



Ackworth School

Applications to Higher Education Institutions

**A Guide for Members of
Ackworth's Sixth Form**

September 2011

Introduction

Applying to a university or other college of higher education is not a straightforward process and the decisions which you make will affect your life for the next three years and beyond.

It is therefore important that you prepare yourself from the earliest possible time and, indeed, on entering the Sixth Form this preparation has already started - you have done your GCSEs and you may be involved in activities and interests which could support your application. It is important to realise that your application is processed in September/October/November of your Upper Sixth year and so it will be based mainly on your achievements within the Lower Sixth. So, the work starts as soon as you enter the Sixth Form - and the work is not easy.

For courses at the old established universities you can expect offers of around BBB or higher. You will soon find that to obtain a B at 'A' level is much more difficult than achieving a B at GCSE and, to have a good chance of reaching such grades, you must work hard throughout your Sixth Form years. When applications are made to institutions they require estimated grades. These will be based on your Lower Sixth work and, in particular, on your performance in the AS exams.

The Lower Sixth exams are, then, something of a watershed for you. It really is pointless applying for courses which require grades higher than staff are prepared to predict for you; you will probably be rejected (thus wasting the application) or you will be faced with the unpleasant and stressful job of applying through Clearing (more of that later!). Of course teachers know that you will probably make progress in the Upper Sixth but they are also experienced enough to know how much improvement is likely or possible. You must realise that those who are here to give you advice would want you to go to the most prestigious universities on the most prestigious courses – if that were possible. We give you honest, realistic advice and you would be foolish not to follow it! The first piece of honest and realistic advice is this – work hard at your 'A' levels and build on the personal aspects of your application from the start. Why not do something positive in this direction today?

The Application Form

Applications to British universities are made through UCAS, which processes your application on behalf of the universities.

The application form is completed online and has 4 main parts:

- a) - Personal Details e.g. age, address, school. The courses for which you are applying.
- b) - Qualifications achieved and to be taken.
- c) - Your personal statement.
- d) - The School's reference.

To help you fill in this form we organise a number of lectures, visits and discussions.

The Two Years of the Sixth Form – a Summary

Lower Sixth

- September** - Sixth Form Special on related topic e.g. 'gap years', 'filling in the form' etc.
- November** - 'November mocks'. The first opportunity to see how you are coping with 'AS' levels.
- February** - Visits to Open Days possible from this time.
- March** - Familiarisation with the Careers Library and appropriate computer software.
- Individual Careers interviews with ISCO Careers Advisor/Miss Smith
- Oxbridge candidates invited to attend an information session.
- April** - Informal interviews with Head of Careers from now, if required.
- May** - Oxbridge applications continue - potential applicants will be interviewed individually by senior staff.
- June/July** - All L6th to an Open Day at a major university - a chance to visit departments and crystallise ideas about the important factors in your decision.
- All L6th to Higher Education Fair. A chance to pick up prospectuses and attend seminars on several topics.
- AS exams – a pivotal point in your application.
- Personal statements drafted and advice given by tutors. Online applications started. Personal Details and Qualifications sections completed.

Upper Sixth

- September** - **Applications received by UCAS from 1st September.**
- U6th meeting to discuss the applications procedure
- Individual interview with Helen Smith.
- Open Day visits continue.
- Sponsorship applications.
- Sixth Form Special on related topics e.g. 'gap years', 'filling in the form'.

- October** - Mid-October is the closing date for Oxbridge and those applying for medicine/dentistry/veterinary science.
- Informal mid-October deadline for highly competitive courses and top flight universities.
- Mid November** - Deadline for completion of draft forms for those wishing to apply this term.
- December** - The end of the Autumn Term is the School's deadline for all applications.
- January** - A2 exams and AS resits.
- UCAS deadline mid-January.
- March** - Tuition fees/loans means testing procedure begins (students and parents are responsible for this).

The Process of Applying

The Lower Sixth year is a year for research. Take time to read prospectuses and study courses and the strengths and weaknesses of the various universities.

From September of the Upper Sixth –

- a) Discuss with Miss Smith the courses for which you are applying.
- b) Complete the draft UCAS form online. Continuing dialogue with Form Tutor about Personal Statement.
- c) Send draft to Miss Smith for checking (click "send to referee"). You will be given a yellow card indicating whether your form is ready for submitting. After correcting mistakes, send to referee and give the signed yellow card to Mr Ward. Mr Ward will not send off your UCAS application without your written permission (on the yellow card).
- d) Mr Ward then constructs the School's reference based on comments from staff, tutors and, of course, his own experience of the student. This is added to the form.
- e) UCAS form sent to UCAS electronically.
- f) Acknowledgement received from UCAS in the form of a welcome letter. This contains a UCAS application number which you will need in any future communication with UCAS.
- g) University decisions sent to students through UCAS. Some students may be called to Open Days or for interviews.

Receiving offers and rejections

Once your UCAS form has been submitted by the School, you will receive a welcome letter, which will give you an application number. This number is very important and will be necessary for any further communication with UCAS or the institutions to which you

have applied. The time taken to send you the welcome letter varies. Inform your Tutor if you have not received an application number within 10 days of submitting your application.

Before long you will start receiving the decisions of your chosen universities. There is no hard and fast rule on timing for this but, if you have concerns, talk to your Tutor. Decisions for highly competitive courses often take longer than those for less competitive ones. If you are asked to attend an interview, ask Mr Ward to see if a mock interview would be appropriate.

It is normal procedure to wait until you have received all the decisions from your chosen universities before making any acceptances. You should discuss your acceptance decision with Miss Smith or Mr Ward before making your final choice.

Taking a Year Out

Whether or not to take a year out is a very important decision - one which must not be taken lightly. Many university departments value the experience and maturity which can be acquired by students taking a GAP year but this attitude is not universal. In particular, departments of Maths and Medicine do not usually encourage students to take a GAP year.

It is important to plan your year out carefully and this will require time, effort, persistence and imagination. Whilst universities and future employers may be impressed with well-planned years filled with valuable experiences, they will also be quick to spot time wasted or spent drifting.

The School constantly receives details of gap year schemes and they are available in the Careers Library. Do talk them through with your parents, your Tutor and with Miss Smith and Mr Ward before coming to a decision.

If you intend to take a year out, you can apply through UCAS for deferred entry or you can wait to make your application when you have received your 'A' level results. Alternatively you can apply through UCAS as normal and, once you have received offers, write to the university asking them to defer your entry. Although there is no requirement on the part of the university to defer your place, they are usually willing to do this unless the course is particularly competitive. You would be well advised to contact the Admissions Offices of the universities you are considering and ask them about their policy on this matter. You should also ask Miss Smith for advice concerning your particular situation.

Results Day

Please note that your university's decision is posted on 'Track' early on the morning of Results Day.

For most this will be a day of celebrating and looking forward to embarking on your chosen courses. For some, however, results are disappointing and the days following publication can be full of uncertainty.

The School Office is open at this time and Mr Ward and Miss Smith are available to offer help and advice.

There are three pieces of advice which we would offer those not achieving the necessary grades:-

- Do not panic – many institutions will still accept students even if they have not quite fulfilled the terms of their offer.
- Do give the possibility of rejection some careful thought before your results are published. You may be asked to make quick decisions at this time.
- Do take the initiative – we can help in many instances, but universities are impressed by young people taking control of the situation and making direct contact.

Of course, if you have not achieved the necessary grades then you enter the 'Clearing' process, which attempts to match students to appropriate courses. Details of the Clearing process are given at the time by UCAS. If, however, you have done much better than you expected, please seek advice on how to use the 'Adjustment Period.'

Oxford and Cambridge Applications

Students who are likely to achieve As or A*s comfortably at 'A' level may wish to consider applying to Oxford or Cambridge. Applications are made through UCAS, but there are some major differences:

1. The closing date is in mid-October.
2. Applications are usually made to a college of the university.
3. A separate, additional application form is required by Cambridge – this is sent to you from Cambridge after you have applied.
4. You may not apply to both Oxford and Cambridge.

Students who would have the School's support in an Oxbridge application are approached by Mr Ward in the Summer Term of their Lower Sixth year. Students wishing to proceed are offered a mock Oxbridge interview and the way forward is decided at this point.

Oxbridge applicants must be aware that such an application will require considerable preparation either for the interview (which is strongly academic) or, sometimes, for additional exams.

Advice and Information

You are fortunate at Ackworth in the quality of the advice which you will receive. The Careers Department is well resourced. In addition, Sixth Form Tutors and the Head of Sixth are available for consultation. You should take advantage of the opportunities open to you and spend time in the Careers Library researching your options.

Medicine/Veterinary Medicine/Dentistry/Law

For these subjects you are likely to be required to sit additional aptitude tests.

BMAT } for Medicine/Veterinary Medicine/Dentistry
UKCAT }

LNAT for Law

You should see Miss Smith for advice on how to register for these exams, preferably before the end of May in your Lower Sixth year.

Notes