



## Outreach North East: UCAS - Preparing Students to Choose Their Options Q&A

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### **Is the speed at which Universities get replies to their students' offers important?**

In a word, no! It doesn't matter when a student hears from their choices - an offer is an offer. It's possible two classmates apply for the same course at the same time and one hears straight away the other not until May.

### **What do students want from 'Applicant Days' or similar in the virtual world?**

- Students want to hear from current students about their own experiences. The opportunity to ask questions is important
- Virtual events important but only when done right
- 70% of applicants feel confident of being able to make the right choice without a physical visit
- Parents, teachers and friends remain biggest influence on student choice.
- Scepticism towards virtual events is quite high – some don't feel they are representative, most of the info can be found without the need for a virtual event
- We know students value course information and accommodation tours as their biggest influences when making decisions about where to study

### **The price of applications has been going up year on year - some young people and adults are finding it harder to find that money. Is this going to be the 'norm' for UCAS?**

UCAS is a not for profit charity and the application fees allows us to run the higher education admissions service, we do not receive any government funding. We also use the application fees we receive to improve and develop our student offering, for example, the introduction of Clearing Plus last summer allowed nearly 30K students to find a place in higher education. Each year the price of the application is reviewed by our board before any decisions about price changes are confirmed. Some universities, along with local authorities, schools (using their own pupil premium budgets) and many charities are able to cover the cost of application for individual students so I would recommend reaching out to one of them if this is an issue for any of your students.

## Where do you see the future of CEIAG?

I am afraid this is outside of UCAS's remit and not something we would be able to answer with any authority. There are lots of free resources available to students and teachers through [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) and the e-learning platform [www.pdp.ucas.com](http://www.pdp.ucas.com) designed to support students considering their options and to support teachers supporting students.

## How can students best strengthen their personal statements and applications under Covid-19 restrictions?

Students should focus on trying to provide evidence of why they are applying for the course(s) they are applying for and what makes them the right person for the course. Evidence can be anything: podcasts, reading, current affairs, online lectures, part-time work, volunteering- something that links the real world to their course or the skills needed for their course.

Students should aim to write a positive statement, what were they able to do, read, write, explore etc. rather than focusing on what they couldn't do. On our Professional Development Platform there is a module aimed at advisers supporting personal statements and there are lots of other great free resources available at <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/writing-personal-statement/how-write-personal-statement>

3 Top Tips for personal statements:

1. Be positive
2. Be concise
3. Be authentic

Ensure students demonstrate:

1. Their 'why'
2. Their research
3. Their skills
4. Summarise/finish strongly

Always be thinking two things:

1. Why are they applying
2. What makes them suitable?

Remember, most people also applying will have had similar experiences to your students (e.g. lockdowns, remote learning etc.) and they should focus on positive experiences.

**Last year many young people deferred their application due to Covid-19. Looking back, this seems a wise decision. Currently things still look iffy, is there a chance that HE students are going to be short-changed again next year?**

The deferral rates for students in 2020 was 5.7% (compared to 5.1% in 2019) which is relatively flat based on previous changes. It is hard for anyone to predict the future and know what student life will be like in the autumn. Universities are focused on helping students to

have the best experience possible whatever that looks like. Students should be encouraged to raise any questions they have about university with their chosen choices.

### **You have all of your offers, how can students narrow down which choice is best?**

It's important to remind students that they are unable to swap between firm and insurance choices, however there is always the option to decline the place and release themselves into clearing to find another course.

Choosing what choice is best for the student links back to their research. Below are a list of points that should be considered:

- What does the course involve (entry requirements, course content, contact time, opportunities offered, different study options)?
- The location – where is the university campus and does this interest the student?
- Career options and opportunities (choosing a course purely based on career prospects isn't advisable)
- Graduate prospects (if this is of interest of the students there are statistics available)

Ultimately it is a personal decision that a student makes when deciding their choices and you should encourage these decisions to be as informed as possible. Students should be encouraged to ask questions if there is anything they are unsure of.

Students are able to make reply swaps for 14 days after initially making their replies. After this 14 day window in order to swap their replies they need to get the permission of all involved universities (and UCAS) before they can swap their replies so they should be encouraged to really consider their options before making their replies or swapping them.

### **You have your top choice, how would you recommend selecting an insurance?**

Once they have accepted a firm choice, if they are not sure about any of the other university choices, they're not obliged to accept one as a back-up – they don't have to accept an insurance choice.

It can be wise to accept another offer, usually with slightly lower acceptance grades, as a back-up plan. If students don't meet the conditions for the firm choice but meet the grades of the insurance, they will be committed to that course. And like the firm choice, they can only have one insurance selection.

Students should ensure they are happy to go to their insurance choice should they not be placed at their firm choice. So following on from that it's important they have done lots of research about this course and university choice, this should include attending virtual open days and applicant days – see more here [www.ucas.com/ucas/events/find/scheme/virtual-and-digital](http://www.ucas.com/ucas/events/find/scheme/virtual-and-digital)

The research that goes into the firm choice should also be done for the insurance choice. Considering the following: the course structure, the location, the extracurricular opportunities available.

Remind students that they are unable to swap between firm and insurance choices after they have received their results (in Clearing after 23 July), however there is always the option to decline the place and release themselves into clearing to find another course.

## What about pressure from universities for an early decision to secure accommodation?

Students do not need to make any decisions until they have received all offers. If students receive the last decision on or before 20 May 2021, the reply date is 10 June 2021 (except if they're using Extra to find a place). If they receive the last decision on or before 13 July 2021, the reply date is 14 July 2021 (including Extra choices).

In terms of securing accommodation at a university, each university allocates and handles their accommodation differently. Securing accommodation can be a big worry for students, however, should not sway a decision as often there is availability (unless left until the very last minute).

A university cannot use accommodation booking to exert undue pressure on an applicant to reply to their offers – this is covered by our business rules. This cycle all on-time applicants have until 10th June to reply to their offers, and universities should not be encouraging applicants to accept an offer ahead of this date if they are uncomfortable in doing so. Therefore if a university opens their accommodation booking process in March, applicants should still be able to apply for accommodation until at least 10th June.

If an applicant is unsure on the likelihood of securing their preferred type of accommodation, they should contact the university directly to discuss with them. An applicant should not feel pressurised to make a decision before their Decline by Default Date.

We are happy to investigate and respond to any queries about our business rules. You can either contact the relevant Relationship Manager, or contact [businessrules@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:businessrules@ucas.ac.uk)