

# Supporting your students through their UCAS application

CHRIS, EDUCATION LIAISON MANAGER

TOM, EDUCATION LIAISON OFFICER

EMMA, SENIOR ADMISSIONS MANAGER



# Aims

- OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR FROM EACH OTHER
- SUPPORTING STUDENTS RESEARCH
- PERSONAL STATEMENTS
- STAFF AND TEACHER REFERENCES
- FINAL TAKEAWAYS



# Activity

Discuss your responses to the following questions;

1. How is the UCAS process managed at your school/college?
2. How involved are subject teachers in your UCAS processes?
3. What have you changed in recent years about your processes that have worked well?





# The research process





# Importance of research

- Students often struggle when researching universities/courses
- The more research students do, the more likely they will be to select the right university/course for them
- Students who conduct thorough research tend to strongly convey their motivation for the course in their personal statement and at interview





# Supporting students' research

- Encourage students to focus on a subject they love and enjoy
- Promote Subject Taster Days/Open Days/Summer Residentials
- Arrange a bespoke campus visit
- Students studying professional courses can speak to a professional in that field
- Invite University academics in to talk about their subject





# Student resources

- Social media for their choice of University
- Sign up to university mailing lists
- Encourage wider reading – linked to modules
- Unifrog, UniTasterDays & UCAS Hub resources and tools
- Three impartial websites/apps:
  - Discover Uni – OfS impartial website
  - ThinkUni app – stats guide
  - Informed choices – from the Russell Group about choosing the right subjects





# Application process





# Admission tutors

- Admissions Tutors will read applications for a variety of courses.
- Some courses may choose to read their own applications and have Faculty Admissions Tutors.
- Applications can be weak where a student has chosen a wide range of different courses, and students may need to be advised about this.
- They will read the Personal Statement and the reference





# Fair entry criteria

- New contextual admissions policy
- Based on personal and educational background
- Eligible applicants to receive **up to a two-grade reduction** in entry requirements for most courses (except Medicine/PA and Nursing associate)
- Care Experience or Estrangement
- Free School Meals
- Sole Carers
- Refugee Status
- POLAR Quintile 1 or IMD Quintile
- Edge Hill WA Programme Participants
- Prospective students apply as normal





# Personal statements

- Research by The University of Manchester and the HE Access Network showed that Teachers and Advisers view personal statements differently to Admissions Tutors.
- 'Only **10** of the **44** personal statements were awarded the same grade by both teacher and admissions tutor: **20** statements were one grade different, **13** statements were two grades different and **1** statement was three grades different.'





# Activity

‘Admissions tutors tend to value focused and sustained analysis of a specific topic of interest or case study rather than broad statements about a subject, or attempts to make the statement more “personal”’

The research shows that whilst staff may advise students to make more generic statements, universities view ‘academically’ written statements as stronger.

**Look at the personal statements extracts, can you identify whether the feedback was from an Admissions Tutor or a Teacher/Adviser?**





# What is the Personal Statement?

- Their chance to stand out from the crowd
- The one personal statement goes out to all five of their choices
- 4000 characters to use across all answers
- Three sections to answer with a minimum of 350 characters per section
- Many courses don't interview, so this is their only chance to impress





# What should students include?

- Consulted with Universities, teachers and advisers, students, Government bodies and charity organisations.
1. Why do they want to study this course or subject?
  2. How have their qualifications and studies helped them to prepare for this course or subject?
  3. What else have they done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?





# 1). Why this course or subject?

- **Motivation for studying the course**
  - Role models?
  - Particular moment or experience?
  - Subject they love?
- **Knowledge of the subject area**
  - Particular subject or topic of interest
  - Book/subject expert
- **Why this is a good fit for them?**
- **Future plans or ambitions**





# 2). Qualifications and study

## Not about their grades

- Specific modules or topics
- Essays or projects that explore a particular view point or technique
- EPQ – Extended Project Qualification
- School, local, or national competitions
- Private lessons and qualifications e.g. music, stage school or sports if relevant to the course
- Tutoring or mentoring
- **How do they link to their course/subject area?**





# 3). What else have they done to prepare?

- Extra and super-curriculars
- Personal life experiences
- Work experience/volunteering
- Job/employment – part-time or full-time
- Shadowing
- Online learning activities e.g. Springpod, MOOCs etc.
- Trips and visits (online or in person)
- Podcasts, TED talks, documentaries etc.
- Duke of Edinburgh/Duke of York awards
- **How do they link to their course/subject area?**





# Linking to their course/area

- Why is the course a good fit for them?
- How does their qualifications and study link to their course?
- How does their experience, skills and attributes link with their course?
- To give these emphasis, use real world examples and think **STAR...**





# STAR Technique

## *Situation*

*Briefly outline where you were and what your job was*

## *Task*

*Explain the task you encountered and what had to be done*

## *Action*

*Explain the specific actions you took to overcome the challenges*

## *Result*

*What were the results and what did you learn?*





# Examples

	Situation	Task	Action	Result
Communication	Sports lesson	Asked to lead a warm up	Planned the warm up, gave clear directions to other students. Checked with them that they knew what to do and that they were completing the activities properly.	Warm up went well, all of the students completed it. The teacher was pleased with my efforts and has said I will have the opportunity again.



# Examples

	Situation	Task	Action	Result
Problem solving	Student helper at a Sixth Form Open evening	Give the parents of prospective sixth form students a tour of facilities. Half way through the tour, the doors to the main hall were locked.	Advised the parents that this was due to the event taking place out of hours, carried on with the tour picking a key up from reception. Showed the hall at the end of the tour and apologised for the inconvenience.	Parents got to see all of the facilities without the tour being too disrupted.



# Things to encourage

- Give yourself plenty of time
- Multiple drafts
- Show your enthusiasm through your content
- Use university websites and prospectuses
- Be positive
- Stay relevant throughout
- Check and double check!





# Things to discourage

- Humour
- Clichés
- Inappropriate email addresses
- Irrelevant facts
- Spelling errors
- Lies or 'over-exaggeration'
- Lists
- Quotes – don't search for one
- Excuses





# Staff references





# Reference weighting

- References are becoming an ever more important aspect in decision-making for Universities, to understand a student profile and future success within Higher Education
- All universities are different
- UCAS encourage schools and colleges to consider including the following useful information in an applicant's reference





# Reference format

- Following consultation, the format to input references changed for 2024 entry onwards
- References have been streamlined and will include three distinct sections (4000 characters in total);
  1. Enter a general statement about your school/college/centre (mandatory for any application sent via a registered centre)
  2. If applicable, enter any information about extenuating circumstances which may have impacted the applicant's education and achievement
  3. Outline any other supportive information specific to the applicant and relevant to the course (s) applied for that you think the University should be aware of

**Won't negatively affect application if 2 & 3 are blank**





# General statement

Information could include;

- Performance, intake demographics, progress rates to higher education etc
- Portfolio of qualification provision and any restrictions on options students may have
- Information about your school/college or centre which may affect general performance such as significant staff changes or damage to buildings
- Any policies or processes used for predicting grades
- Can utilise the same information for every student – **use reference template in centre management**





# Extenuating circumstances

Include relevant information that contextualises the educational journey, such as;

- Individual circumstances (mature student, disability, serious, acute or chronic illness, bereavement, personal circumstances **(with applicant's consent)**)
- Context as to why there is a disparity between an individual's grades achieved throughout the school/college
- Factors which have limited the individual's choice of subjects or load of study at Level 3 or equivalent **(factors which have affected the whole centre rather than the individual should be included in section 1)**
- Support the university or college should consider putting in place to ensure the applicant can thrive on their course **(with applicant's consent)** – e.g. highlight the measures the school, college or centre put in place to ensure the student's inclusion/experience





# Other supportive information

- Not necessary to craft the perfect paragraph here; **providing short, clear, factual statements** helps universities and colleges digest the information.
- You can provide a supporting statement for your students and showcase any additional information for high performing students.

Such as;

- Evidence of suitability for the course(s) applied for which may include performance and academic ability in relevant Level 3 or equivalent qualification, relevant work experience, cases where an applicant is the strongest performer in their cohort or extracurricular achievements
- any barriers the applicant has faced in accessing work experience opportunities only where relevant to the course applied to





# Final thoughts





# Final thoughts...

**List two things you plan to apply to future application processes at your school/college;**

1. From the session
2. From your table discussions

## Any questions?

