



The Thomas Hardy School

HIGHER EDUCATION

Parent Booklet

Help to guide you through the process of your son or daughter's application to higher education

THS-6th Form
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Introduction

The aim of this booklet is to provide you with the information required to support your son or daughter through the decisions concerning Higher Education. I hope you find this useful.

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Why go to university?

This is a question more and more young people and their parents are asking as job prospects seem limited and fees are a considerable financial undertaking. There are two main responses a student may give when answering this question:

- They have an academic thirst for knowledge: a desire to be taught by subject experts exploring and understanding a subject enabling them to fulfil their potential for learning; this may or may not be coupled with ...
- preparation for employment

Studying at university not only means a student learns more about their subject but also that they can demonstrate and develop many skills such as independence and commitment.

Some careers need specific degrees, however, there are many that just require a person to be educated to degree level.

In an increasingly competitive job market it is important that school leavers consider the different choices available to them; do the research and make an informed decision.

How can students prepare for university?

Studying and achieving high grades are vital. However, universities would like students to arrive better prepared for independent learning. They would like students to demonstrate that they have learned how to think for themselves and to see evidence that they are interested in the wider aspects of their subjects, beyond the confines of the syllabus.

At Thomas Hardy School we offer a broad range of activities to encourage and demonstrate this interest. Please encourage your son or daughter to participate; this is not a complete list, there are many other opportunities offered by the school and students need to be pro-active about finding out about them and taking part!

- Sixth form speaker slots once a fortnight; already we have heard from speakers as diverse as a senior BP geophysicist and a leading choreographer – see white board and tutor notices
- Community lectures – see school web-site and posters
- Model United Nations – attend school one day conference in July
- Debate Club Tuesday lunch-times
- Biomedical Science group – for all those interested in medicine related degree courses
- Subject seminars – see head of faculty or 6th form team; these will include suggested reading
- TED talks and online MOOCs
- Reading widely - newspapers, books journals

Students should also listen out for other opportunities outside of school, for example, we advertise open days, summer schools, visits and competitions.

So your son/daughter wants to go to university...

What is UCAS?

- www.ucas.com
- The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. It provides information about all the courses available, grades needed, and the website has links to university websites.
- It also organises events, such as the Higher Education Convention for students, and carries out the administration needed for applications.
- The UCAS website is central to the process of applying for Higher Education and has a lot of information about university study and the application process.
- In the summer term UCAS will launch '**Apply**' for the **2018** application cycle. Students will register as part of the school and must remember their log in & password.
- UCAS processes all the applications sending them onto universities and providing information to students to '**Track**' their progress.
- Students can apply for a UCAS card which will give discounts as well as registering them for a newsletter and further information about their courses.

When does it all happen?

Year 12

October: All Year 12 students take part in a FUTURES day exploring their post 6th form options.

February

/ March: Higher Education evening at the school for parents and students.

Oxbridge Conference is held for students looking to apply to either of these universities.

Students visit the UCAS Higher Education (HE) Convention, held in Exeter, to collect prospectuses and talk to representatives from universities.

Preparation exercises for this event will be held before we go.

Students discuss their options with tutors and can speak to Careers advice staff (Mrs Hymas) and to Mrs Sainsbury, the HE Coordinator.

Students receive HE updates via **email**, listing open days and other opportunities; further information is displayed on the HE noticeboard and is available electronically on the school network (T:\Sixth Form\UCAS)

May: UCAS Course search is launched online for **2018** entry.

June: Students take part in further FUTURES sessions in school where they receive information and are able investigate different courses and universities. During these sessions students register with UCAS, linking their application to the school with a 'buzzword', issued in the summer

term. Students start writing **personal statements** and decide whether further work experience, reading, visits etc...are necessary.

August: **AS** Results are published; these are an **important** part of the application process. They are the last external results a student earns before their application is seen by the universities.

Year 13

September: Students receive updated predicted grades, finalise choices and application.

Students are expected to have a strong draft, or a completed personal statement for use when applying to university or for an apprenticeship.

Sept-Nov: Students submit their university application forms to the school, which processes them and forwards them to UCAS.

Oct-April: Students attend further open days, interviews and auditions; receive offers/rejections and by early May make decision for first choice and insurance choice course/university.

Jan-May: The finance application needs to be completed.

August: Results are in and university places finalised

IMPORTANT DATES

Application deadline for professional medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and veterinary science courses, and for all courses at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge:

School: September 15th (Fri) UCAS: October 15th 2017 (Sun)

Application deadlines for all other courses except those listed above:

School: November 24th (Fri) UCAS: January 15th 2018 (Mon)

How strict are the Deadlines?

Early applications do show universities that students are enthusiastic and students can receive offers very soon after their applications are received. Inevitably as a deadline approaches there is a surge in UCAS forms arriving in the 6th form office so early applications also have the advantage of being processed quickly within the school.

We have several hundred student applications to deal with each year. The school has early deadlines to make sure we are able to check student forms ensuring all our students make high quality applications with the best chance of success. We cannot guarantee the level of support available to students making applications after these deadlines.

PLEASE NOTE: The school is closed over the Christmas break and this is the reason for the school's deadline being in November. Applications made after this date will not be processed until the school reopens in January.

What should students take into account when selecting universities?

Students will need to:

- From September, following their AS results, receive predicted grades.
- Narrow down their course choices; it is usual to apply to similar courses at all institutions. Students can apply to up to **four** choices for medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, veterinary science and up to **five** for other subjects.
- Consider where they wish to study. It is important that they chose the right course, but they will also need to think about where in the country they wish to be, the size of the institution, and whether they wish to be in a city or on a campus. Students may apply to study at Oxford or Cambridge not both.
- Make sure that they are extending their experiences and knowledge of their subject beyond the A Level syllabus. For some courses, particularly those working with people, specific work experience is vital; it is important to show an interest in the wider world, and experience of leadership, working with others or volunteering is useful. This should be discussed with tutors and Mrs K. Weir.
- Visit some of the universities they are interested in. It is not essential to visit all on their shortlist, universities will often invite student for open days after they have applied.

How can students/parents find out more about universities?

- The **UCAS website** (www.ucas.com) lists all courses and institutions and has links to the university websites. There is also information about fees, accommodation and bursaries. It is important to consider the grades needed for each course and students should make sure they have up to date predicted grades after they have received their A Level practice exam results.

Some degrees require particular A Level subjects, and others have a short list of subjects which are appropriate. It is essential to check whether particular modules, GCSE grades or subjects are required and whether the institution accepts retakes of A Level modules (a few do not).

More about open days:

- Parents do not have to attend open days, but universities now often put on specific sessions for parents while students are on a tour or in an interview.
- Open days often have to be booked in advance, particularly for specific subject areas. You can usually visit a university at any time-look on the individual websites to find out. On websites you may also find virtual tours as well as videos from students and tutors about the universities.
- Students can have time off school if they fill in a leave of absence form; we ask that students do not visit more than **three** universities in term time.

What do I need to know about Predicted Grades?

- Students will be given predicted grades specifically for their UCAS forms at the start of year 13. These will be optimistic, but realistic, and based on current progress.
- Students may resit in year 13 to improve their grades but must be realistic about the success of this; teachers should mention in reference why retakes are needed. Some of the top universities will not accept retakes and will ask for specific grades in modules.

What else is going on in school?

Interview

Preparation: Some universities and courses require interviews particularly, but not exclusively, Oxford, Cambridge and medicine. Students will have the opportunity to practise in the autumn term. Student should see **Mrs Taylor, Ms Platt or their tutor** for more information.

Admissions Tests: Some courses also require Additional Admission Tests; some of these are taken in school, in November. These include LNAT for Law, BMAT for medicine, and several for specific subjects at Oxford, there will be preparation sessions in school for some, but not all, of these. Other tests are not available at school and are run by other organisations (e.g. UKCAT is run by Pearson Testing and can be taken in a range of test centres). **Ms Platt** will guide students through preparation tasks.

It is the **student's responsibility** to find out whether they need to sit an admissions test and make the arrangements to do so; they must inform **Ms Platt** and the exams officer, **Mrs Boyles**.

Work experience: **Mrs Weir** coordinates work experience in the school; this is particularly important for those wishing to pursue professions that involve working with people.

Volunteer work: Students in the sixth form can work with year 9 tutor groups as mentors, and there are other volunteering opportunities advertised through the year team/tutors

What else do I need to know about the application form?

- The personal statement explains why the student wants to do the courses they are applying for and describes the qualities they have that the university will find useful and interesting. It cannot be longer than 4000 characters.
- This should be written in formal language and approximately 75% should be academic and about the student's interest in the subject. Students may talk to relevant subject teachers about this part of the statement.
- Interest beyond the A Level syllabus must be described; participation in clubs and visits relevant to the subject they wish to study is an excellent way of doing this.
- Students can include information about their jobs and hobbies, if they emphasise the skills that have been acquired and how they relate to the course.
- Students will be given advice in school and receive feedback from their tutor, but will appreciate parents and friends reading the statement and offering comments too.
- UCAS has a lot of advice, and downloadable pdfs with a timeline, mindmap and worksheet. We will use similar resources in school.
- It is usual for all statements to be redrafted many times; students should ask for advice in drafting and redrafting the statement but it must be their own work. UCAS will check for plagiarism.
- The statement is often used to choose between students with similar grades, including when students have just missed offers; the university may be looking for ways to reject the students do work to avoid spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.
- They must have a sensible email address to put on the form and a few details about parents are requested though are not obligatory. Parents can also be named as a contact on the form; this is useful if a student is not available on results day.
- Subject comments for the reference are written by the student's year 12 teachers; the tutor will collate these and add comments about the student's personality, contributions, study skills, extra-curricular activities, work experience and other relevant information. Be assured that when preparing a student's reference, we are always as positive as possible The student will be able to read through an electronic copy with the tutor.

Paper and electronic copies are not provided to students or parents though we are happy to go through a reference on screen. Please be aware that at busy times this may delay the submission of a student's application in UCAS.

How is the Application sent?

- The student will complete a checklist to confirm that they have filled in each section accurately and hand a paper copy of the whole form to the tutor to be checked.
- The checklist and paper copy, with any corrections made, are handed in at the year office, and the student can pay online and send the form electronically to the referee (**the school**). Payment is made online, directly to UCAS for their administration; for 2017 entrance this is £24 for 2 or more courses, £13 for one course (you 'top this up' by paying the £11 difference if you later decide to apply for more than one course); new prices for 2018 may be released by UCAS.
- The form will be checked again by Mrs Sainsbury, and can be sent back electronically if changes needed to be made. **YOU ONLY PAY ONCE**. The reference and predicted grades are added and the form is then sent to UCAS, which sends it on to all the universities.
- Art Foundation/Drama School etc. application procedure: some colleges ask for Art Foundation applications to be sent directly to them electronically. The school will expect students to follow the same checking process that we use for UCAS and all references will be sent directly to the institution by the school.

What happens next?

Some universities will make contact straight away and students may be made offers or invited to interviews, open days, auditions etc. However some institutions are very slow to respond and students must be prepared to wait for quite a long time. If a student needs to contact a university they can discuss the situation with **Mrs Sainsbury** first, but the university will expect to hear directly from the student.

If a student receives no offers and has **not** used all their choices, they can add further courses. If they have used all their choices, in February the UCAS website will show courses with places available through a system called 'Extra'. Students should talk to their tutor or **Mrs Sainsbury** if they find themselves in this situation. Don't panic some students follow this route every year and have very successful times at university on courses they love.

After applying and receiving offers students (normally by the end of March) have until early **May** to select a **first (FIRM) choice**, with grades they and their teachers believe they can achieve, and optionally an **INSURANCE choice**, which usually has lower grades in case they do not achieve those required for the first choice. The universities will contact the students with information about accommodation.

In a year's time you will be invited to a '**Preparation for Higher Education**' **Evening** for parents and students, where we will discuss what you and the student should expect when they start university.

Results Day

When the results are published in the summer there will be a lot of information online but we suggest that students come into school to collect results and discuss any problems.

If students miss the grades they need for their choices there will be staff on hand to talk to, and access to telephones and computers to contact universities and help with using **CLEARING** to find a suitable university place.

What about students who want to apply during a gap year?

- The school still supports students who apply through UCAS after they have left the school. They should contact **Mrs Sainsbury** at school by phone or email (HE@thomas-hardye.net) as soon as they have decided to do this and **must meet the school's deadlines**.
- Students may also need to do a new application if they want to change their course once they are at university; we also have students who apply after a few years working. **They must meet the school's deadlines**.
- If a student went straight into work after leaving the sixth form and now wants to apply to university, they should ask us for an academic reference. They can also check with their current employer whether they would provide a separate reference and mention in the personal statement that the university can contact the employer for further information. **They must meet the school's deadlines**.

Any problems or questions

I hope the information will be useful to you. I know it is a lot to take in and this is a big decision that can have long term consequences.

If you have questions I am available to help; emailing is the best way to get in touch with me (csainsbury@thomas-hardye.net) **however** please do look at the UCAS and university websites first as you may well find answers without having to wait for me to reply.

How do I find out more about finance?

Student finances are not organised through the school; we will provide up to date information from Student Finance England next year. There is further information on www.gov.uk/student-finance

Students should find out whether there are any bursaries available to them at their chosen institutions; this can be done via the UCAS website or the university's website.

Other Websites:

Universities all have their own websites; students must check these as they will be the most up to date sources of course information. Some newspapers have their own university league tables with profiles of universities and tables for individual subjects. Also try:

www.ucas.ac.uk

the main site for applications to higher education. This site has areas dedicated to students and parents and enables you to search for courses and find out about the universities.

<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>

compares subjects at different universities, including student satisfaction, graduate employment

www.opendays.com

lists all official open days, and tips for making the most of them

www.ukcoursefinder.com

has a questionnaire helping to narrow down the search for courses (students need to register)

www.whatuni.com

has student reviews and videos for different universities

www.oxbridgeapplications.com

A useful website for those considering application to Oxford or Cambridge

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

A very useful website that allows students to search for courses. Students will be supplied with the school's password during Futures Day in July.

The Thomas Hardy School: UCAS PROCESS

