. Would you suit a big city or a small town? An old university or a newer one? Sporty or arty? These are all options available to you, and if you're still not sure after thinking about it, you should try visiting a couple of campuses on their open days if you get the chance.

The cost of living. Some universities are cheaper to attend than others, and while it shouldn't be your number one reason, it's worth bearing in mind - see the map on page 12!

Less good ways to choose

- Where your friends are going (you can FaceTime wherever you are!)
- Where you've already heard of (do your research)
- Where your parents think you should go (you should listen to advice, but ultimately the decision is yours)

Extra piece of advice for picking your 5 UCAS choices:

Make sure you apply to a group of universities that have a range of entrance requirements. That way, when you come to accept your "firm" offer (the place you'd like to go to most) and your "insurance" offer (your back-up plan if you don't get the grades for your firm offer), you'll be more likely to meet at least one of your offers.



How to write a cracking personal statement

Your personal statement in your UCAS application is your chance to really stand out and show who you are as a person. It's just 1000 characters to tell university admissions tutors why you want to study what you're applying for and why you will make a great student. Here are a few things you can fill up your statement with:

- What made you want to study the subject - a real, heartfelt reason
- Any books you've read outside the classroom which are relevant to the course, and how they shaped your ideas and interests
- Any relevant lectures, courses, talks or events you attended outside school and why you found them interesting. Check out Coursera for their free MOOCs (Massive Online Open Course) in 100s of subjects you can take in your spare time.
- Any work experience you've done which you can relate to the subject your applying for
- Finally, any extra-curricular sports or other activities that reflect your good character - anywhere you've shown leadership, cared for others or been helpful in your community etc.

At MyTutor, lots of our tutors offer Personal Statement Mentoring as one of their subjects. With them, you can get 1-1 help on planning, preparing and writing your personal statement. They're all students and recent grads from UK universities, so they know exactly what it takes to write a statement that will get you noticed.

Your UCAS timeline

Key dates to keep your eye on for entry in 2022

18th May '21

UCAS applications open. But don't fret, the deadline is a way off.

August '21

If you've decided on a course, have a first crack at drafting your personal statement. You can then show it to your subject or careers guidance teacher when school starts.

6pm, 15th October '21

Deadline for applications for Medicine, Veterinary Science & Dentistry courses + any courses at Oxford or Cambridge.

December '21

Make final tweaks to your statement and application.

July '21

A great time to think open-mindedly about your options and what you want to do - before deadlines get close.

If it's possible for you, you can also use the summer holidays to visit a university open day or two, and get ahead on reading for your personal statement.

7th September '21

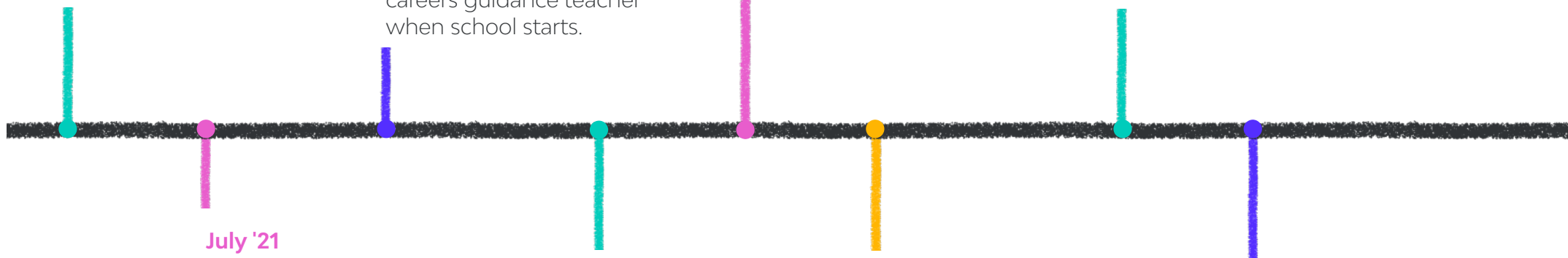
UCAS applications open! If you're ready, you can send off your UCAS now, and universities start to review applications.

November '21

If you're submitting your application in January, keep working at your personal statement & do more research into each uni and course you're thinking of applying for.

6pm, 26th January '22

Final deadline to submit your UCAS application. We don't recommend you submit at the last minute - aim for at least a few days in advance in case of *technical difficulties*.



Universities then review applications, and they'll start to send out most offers from January until around April. You don't have to reply (i.e. accept or decline) any offers until everywhere you've applied has got back to you.

Once you've got either offers or declines from all the places you applied, you can accept a firm offer, an insurance offer, and decline the rest. Your firm offer should be the place where you most want to study, and the place you'll go if you meet your offer.

Your insurance offer should be a place where you'd still be happy to go, and where you'll go if you don't get the grades for your firm offer.

This is just an overview. You can find out more about all the nitty gritty details (including using UCAS Track and applying through UCAS extra) on the UCAS website.

Good luck!



Recommended Resources

[How GCSEs and A Levels are being awarded in 2021](#) - info from the MyTutor blog

[The UCAS guide to university subjects](#) - for every subject you could possibly study

[The Buzz Quiz on iCould](#) - to help you work out possible career paths

[The Times Good University Guide](#) - compare what different unis are best at

[UCAS Track](#) - how to keep your eye on your application status

[UCAS Extra](#) - info on how you can apply for universities after the deadline if you don't get any offers