

University Applications: Everything A Parent Needs To Know.

Leaf fall season – as the train companies have renamed autumn – comes around more quickly every year. And if it's autumn, it's also UCAS application time. For the uninitiated, UCAS is the centralised system for university applications and starts processing online forms for 2017 entry around September of this year.

Seems premature? Bear in mind it's complicated. A lengthy procedure involving hundreds of thousands of candidates means that this kick-off point, nearly 12 months before the game ends, is not unreasonable. Oxbridge hopefuls and would-be medics, vets and dentists need to be even quicker off the mark as their cut-off date is 15th October. Most intending undergraduates have until mid-January to apply (and some hopeful artists and designers can extend the timetable till late March: I told you it was complicated ...).

However, you know what they say about early birds and worms. Indeed, many schools and colleges actively chivvy their students to submit their forms by half term. For administrative convenience? Certainly. But also a way to boost the contenders' chances. Make no mistake – competition is keen.

So if your son or daughter is about to become immersed in UCAS in a few months time, how can you help? Let the following be your watchwords:

Encourage:

- **research.** Looking at prospectuses in print or online is essential. Attending open days in the spring and summer is much to be commended (and, at most, parental participation is actively promoted). Checking tables and statistics will ensure that your teenager pitches his or her application correctly in terms of the grades demanded – these vary between universities and courses.
- **attention to detail.** Courses with a similar title may not necessarily have the same content, studies might not be based on the main campus, degrees such as law or psychology are not always accredited for entry to the occupation in question. I could go on, but you get the picture. READ THE SMALL PRINT.
- **realism.** Candidates should be ruthlessly rational about their potential grades in next summer's exams because universities will make offers based on these. Fail to cut the mustard on results day and that coveted place will go to someone else. Aim for the moon by all means, but be prepared to settle for the stars.
- **objectivity.** Choice of university should not depend on its perceived status – some excellent options exist outside the (ostensibly) elite Russell Group. And even some institutions languishing low in the league tables have an enviable reputation for specific subjects. While we're on this theme, plumping for a particular city because of a) its club scene or b) its football team is not to be recommended either. □ time management. Leaving

the application to the last moment can end in tears before bedtime, hasty choice of university or degree and a poorly prepared personal statement. The latter is pivotal to success in the selection race and multiple drafts are usually needed before it is polished to perfection.

Moral? Commence well before any deadlines loom.

Follow the above pointers and victory, if not assured, is definitely within reach.

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