

THEALE GREEN SIXTH FORM

POST – 18 DESTINATIONS

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1. Introduction

There are an increasing number of options available once you have completed your A levels. The process of applying to university can seem quite daunting, but we hope that the information and advice contained in this booklet will help set you on the right path. Though it may seem early, you need to begin considering your university, gap year and/or apprenticeship options. You must start investigating now, and you must do so purposefully. Even if you are pretty sure what you want to study, you should think about the exact course and institution and whether you want to take a gap year. In addition, you should consider whether you wish to explore alternatives to university such as degree apprenticeships or other apprenticeship and training programmes.

2. What is UCAS?

UCAS is the Universities and College Admission Service. It provides a central application service for full-time undergraduate course in the UK. UCAS works with 327 universities and colleges and over 50,000 courses. If you want to go on to higher education after A-levels, it is highly likely that you will be putting together a UCAS application at the start of your first term in year 13. Most students who have been through this will tell you that it is a time-consuming process and can be very stressful. That is why you will have a range of help and support provided for you and this booklet is just the beginning.

What the UCAS process involves

1. *Choosing a course/courses*

Reflect on your skills and consider which courses might be right for you. Think carefully about where your skills lie and what you would enjoy doing every day for between 3 and 6 years.

2. *Choosing 5 universities*

Investigate institutions where these courses are available. Find out as much as you can about the course structure and style, each subject varies considerably from institution to institution. Consider your personal requirements, look closely at their entry requirements (also admissions policies if you can find them out) and find your 5 best matches!

3. *Putting together your application*

You will have to gather information about past examination results, know your Local Education Authority etc. but writing your personal statement is the most important part of this form. You will work on this with your tutor and with subject teachers.

The UCAS deadline for all those students applying to Oxbridge or to Medicine and Dentistry is 15th October. All other students will be expected to have completed their forms by 15th November at the latest. This deadline is an internal deadline intended to allow students to focus on their A-level courses. The UCAS deadline is 15th January.

Abbreviations

UCAS: University and College Admissions Service

UMS: Uniform Mark Scale

UKCAT: UK Clinical Aptitude Test BMAT: Biomedical science Aptitude Test LNAT: Law National Aptitude Test

CF: Conditional Firm offer

CI: Conditional Insurance offer UF: Unconditional Firm offer

Maximum number of courses students can apply for on their UCAS form: 5

Maximum number of Medicine courses students can apply for: 4

The fifth choice on the UCAS form can be used for a related subject, e.g. Biomedical sciences.

UCAS Extra: Runs from February to the end of June and can be used by students who have:

- already made five choices;
- received decisions from all these choices; **and**
- either had no offers or declined all the offers they have received.

3. Researching Choices

Theale Green School uses beready.org for careers advice, and the link can be found under the careers section on the Theale Green website. Another useful website is www.informedchoices.ac.uk

UCAS Course Finder

Details of all courses are found through the 'Course Search' section of the UCAS website. Type in the subject area you are interested in and you will be able to look at entry requirements and course details for all the programmes linked with that subject. This information is particularly useful as it is provided by UCAS, not by the institution, so it is unbiased, unlike prospectuses which are there to 'sell' the university at its best.

Prospectuses

These are still useful as they provide a picture of the university as a whole and go into some more depth than Entry Profiles. You can find a selection in the common room, and also online at the university website.

Your 'long list'

At this stage, you may even have two or three different courses you are interested in. If they are wildly different (e.g. Medicine, Fine Art and Human Resource Management) you need to have a serious re-think. However, it is fairly common for students to be deciding between such subjects as English and History, Economics and Law or Biochemistry and Life Sciences. Remember that combination courses, for example English with French, have fewer applicants than, for example, straight English, and that means higher acceptance rates. If you are really struggling with the decision, find out what modules are studied in the first year of each course at your chosen universities (it will vary from institution to institution) and ask yourself what you would rather spend all day doing.

Family, friends, professionals

It's always worth getting an insider's perspective on universities and courses so talk to older friends, siblings and other family members to find out what their experiences were like. What did they do before applying? With the benefit of hindsight, would they do anything differently if they had to go through it again?

If you already have an idea of what career path you would like to follow, make sure you talk to people in that profession and find if any courses are essential/desirable.

Soul search

It is essential that your chosen course appeals to you as you will spend most of the next three or four years working on it. Doing a degree as a means to an end does not always lead to a successful career. If you love the idea of being a lawyer but the Law degree looks extremely dull, it is unlikely you will suddenly start enjoying legal work on graduation!

Open Days

Attending university and college Open Days is a great way to get a feel for the place. It's very difficult, if not impossible, for students to make their minds up about somewhere just from reading a prospectus or visiting a website. During your visit, you should also be shown around various parts of the university or college, such as the student union, library, accommodation areas and the department in which you might end up studying. There might be opportunities to meet some of your potential tutors and chat with students currently on the courses in which you are interested.

Most students agree that Open Days have enabled them to make an instinctive decision – the place may or may not feel right. Making the effort to explore a university or college in this way should prevent you applying to go to somewhere just because it "looks nice" in a prospectus or on a website. If you don't explore beforehand, you risk feeling disappointed when turning up to start your course, only to find that it's not what you expected.

Each year, UCAS publish a *University and College Open Days* booklet, a copy of which should be available for reference in the Common Room.

When you go to an Open Day, remember to take the 'Open Day Checklist' with you which you will find on the UCAS website.

Open Day Policy

As with other absences, permission must be sought before you take a day or days off for open days. We request that only two school days are used to visit universities. The request for absence should be made by email to the attendance office and cleared with Dr Richards. Permission is not guaranteed. We encourage you to attend universities you are seriously considering but it is important to take as few days off as possible in Year 13. Please consider your Open Day choices carefully and remember that most universities now have Open Day events on Saturdays.

Later in the year when students receive offers, it is increasingly common for these to come with invitation to visit which is not an interview. In some cases it is worth taking up this invitation, but it should be remembered that universities are keen for visitors so they get as many 'firm' acceptances as possible. If you receive an offer, it is not retractable and you are not obliged to go and take valuable time off school.

Your Short List

This decision is the tricky bit so discuss it thoroughly with your tutor and Dr Richards. You have five choices which are entered on the form in alphabetical order so you do not have to show any preference at this stage. However, you should have a clear idea of how your chances of success vary at each institution. After

considering entry requirements, your predicted grades and other factors to take into account (e.g. Does this university prioritise certain applicants, local students for example? Is my chosen course oversubscribed here? Will an interview be required here and will that improve/damage my chances? At the end of the process you should feel that you have:

- Three choices where standard offers for your course are in keeping with your predicted grades.
- One ambitious choice if you wish, where typical offers for your course may be marginally in excess of your predicted grades.
- At least one insurance course where typical offers are lower than your predicted grades.

This next piece of advice sounds obvious but more people than you think end up at their 'back-up' university so please don't waste choices on places you do not want to go to.

Every one of the five should be a course and an institution where you would be happy to spend the next three or more years.

Students applying for Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Sciences may only choose FOUR such courses. Your fifth choice must be an alternative e.g. Biomedical Science.

4. Admissions Tests

These are used by some institutions for the most competitive courses. They vary from course to course and must be researched and booked by the students. The most common are the UCAT (Universal Clinical Aptitude Test) and the BMAT (Biomedical Sciences Admissions Test) required by some universities for Medicine or Dentistry. Oxford and Cambridge Universities make a wide use of Admissions tests to help decide which candidates to invite for interview. Further information can be obtained from the Examinations Officer, Mrs Stevens. It is important that you find out which tests you may have to take as early as possible. Some can be taken in school but must be arranged through the Examinations Officer, others require you to go to a test centre

Some of the most common admissions tests are listed below:

BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) - For entry to Medicine and Veterinary schools.

English Literature Admissions Test (ELAT) - For entry to English courses at the University of Oxford.

History Aptitude Test (HAT) - For entry to Modern History and a joint honours degrees involving Modern History at the University of Oxford.

The National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT) - For entry to Law.

Modern and Medieval Languages Test (MML) For entry to Modern and Medieval languages at the University of Cambridge.

Sixth Term Examination Papers (STEP) - For entry to Mathematics at the University of Cambridge.

Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Cambridge) - For entry to Computer Science, Natural Sciences, Engineering and Economics at the University of Cambridge.

Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Oxford), formerly known as the PPE Admissions Test - For entry to the Philosophy, Politics and Economics, and the Economics and Management courses at the University of Oxford.

Universal Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) For entry to medical and dental schools.

5. The Personal Statement

The personal statement will take several drafts to write and each one should be discussed with your tutor and/or subject teacher for the course for which you are applying. It is your chance to show the University Admissions officer your strengths, personality and interests. The personal statement is increasingly important as pressure for places mounts and interviews become less common.

A good personal statement...	A bad personal statement...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ shows that the applicant has researched the course well and has good subject knowledge ✓ is written in the applicant's own voice ✓ has a clear structure ✓ ties in a range of activities by focusing on specific skills learned ✓ uses varied vocabulary ✓ is unique! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ is <i>too</i> 'original' or odd ■ features plagiarised ideas (e.g. pyjama story) ■ makes false claims about work experience or books read ■ contains negative comments ■ uses a boring formula or lists experiences without comment ■ employs hyperbole ■ has several spelling mistakes

Content:

Reasons for choice of course

School experience

Relevant work experience

Interests & experience outside of school

Concluding statement

Reasons for choice of course:

Enjoy the subject – why?

Enjoy aspects of the subject – which aspects?

Look forward to studying in greater depth – state specific interests Work experience confirmed interest – how?

Possesses required skills for the course – which?

Post degree aim? (where useful)

School experience

Consider what skills have been developed through school activities such as

- Sport
- Drama
- Musical instrument lessons/orchestra etc.
- Prefect duties
- Voluntary/charity work
- School trips
- Clubs & societies
- Organising events
- Helping staff
- Public speaking

Work experience

As well as mentioning duties carried out, you should consider the skills you have acquired e.g.

- Communication
- Working independently
- Teamwork
- Working to deadlines
- Problem solving
- Initiative

Outside school

Avoid listing activities; try to make them relevant to your application. Admission tutors are looking for things that make applicants stand out and possible things to discuss at interview.

Interest	Outline	Relevance
Reading novels	E.g. Science fiction/historical/classic	Enjoy a wide range of literature
Travel	Unusual / educational visits	Curious & eager learner Mature and ready to live away from home
Part time work		
Cooking		
Concerts		
Films		

Concluding Statement

Something not covered by the above which relates to the degree course. Summarise how anything already mentioned makes you suitable for university.

Example & Analysis of a Personal Statement

This personal statement is not a 'perfect example', it has strengths and weaknesses (see below).

GUILTY!!! I confess!!! I want to study law!!!

From an early age I was attracted to law as it is such an important aspect of Society and more recently the evolution of laws has interested me. I have taken part in exchanges, travelled internationally and this together with a Belgian mother has given me a cosmopolitan outlook and fuelled my interest in European law. Following my GCSEs in which I gained the Latin prize I chose a mixed combination of A levels. By studying mathematics and Chemistry I have acquired the scientist's respect for logic, reason and critical analysis and from the study of German I have developed a greater sense of linguistic awareness and enhanced my oral expression and writing skills.

Spending two weeks at one of the region's largest firms of solicitors gave me an insight into property, litigation and company law. This was followed by a week's mini-pupillage at a barrister's chambers. During this week I attended the courts which dealt with small criminal matters. Having spent three weeks at Reuters before this, the work experience I gained confirmed that I wished to study Law at degree level. Reuters showed me the importance of the law in international business and I eventually hope to pursue a career in company law. At school, I am involved in Model United Nations and I have helped organise, re-establish and promote the school's debating society. I have debated in front of 4000 delegates at a conference in The Hague and this improved my debating and language skills and strengthened my knowledge of current affairs as well as developing my self-confidence. In addition to my interest in debating I am computer literate and I enjoy journalism, albeit on a small scale, as I write for the Sixth form magazine. Swimming is my main sport for which I received the Bronze medallion in life saving. I also play netball for the school and have joined in hockey and tennis where I class myself as a willing and enthusiastic player. In my final year at School I have been appointed a prefect and selected as a member of the Christmas Ball Committee and the Yearbook Committee.

Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Good, short summary of reasons for studying law● Good indication about why this unusual combination of A levels was studied and this is used to demonstrate relevant skills● Two relevant work experiences commented upon positively● Debating experience is highly relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Gimmicky opening line – a serious candidate?● Mentions some extra- curricular activities without explaining their worth/relevance● Some inconsistencies in punctuation – capital letters

Remember the following:

The personal statement should be 47 lines (4,000 characters including spaces) (Times New Roman point 12 font). Draft it carefully and ensure that it is well written and technically accurate. Ensure you recruit help especially from your Tutor and subject teachers. You do not need to ask more than three teachers to read it. The personal statement is your way of standing out from the crowd so make sure it is excellent. The statement must be typed as a Word document and can then be pasted into the relevant space on the online form.

6. Interviews

If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge, you will probably be invited for interview in December. Relatively few courses outside these two universities require interviews so don't rely on your sparky personality to make up for a weak UCAS form. Interviews are likely to be requested for Medicine, Law, Dentistry or Veterinary Sciences. When you are given a date, see Dr Richards to arrange a mock interview in school.

Sometimes these come with an invitation to visit which is not an interview. If the offer is from one of your preferred institutions and you feel that it is a demanding one, it may well be worth visiting and getting to know the tutors. This could go in your favour on Results Day if you don't quite get the grades. However, offers with invitations to visit are increasingly popular as universities are also trying to get as many 'firm' acceptances (more on this later) as possible. If you feel like the offer is easily achievable, have already visited the institution or have even changed your mind about going there, do not feel obliged to go and visit. University offers are not retractable once it has been sent to you.

7. UCAS Extra

If you have applied through UCAS and are not holding any offers, you may be able to apply through Extra for another course. Extra allows you to apply for courses with vacancies between the end of February and the end of June. In Extra, you apply for one course at a time using the Track service on the UCAS website. To use Extra you need to have:

- already made five choices;
- received decisions from all these choices; and
- either had no offers or declined all the offers you have received.

If you decline your offers and add an Extra choice, you will not be able to accept any of your original choices later. N.B. Only those universities which still have vacancies will have courses in Extra.

8. Making your choices

Once you have received offers or rejections from your chosen institutions, you will be asked to select a FIRM offer and an INSURANCE offer.

FIRM choice – your favourite course from the offers you have received. INSURANCE – a course you would be happy to study, ideally, though not necessarily, with a lower, more easily achievable offer.

This decision seems simple but a number of difficult situations could arise:

Frequently Asked Questions

What if my firm choice has a lower offer than my insurance?

Your firm choice should always be your first choice, as that is where you will be automatically placed if you achieve the grades of the offer. If you just miss the grades and your 'firm' institution does not accept you, it is unlikely that another institution who gave you a *higher* offer will accept you now unless they were hugely undersubscribed and now need to fill places (unlikely but not impossible).

My first and second choices have made me the same offer. Is it worth putting one as an insurance?

Yes. If you miss the grades for your firm choice, your insurance could still accept you if you have only missed by a few marks and they need to fill places.

My favourite places have both given me very high offers. I have one low offer for a place I don't really want to go to, should I keep that as an insurance?

No. When you officially name an insurance place, if you miss the grades for your firm place and the institution does not accept you, you will be automatically placed on your insurance course. Do not choose a course you do not really want to do.

I only have one offer, does this matter?

No. Often, if you are applying for a competitive course like Medicine or English, you may only receive one offer, and highlights the importance of only choosing courses and universities that you like.

I don't have any offers. What should I do?

Don't panic, you still have options. Read the above section on UCAS Extra.

I've changed my mind since last November and I want to do a different course I haven't applied for. What should I do?

Decline all your offers and use UCAS Extra to apply for your new chosen course.

I have five reasonable offers but there's only one course I definitely want to do. Do I have to select an insurance?

No, you do not 'need' an insurance. Only select the course(s) that you definitely want to do!

It's Results Day, I've got in to my first choice but I would now prefer to go to my second choice. What should I do?

Once you have selected a course as your firm choice, you are committing yourself to studying there if you meet the grades offered. It is difficult to get out of this commitment, but not impossible. See the extended leadership team on results day.

9. Results Day

From sometime after midnight on the night before your results are available, you will be able to log on to your UCAS Tracker to see the final results of your application. You could have been accepted already or the university's decision could be pending. If this is the case, you need to come into school prepared to get on the phone (have names of admissions/course tutors and their phone numbers ready). Often, if you have missed your grades, you can still be accepted, it all depends on how many applications the course received that year. It helps to be in school when you are making these phone calls as you have more information about your results and can argue more convincingly. The Sixth Form team will be around to help, but a teacher calling on a student's behalf to explain why they really want to go to university is much less convincing than a personal call from a potential student! If you have not achieved the grades offered by your firm or insurance choices, you still have options. You go into 'Clearing'.

What is Clearing?

Clearing is used by applicants who have not managed to secure a place at university or college for the current year. It matches applicants to suitable courses with vacancies. More than 30,000 people gain a place during Clearing every year. If you are flexible and you have reasonable examination results, there is still a good chance you will find another course. Consider carefully before making a commitment though, don't panic and choose a course for the sake of it. Make sure you think it through and talk it over with family and teachers. Course vacancies for Clearing are published on the UCAS website from early summer onwards.

Adjustment

UCAS Adjustment is a process that's available to anyone who exceeds the grade requirements of their firm offer. If that ends up being you, you can use Adjustment to swap your existing university place for one at another university. **If your A-level results come as a pleasant surprise you might find it can help you 'trade up' to a higher-ranked university.**

Remember - the majority of our students do get in to either their first or second choice universities. Those who don't are often just as happy at the course they found through Clearing.

10. Alternative options

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

An increasing number of employers and institutions of higher education are working in partnership to offer higher and degree apprenticeships - a combined package of paid work and study. These apprenticeships offer routes into professional careers at a high level. It should be stressed that is not an easy option – competition for placements is intense and we would advise submitting a UCAS application in parallel with applications for apprenticeships to ensure that you keep your options open. The advantages of apprenticeships include:

- the chance to enter the world of employment immediately
- to get hands-on experience in your chosen subject area
- earn a salary.

If you embark upon a degree apprenticeship, further benefits include:

- a university degree at the conclusion of your apprenticeship
- payment of tuition fees by employer and government – the benefits of higher education without incurring the cost.

Many apprenticeships (degree and otherwise) offer the potential for significant career progression and earnings potential. However, it must be made clear that apprenticeships involve full-time work (usually with standard holiday of twenty days per annum) and that it is a very different experience indeed to life at university. Think very carefully whether this is for you before making the decision to embark upon an apprenticeship route.

Unlike university applications, there is no fixed deadline to apply. Vacancies appear throughout the year – although an increasing number of the top employers are advertising jobs twelve months early to tie in with the UCAS schedule (September to December of Year 13 – to begin employment in the September following graduation). Many application forms can be completed online; you will almost certainly be asked to submit a CV and covering letter. The application process is often rigorous – particularly for the most sought-after programmes. You might have an online assessment and/or assessment day, telephone or skype interview, etc. If you get an interview, please let the 6th form team know, so we can assist you in your interview preparation.

Information on higher and degree apprenticeships can be found on:

The UCAS website: www.ucas.com/apprenticeships-in-the-uk

The Department of Education: www.gov.co.uk/government/publications/higher-and-degree-apprenticeships

Amazing Apprenticeships: <http://amazingapprenticeships.com/higher-and-degree-apprenticeships>

Apprenticeship Guide: www.apprenticeshipguide.co.uk/higher-apprenticeships

Gap Year Option

A Gap Year can provide a unique opportunity for students to take a break from their studies, maybe earn some money to help them through university and to broaden their experience of the world. There are a large number of organisations that provide a range of Gap Year activities in the UK and throughout the World. A substantial proportion of these are run by charities whose primary purpose is to give young people the opportunity to get out of the comfort of living at home and experience working in challenging situations. Many projects involve helping local communities abroad but similar placements are available in this country. At the end of the placement, which is for a minimum of 6 months, the students are awarded a grant to help fund any planned foreign travel or towards his/her university expenses.

An alternative is to work for a company in the UK. Several large firms run Gap Year schemes which provide an excellent introduction to the working environment. An organisation which some pupils have used is 'A Year in Industry'. Pupils apply to the organisation with a wish list of their aspirations and the organisation arranges interviews with suitable employers. This scheme is not only open to budding engineers - applicants for management related posts are also encouraged.

What Universities think of Gap Years

On the whole universities are in favour of gap years, in that students arriving at college after taking a gap year tend to be more mature and keen to restart their studies. However, some faculties, particularly for subjects like Mathematics, find that the break can be detrimental to students' performance. **Applying for deferred entry is not always prudent when making an Oxbridge application.** If in doubt, ask your tutor / Dr Richards, and the university faculties to ask their advice. One thing is certain: gap years need careful planning and should not be wasted.