# Supporting your students through their UCAS application – delivered by Tiegan Yates and Niamh Gallagher

## Overview of key dates

## March to August

### Year 12/1st year college students should start thinking about if they want to go to university/what to study – time to start developing an understanding of why they want to study the course they’ve chosen

### Can do this through open days, UCAS/UK Uni Search, online

### Intro to HE talks – what actually is university, what are their options?

### Campus visits

### Subject talks/visits – to get a better idea of what they will study

## September

### Begin online applications (open from 5th September 2023)

### Personal statement workshops

### Intro to UCAS talks

### Make final decisions on choices

### Deadline for Oxbridge is 16th October

## January 2024 - Application deadline is 31st January 6pm

### Students should start to hear back from universities through UCAS hub

### May be invited to interview

### Mock interviews

### Workshops to help with interview techniques

### May be invited to offer holder days

### Students should receive all decisions by TBC May 2024, need to decide and reply by TBC June 2024

## Round table activity

### Groups given a range of different questions to discuss, followed by feedback to find similarities and differences in the ways in which schools/colleges support students with the UCAS process

## Questions for discussion:

### What issues do your students commonly face during the UCAS application process?

### UCAS moving back deadlines results in students not adhering to internal deadlines. Schools want to get things done before mock exams but if students know the UCAS deadline is later, they will end up bumping into mock exams.

### Chris from admissions at Edge Hill: pushing back deadline worked to our benefit as it removed the bottleneck effect that would occur when returning after the Christmas holidays – when it was pushed back the levels of applications were much more manageable.

### Would early application be looked at more favourably than others? – No, all applications have equal consideration regardless of when submitted (as long as it meets the deadline). Eg. for Health courses, those who have early interviews would have to be kept on hold anyway, as we cannot accept until we’ve had 90/95 interviews.

### Personal statements – students struggle getting started with them. Students statements aren’t personal enough/selling themselves.

## How much support do you provide to students from both internal and external services? Is there anything more that we can provide as universities?

### Burnley College – invited representatives from Unis to hold mock interviews – successful, students feel it really benefits them. Representatives are asked to gear questions towards the course that student is wanting to do. Delivered to year 13 students around October (before November internal deadline for UCAS)

### Unifrog – worth the money, lots of features that help students

## How would you support a student who has no idea about their future?

## Encourage them to remain calm

### Rather than asking ‘what do you want to do’, as there is no definitive answer for this, ask other questions such as what do you want to develop about yourself, what skills do you want to develop – then match the career to that (rather than picking a career and moulding the student into that career)

### Focus on the fact that this is for the next few years – it doesn’t have to be for forever (this will help take weight off the decision/help the student calm down)

### Celebrate not knowing what to do – too often students are pigeonholed (especially with STEM agenda, when they may be more suited to humanities). Explain to the student that it is beneficial that they are open-minded, rather than being shut off in one direction which may not be the right one.

### Students may be excellent at history/love it, but say “what's the point, there’s no job at the end of it” – students should know it’s okay to go to university for the love of the subject, and the transferable skills that can be gained from subjects, that can give them careers in many different workplaces

### Reframe it away from discussions of how much money they can earn – young people want their job to be meaningful too

### Encourage students to go and see the careers advisor in school – they will help them to develop self-awareness, and understand what opportunities are actually out there

### *How is the process managed at your school/college, and when do you start to introduce students to this?*

### *How do you support your students in gaining work experience?*

### *Have you changed anything for this year that has worked well? Is there anything you are wanting to change for the future?*

### (last three questions not discussed as a group due to time constraints)

## The Hub, UCAS processes and tips

### Students can register for UCAS Hub at any point (don’t have to be applying this year or even be in college/sixth form yet) – can start their research ahead of time

### Everything is in one area right through to results day, really beneficial for students to use

### Starting early on the hub allows students to get used to it and become well-versed in using it

### Student dilemmas tips:

### Encourage them to focus on a subject they love and enjoy

### Promote subject taster days/open days

### Arrange a bespoke campus visit with universities

### Particularly useful for students who aren’t doing any research yet independently – gets them thinking about university in a group environment

### Students studying professional courses can speak to a professional in that field

### Invite university academics in to talk about their subject

## Student resources

### Uni mailing lists – emails and texts about events, may inspire them to do some research.

### Encourage wider reading, especially if they have a particular subject interest – see where it can lead to

### Social media for their choice of university

### Unifrog, UniTasterDays and UCAS online resources

## UCAS Extra

### Opens 28th February 2024

### Can be used by students who have either declined or been unsuccessful in their choices – or if they have changed their minds on what they want to study

### Allows them “a sixth choice”

### May need to send a revised personal statement – this means the subject can be completely different than what their initial application was – UCAS will contact them if this is the case

## What are universities looking for?

### Potential for success

### Will they be able to study on the course? Will they complete it? Will they go on to good graduate outcomes?

### Fair and contextual assessment of each individual student – anything that may have impacted the student, whether it is personally or to do with circumstances in the school/college

### Evidence of examples – STAR technique is key (Situation Task Action Result)

## How should you advise your students?

### Research by Uni of Manchester has found teachers and advisors view personal statements very differently to admissions tutors

### Admissions tutors will read thousands of applications, sometimes for a variety of courses, sometimes more specialised – each admission team is constructed differently

### Some departments may have their own admissions tutor, some universities/courses will have a central admissions team

### Applications can be weak where a student has chosen a wide range of courses, as the 4000 characters isn’t enough to cover everything

### Eg. if they have chosen joint honours for some, and single honours for others

## Personal statements activity – differentiating teachers’ comments from admissions tutors’ comments

### Quote 1

### Comment 1: teacher/advisor

### Comment 2: admissions tutor

### Quote 2

### Comment 1: teacher/advisor

### Comment 2: admissions tutor

### Quote 3:

### Comment 1: teacher/advisor

### Comment 2: admissions tutor

### (see slides for quotes)

## Personal statements

### Opportunity to show why they should be offered a place – their chance to stand out from the crowd

### Be mindful that the one statement goes to all of their choices

### 4000 characters or 47 lines (whichever comes first). Word or Google docs’ word count varies from UCAS’ text box – make sure to check.

### A lot of courses don’t interview so this is the one chance to impress

### Five key areas to include:

### Motivation: is there an end goal/next step they want to get to, what has made them choose this topic

### Academic ability: any challenges they’ve overcome, anything they have enjoyed studying or looking forward to studying (check that the modules apply to all of their choices if mentioning this). What do they have to offer? Interests and wider reading – NOT GRADES as this is a separate section on application

### Skills and attributes: STAR technique (situation, task, action, result) – use examples/evidence to show the skills, how they have developed them, and how they can harness them/apply them to university. Encourage students to see the transferable skills they have gained from part time work, even if the job is not directly relevant to their course.

### Relevant experience: focus on what they have learnt from the experience and how it will help them with the next steps

### Outside interests: not as compulsory as the other 4 areas – useful to include if it links to their course of interest or particular things they want to do at university (eg. sports, volunteering, hobbies and clubs, any awards they have achieved)

## Work experience

### Uni admissions teams are aware that there have been limited traditional opportunities for students in the past few years (especially with COVID or GDPR putting limitations on healthcare work experience)

### But still important that students showcase relevant experience and skills to make their application stand out. Alternative work experience include:

### Virtual opportunities: Springpod, Uptree, Barclay’s life skills. Can access from home

### Volunteering from home: fundraising for charities, phone calls with the Samaritans or Age UK, blogging and vlogging to support young peoples’ mental health, letters against loneliness

### Call practitioners, chat to current students, read up on professional body websites

## Academic references

### Refence is key to universities – you as a teacher/advisor know best who they are and what they are like

### Read the students’ personal statement and echo the key messages that they have included

### Utilise information available on course prospectus pages

### Your personal experience will be essential to comment on academic ability, and any personal qualities of the student

### If the student is new to your organisation, UCAS may ask for another reference at a later date

### References are becoming more and more important in decision making for universities to understand if they will be successful in higher education, as landscape is changing in terms of qualifications with T Levels etc. and many students may be sitting their first exams as they missed GCSEs due to COVID.

### **New approach for 2024 entry: split into sections**.

### Section 1: general statement about your institution

### what courses are on offer

### what do they majority of your students study

### info about general performance

### has there been a high staff turnover or negative OFSTED rating

### policies or processes used for predicting grades.

### **SAME STATEMENT CAN BE USED FOR EVERY STUDENT** (higher ups might have a blanket statement they wish you to use).

### Section 2: any relevant info that may contextualise the students’ educational journey.

### Individual circumstances (get students’ consent).

### Any info that may have impacted choice of subjects (eg. timetabling issues preventing them taking a subject).

### Anything that may help them in the future (do they have any extra qualifications?)

### Although this is optional, it is vital for us to know if there are any mitigating circumstances that have affected the students’ application/grades, in order to help.

### Section 3: other supportive information.

### Short clear factual statements (bullet points are fine).

### Suitability for the course

### any relevant experience

### academic ability (are they the strongest performer? Any achievements?)

### It won’t negatively impact a students’ application if sections 2 and 3 are blank (if there are no circumstances that have impacted the student for instance, you do not have to write anything in these boxes)

## Transition to university

### Important to inform students about finance and budgeting early – you can apply for student finance without having an offer – just put first choice and this can be changed if it is not the case

### Make sure they are checking their emails and keeping up to date with anything they need to do for SFE/SFNI

### Research scholarships and bursaries

### Encourage students to keep an eye out for communications from universities – look out for events, reading lists, accommodation information

## Results day – clearing and deferring

### Have a clear Plan B for results day

### Utilise clearing plus to narrow things down

### Make sure they feel prepared for clearing – research what is available, they may want to apply to another course if they have done better than expected, not just for students who haven’t got into their choices!

## Utilising your Alumni

### Can be a beneficial way of encouraging students to focus on the decision they will be making – good to see someone who was once in their shoes.

### A profile on their job, talks and workshops

## Top tips

### Find a relevant contact at universities that you can get in touch with

### Sign up for newsletters and communications from universities – these are useful for teachers and advisors as well as students

### October/November, march, June/July can fill up quickly in terms of events from us – get things in the diary early

### We can put you in touch with the relevant person throughout the wider university – just ask