

UCAS

# Preparation Booklet 2017/18



## **Index**

<b>Important dates &amp; Responsibilities</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
<b>Advice to Year 12's on Higher Education</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>What course to do</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Where to go</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Qualifying</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Applying</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>The UCAS Form</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>The personal statement</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>A surreal personal statement from Birmingham University</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>Interesting try at a personal statement!</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>Making a start on your personal statement</b>	<b>Page 12</b>
<b>Notes for other prospective specialists</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>Subject specific reading lists</b>	<b>Page 17</b>
<b>Qualities required to be a good</b>	<b>Page 24</b>
<b>Useful Web sites</b>	<b>Page 26</b>
<b>Note for prospective medics</b>	<b>Page 27</b>
<b>Note for prospective Oxbridge applicants</b>	<b>Page 29</b>
<b>Getting Started with your Personal Statement</b>	<b>Page 31</b>
<b>A Level Grades / Vocational Qualifications = UCAS Point Score</b>	<b>Page 32</b>
<b>Interview questions exercise (general)</b>	<b>Page 34</b>
<b>Interview questions exercise (subject specific)</b>	<b>Page 35</b>
<b>UCAS Passport Log</b>	<b>Page 37-43</b>



## Important dates

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2016** - Loughborough University visit

**Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017** - Presentation by Oxford Brookes

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017**– Higher Education Fair at the University of Bedfordshire

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup> to Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017** – UCAS workshop run by the sixth form team. All students' carryout online registration with UCAS

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017** – First draft of Personal Statement submitted to Form Tutor

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2017** - Final draft of Personal statement submitted to a member of the sixth form leadership team

**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017** – Students add AS grades to application and make final destination choices (up to 5). Application is sent to the school who will add a reference and forward to UCAS. The school will endeavour to upload the reference as quickly as possible after receiving the application. Please understand that they take a great deal of time and it is critical that they are strong so be patient.

**15<sup>th</sup> October 2017** – Closing date for all those applying to Oxbridge, Medicine or Dentistry (Please note that a number of the Russell group universities like their applications before this date although this is not a stated requirement).

**15<sup>th</sup> January 2018** – Deadline for application via UCAS

## Responsibilities

School	Student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an educational reference</li> <li>• Send application to UCAS</li> <li>• Provide information on course and university choice</li> <li>• Provide help and guidance on the preparation of a personal statement</li> <li>• Provide a buzzword to link the student application to the school</li> <li>• provide help and guidance for those undergoing university interviews</li> <li>• Provide information regarding HE Finance</li> <li>• Provide help and guidance on results day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enter personal details and academic history onto application</li> <li>• Ensure that all information entered is accurate and honest</li> <li>• Upload personal statement onto application and send to the school</li> <li>• Pay the required UCAS fee via Credit/Debit card</li> <li>• Meet all of the school and UCAS deadlines</li> <li>• Arrange university visits when choosing destinations</li> <li>• Confirm with UCAS a first choice and a 'back up' choice</li> <li>• Apply for student finance</li> <li>• Confirm acceptance on results day else go through process of 'clearing' or 'adjustment'</li> <li>• Go to university and try to fit some work in around new found social life</li> </ul>

It is important that students understand the limited control which the school has over this process. It is the students' primary responsibility to ensure that the application is successfully completed and deadlines are adhered to. **We are not in a position to grant extensions to official deadlines set by UCAS.**



## **Advice to Year 12s on Higher Education**

We will do all we can to help you with applications to university but we are not in the business of persuading you to go there. That has to your decision and one arrived at in consultation with your family.

You may well have had this message already but it is well worth repeating. In approaching the whole business of university, it is suggested that you answer three questions and in the right order.

WHY?

WHAT?

WHERE?

WHY GO?

There are some professions that you simply cannot go into without a degree. In others your future progress may be seriously limited if you don't have a degree. It may not always matter what the degree is in. A doctor obviously needs a degree in medicine and a barrister a degree in law but leading accountancy firms are not necessarily looking for a degree in accountancy. They don't mind whether your degree is in archaeology, zoology or in a subject beginning with some letter in between. It is the fact that you have a degree that counts. They will train you in what they want later. The same is generally true in business and management.

You may want to take a degree purely for educational reasons, in order to do study and do research in a subject that particularly fascinates you – or simply to gain the experience, maturity and self-confidence that usually comes from going to university. There are lots of very successful people, who have not been there however. It is a costly venture and some people prefer to get into a job and work their way up or work for a few years and then go on to university. It doesn't have to be done at aged 18.

Some people prefer to do other sorts of professional qualification or even study at home via Open University. You wouldn't spend up to £30 – 40,000 on anything else that costs so much, without very careful thought so it is a choice that does need a lot of consideration.

### **What course to do**

It is hugely important that you do a course that you will enjoy. Whatever the image of students, there is work that has to be done and you must look forward to doing it or else it could prove to be a big disappointment and an expensive waste of money. There are some 38,000 different courses so there is a lot to choose from and even courses that have the same title might be very different at different institutions. It is important therefore that you do careful research.

You might also want to look at how courses are going to be structured and assessed. For instance do you want a sandwich course, which has a work placement built into it and, if so, a 'thick sandwich' (a whole year out) or a 'thin sandwich' (different placements every six months)?

## **Where to go**

There are 340 degree awarding institutions to choose from. If you want to study for a degree in brewing, there is only one university that offer it (Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh). If you want to read veterinary medicine, there are only six institutions in the UK you can go to. If you want to read history or biology however you have literally hundreds to choose from.

The key factor that should come into play is the appropriateness of the course.

### **Take history as a case study:**

If you want to read history there are some places where you can concentrate on just modern history. Some places will insist that you do some mediaeval history. Some will give you the chance to do American history. Some may even require you to do modules that require reading papers in a foreign language. You might want to take one of these options or opt away from some of them.

### **For engineering:**

Do you want to specialise right from the start in mechanical or civil or aeronautical engineering or do you want to do a general engineering course, where you might only specialise in the third year?

Once you have a list of the institutions that do the course you want, another set of more personal factors may come in to play.

Do you want to be within a 30 mile radius of home (or even live at home and commute to college)? Do you want to get as far away as possible? Do you want to go to London or avoid it? A big city or avoid one? A campus site or might that be too claustrophobic? If you have a specialist interest such as rowing, do you want to be near a centre that provides for it?

## **Qualifying**

What must not be forgotten in all of this is that you do have to qualify for places. There may well be ten or more students competing for each place, so you have to be competitive enough to win one of them. Some universities are more demanding than others in terms of the grades they expect you to get. It is pointless to apply to universities, that all demand three As at A level, when realistically you are going to get B-B-C.

### **DO BE REALISTIC**

One of the reasons for addressing the issue of higher education so early is to give you maximum time to decide what you want to do so that you can then work to get the grades you'll need to qualify for it.

## **Applying**

You apply to university through UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Application Service, and you apply on-line, using a buzzword that is allocated to the school each year.

You can apply for up to five universities, so you can afford to apply to one or two for whom the grades needed are going to stretch you, two other that may be more realistic and then one, that can act as an insurance choice. **DO NOT APPLY TO ANYWHERE YOU DON'T WANT TO GO** – that just wastes time. You do not put your choices in any order of priority.



If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge or for medicine, veterinary medicine or dentistry, you have to get your application in by October 15<sup>th</sup> in Year 13.

The UCAS deadline for all other applications is officially January 15<sup>th</sup>, but in these competitive times you should aim to get your application in not later than November 15<sup>th</sup>.

There will be materials and special presentations about all of the following-

- 1) How to think about university
- 2) How to fill in the application form
- 3) What to do after the form goes
- 4) What to do at results time

All potential applicants should make sure that they know about these and attend these.

There will be a lot of information in the school library and Sixth Form area. Do look at all of this and take advantage of higher education conferences, university open days (particularly local ones) and links can be established with students, who are doing/have done courses you are interested in. Personal meetings can be key. Web sites with student feedback on them are also useful.

The time to be doing it is **NOW**, especially if you want to compete for top places. Getting them is a marathon, not a sprint but the rewards are well worth it. Not much beats the satisfaction of getting the outcome you want from the two years you've invested in the Sixth Form and feeling that it's all been hugely worth it...so go for it and best of luck.

## The UCAS form

Your UCAS application form is filled out on-line and for the most part is pretty straightforward. However, it is important to get it right as any mistakes may be hard to correct later on.

It is also important to fill in the form and send it off **EARLY**.

The official deadline for applications to Oxford, Cambridge, medical, dental and vet schools is October 15<sup>th</sup>. There is no particular advantage to be gained by getting the form in much earlier, but equally you do not want to be rushing at the last minute and risk making mistakes.

The official deadline for other applications is January 15<sup>th</sup> but there is potentially a very big advantage in getting forms in **MUCH EARLIER**. Universities are looking to recruit good candidates and, if a strong application comes to them early, they are quite likely to want to influence that applicant to go to them by making a generous offer. Such offers may be less generous later on when they find they have many more applicants than they have places left. It has also been known for university departments to hear only in November that due to cuts their number of places is being reduced and they suddenly find themselves with only a few places left to offer. In order to be ready to get the form in early you really have to do lots of research and planning at the end of Year 12, particularly the period after the AS exams.

### **Common mistakes in filling out the form:**

- 1) The Fee Code. This is almost invariably '02'. Do not put '01' (Private Finance) nor '99' (Not known).
- 2) You have to put all of your GCSE results in, not just the ones you're happy with. You also have to put in your AS results.
- 3) You need to put in the exams you'll be taking next summer so that the UCAS computer can generate a section in your reference asking for predicted grades. Do make sure that your predicted grades will put you within reach of what a university is likely to ask for. It is pretty pointless applying to universities, who are all going to ask for AAB, if you are only predicted to get BBC.

### **The personal statement**

There are whole books of advice on this and a lot of students get very hung up about it and produce loads of drafts to try to get it 'just right'. There is no perfect statement.

Allow it to be PERSONAL, ie a proper reflection of you, a portrait that your teacher and best friends would recognise, not simply adapting someone else's statement or downloading one from the internet or other on-line service. Don't try to make it sound too formal or over-intellectual, using lots of long words, philosophical quotes etc. Keeping it relatively simple will help make it clear. Tutors tend to read them through quite quickly, so a statement that is incoherent and hard to follow is likely to be rejected quite quickly too.

It should be about 70% academic \*, 30% personal \*\*.

\*Why do you want to read that subject/course at university? Don't claim that you leapt from the womb with a burning desire to read your subject – (a) because you didn't and (b) because it sounds ridiculous. Admissions tutors do not make this easy for you. I've heard plenty of them say that they'd like to ban the 'P' word – 'passion' – from all personal statements yet a strong level of interest (and evidence of it) is what they are looking for. The best way to show that is to let it become obvious from the things that you've done and what you have picked up from them. Clearly you wouldn't have done a lot of wider reading unless you were keen on something, so you can quote what you've read and say that it 'led you to read' or 'inspired you to read' more and then mention what that was. Similarly, if you've done something like appropriate work experience, work shadowing, attended a special course etc don't just mention it, but reflect on what you got out of it and on any follow up you've done or will be doing. If there are areas of the subject you particularly look forward to developing, unless that one is the only place you are applying to. I have known students make their application so slanted towards Oxford and Cambridge that other universities have rejected them on the grounds that they didn't think they really wanted to go to anywhere else.

Get other people to read over your statement to see whether they (a) can follow it and (b) feel impressed by it. If both are true, it clearly reads well.

\*\* The idea that you can get into university just because you can offer a lot to their sport or musical life went out a long time ago. They do want you to do other things and they do want to enrich their own environment but these factors alongside and 'as well as' your academic ability not 'instead of' it. Interests that are relevant to what you want to study should obviously be emphasised eg outdoor pursuits, Duke of Edinburgh Award if you are applying for adventure education, charity work and

work with other people if you are applying for medicine etc. Don't get too desperate for things to say – exercise book monitor back in primary school probably doesn't sound too relevant now and putting in 'reading, listening to music and socialising with my mates' can pretty much be taken for granted. If you do put in things like 'music' or 'reading', be more specific and say what it is you like to listen to or read. One warning, however. Don't lie. One student thought he'd impress by saying he liked to read Dostoevsky. He may have meant to read Russian literature, but hadn't by the time his interview came up and looked a complete idiot when then asked to have a conversation about what he liked best about Dostoevsky's works by an interviewer. Who turned out was a big fan of them. Remember that, if you are applying for a course where you are likely to be interviewed, what you write in the personal statement is likely to get picked up on so make sure you can back up, and expand on, what you say there.

If you do not have enough room to put in all that you would like in your statement, have a word with whomever is going to write your reference. He or she may be able to mention things that you don't or can't and sometimes things are better said about you than by you. Clearly it will be more convincing if your referee says that you're brilliant at something than you trying to say that and sounding boastful.

NB make sure you get on well with your referee!

Try to get advice from a subject specialist in your chosen area. Don't pester people who are busy, but you will find that people are happy to help you get this right. And remember, please – don't leave it to the last minute. Requests for help in the afternoon of January 14<sup>th</sup> aren't usually popular (or successful)!

## **Personal Statement Exercise**

Look at the three following statements and say what you think the strengths and weaknesses are. If you had only one place left at your university and you could give it to one of these three, which would be the successful candidate and why?

### **1. Application for business studies and marketing**

*I have always enjoyed business studies, but became interested in marketing specifically when I worked for my local chemist. I was only there for a short time, but soon noticed how influential attractive packaging, position of goods in the shop and advertising could be on customers' shopping patterns. I started to notice effective marketing campaigns in many contexts, from television advertising to posters and magazines.*

*I currently have a part time job in a supermarket, where the use of marketing techniques is even more pervasive. I am looking forward to learning more about marketing and hope to pursue a career in this field.*

*I am enjoying my A level studies and am developing my work-planning skills, which I expect will be very useful at university. In business studies I have particularly enjoyed the marketing and human resources modules. Media studies has given me the opportunity to investigate topics which I had not previously considered, such as political bias in newspapers. ICT has provided me with excellent IT skills which can be applied to my other subjects, as well as being interesting in itself.*



*In Year 12 I took part in the Young Enterprise scheme, an experience which taught me a lot about the realities of working in groups! I was the Marketing Manager, a role which tested my powers of persuasion, as my fellow students frequently disagreed on how to sell our product (hand-painted mugs).*

*Although we did not make a profit I feel that I benefited enormously from this experience, if only in learning about the pitfalls of running a business.*

*At school I help younger students with their reading; this is both challenging and rewarding and has helped to improve my communication skills. Similarly, voluntary work in an old people's home gave me another perspective on effective communication. It was really interesting to hear their stories and how life has changed over the years. I am also a Sixth Form prefect, which involved various responsibilities, from showing visitors around the school to meeting regularly with staff to discuss the students' concerns.*

*My main hobby is football and I was lucky enough to be selected for the first team this year. I used to play the drums in a band, but we recently split up when one of our members moved. However, I hope to resume this interest at university.*

*Overall, I think I am a reliable and enthusiastic person and will enjoy then independence of being at university.'*

## **2. Application for marketing**

*'I didn't do very well in my GCSE's as I wasn't very organised. I got C grades in maths, science, French, ICT, business studies, geography and media studies. I am trying a bit harder now (I even have a work-planner on my wall at home!) and am taking A levels in business studies, media studies and ICT. Hopefully I will be able to get at least a C in all of them.*

*My main hobby is watching TV, although I also like shopping and socialising. I sometimes read books, but I usually don't have much time for anything bigger than a magazine.*

*I have a part-time job in my local supermarket, on the checkout. Its really boring, and people can be really rude, but it pays quite well!! Last summer I also worked in a chemists, but got the sack after one week as I was late every day. I thought this was unfair, as I was never more than twenty minutes late.*

*At school I am in the football team and am also a prefect. Last year I did Young Enterprise. My company made hand-painted mugs and I was the marketing manager.*

*Unfortunately we did not make a profit, and we all fell out big time due to arguments over our designs. We are still not speaking, but at least I found out who my real friends are.*

*I did some voluntary work in Year 12, helping out in an old peoples' home, as my teachers told me this would look good on my UCAS application. It was quite rewarding, although some of the old dears did go on a bit about the 'old days'. I also help some Year 7 students, with their reading. Its OK when they do what I tell them but that doesn't happen very often!!!*

*I started the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award last year, but gave up when I found out that you had to go camping. If we could of stayed in nice hotels I would have carried on. I also used to be in a band, playing the drums. I am a keen mountaineer and last year I made the fastest ever ascent of Ben Nevis, which I enjoyed.*

*I am a nice person and also reliable. I try and get my homework in on time. I am proud of the fact that I only handed half my assignments in late last year. My teachers were really surprised!!*

*I want to study marketing as I want to have a career in marketing and earn lots of money'.*

### **3. Application for geology**

*'Even before I fully understood what they were, rocks, minerals, fossils and gemstones had a compelling fascination. I was attracted by their vivid colours and amazed by the ages of the specimens that I found and bought. But it was when I became intellectually curious – intrigued by the manner of their formation – that my obsession with geology really began.*

*My early interest in geology was fuelled by reading Down to Earth, and I became an obsessive collector of the Treasures of the Earth series over its three year period. When I was fourteen I attended 'Scottish Geology Week', a fascinating five days of geological discovery; an inspection of Arthur's Seat; a visit to the BGS in Edinburgh; a view of the cretaceous-tertiary boundary; and a guest for Graptolites in Dobbs Lynn were highlights of a totally compelling five days.*

*As my secondary school did not offer Geology GCSE, I found a private tutor and we had two great years of one-to-one study. My coursework involved a study of faulting and folding; faulting at Staithes on the North Yorkshire coast and folding at Apes Tor in the Peak District. Geology takes you to such great places! My laboratory experiment investigated the different effects of acid rain on limestone and granite.*

*'Rock Shops' have always lured me, and I have collected a wide variety of specimens. My current pride and joy is a section of a Brazilian Geode with spectacular amethyst crystals – closely followed by my precious malachite and onyx chess set I have been keen lapidarist since primary school and have a full range of equipment. My favourite labour of love is my large cross-sectioned ammonite with dog-tooth calcite crystals in all of its chambers.*

*My current original research project is a study of a quarry face section of the Cleveland Dyke near my home; I am also investigating the alignment of phenocrysts and the degree of metamorphism in the host rocks – mainly shale. I also intend to return to Staithes and complete my study on faulting.*

*Geology is my passion. I simply could not consider studying anything but geology at university.*

*I enjoyed completing my Bronze D of E and gaining a first aid qualification. For the service qualification of my Gold award I am assisting the staff team in a special needs school. I feel I have learnt a great deal from this, in self-confidence, personal skills and working in a team situation. I also enjoyed playing an active role as part of a team helping to run the OAP's Christmas party at my college.*

*I have received four awards in national mathematics competitions. Of which the best was a Silver Certificate in the British Intermediate Mathematics Contest. While at school I played in various team sports, e.g hockey, football, rugby and cricket, however my main sporting interest is now golf. I have won two competitions and represent the club junior team. I have got my handicap down to single figures and have recently been selected for Durham County coaching. A career option, which I would very much enjoy would be to combine my interest in golf and geology as a consultant for golf course design."*



## **A surreal personal statement from Birmingham University**

*I am a dynamic figure, an abstract artist, a concrete analyst and a ruthless bookie. I have been known to remodel train stations on my lunch breaks, making them more efficient in the area of heat retention. I translate ethnic slurs for African refugees, I write award winning operas, I am an expert in stucco, a veteran in love and an outlaw in Peru.*

*Using only a hoe and a large glass of water, I once single-handedly defended a small village in the Amazon from a horde of ferocious army ants. I once read Paradise Lost, Moby Dick and David Copperfield in one day and still had time to refurbish an entire dining room that evening. I balance, I weave, I dodge, I frolic and my bills are all paid. On weekends to let off steam I participate in full-contact origami. Years ago I discovered the meaning of life but forgot to write it down. I have won bullfights in San Juan, cliff-diving competitions in Sri Lanka and spelling bees in the Kremlin. I have played Hamlet, I have performed open-heart surgery and I have spoken with Elvis.*

*But I have not yet been to university so please offer me a place at yours.*

## **Interesting try at a personal statement!**

### **Law**

I have always wanted to study Law. Ever since my dad was arrested I have been fascinated by how the law works and how, given the right defence, somebody who is totally guilty can get off without punishment. I have also seen first-hand how, with suitable pressure, a witness can recount their testimony or sing like a canary. This is why I chose to study law at school and this has really fuelled my initial interest. I have also been inspired by watching Judge Judy and back episodes of Crime and Punishment. This is why I am applying to study Law at university.

As well as watching numerous crime dramas I have also made sure that I attend all of my law lessons so that I did not miss anything important. This shows how committed I am to the subject and how reliable I am. I am also studying PE and Geography. Whilst these have nothing to do with Law, I have still tried hard to pass them despite the fact that they are boring (especially geography). This shows that I am committed and willing to put up with stuff that I don't enjoy and has no relevance in society. As well as attending the trials of various members of my immediate family I have also read the law text book from cover to cover so I feel that already know a great deal of what I will be studying next year.

My friends tell me that I am a good and helpful student who is always up for a laugh. I put myself forward as a form rep although I was not elected. This shows self belief and potential to move out of my comfort zone. When I was six I was in the beavers and achieved a range of proficiency badges including bird watching, origami and tracking woodland animals. The skills learnt at this time will stand me in good stead for what will be expected of me at university. I also played the second star fish in my primary school's alternative nativity production. This shows that I can remain still for long periods and do as I am told. I am a keen footballer and won man of the match once and many were surprised when I wasn't scouted by a top team. I also represented the school at mixed netball when our football matches kept getting mysteriously cancelled at the last minute. Being the only boy in the mixed team meant that I had a great deal of responsibility organising all of the girls. This shows that I can organise. I became so valuable to the netball team that even when the football games were mysteriously back on again at the last minute the PE teachers felt that I was too valuable to take away from the netball team.

It has always been my dream to go to university and become a lawyer. I feel that I can help lots of people, not least members of my own family, and this willingness to help other people whilst getting paid for it makes me the ideal candidate for a top university not to mention yours. I have kept my nose clean and, at the time of writing, have not been actually convicted of any crimes so there would be no embarrassing skeletons in the cupboard when I started practicing law. My goal is pass my degree and work my way up and eventually join one of the top law firms like injury lawyers 4U and go on from there to being a high court judge. This shows that I have got ambition, ambition which I am willing to share with any university that is willing to take me. Thanks for reading and see you soon.

*The problems with this are obvious but is there anything which they are trying to do in this which is along the right lines?*

## **Making a start on your personal statement**

This is your chance to prove that you are a 'dead cert'. Structure your Personal Statement into clear focused paragraphs. Do not waffle, become informal and never ever give in to the temptation to crack jokes.

Remember, don't try to make it too formal or over intellectual, using long words, philosophical quotes etc. Please don't feel the need to use semi colons. My English teacher gave me a great piece of advice many years ago – 'not even English teachers know how to use semi colons so don't start thinking that you can' (Thanks Mrs Alcraft).

Take care to avoid common mistakes such as using 'affect' when you mean 'effect'. Be consistent in writing numbers and letters. Don't write 'thirteen' in one sentence then use '13' in the next. Avoid informal English Yr 11 should be Year 11 and avoid abbreviations such as 'etc' 'i.e.' 'e.g.' 'I'm', 'I've'. Keep to straight forward vocabulary – 'I took part in ....' Sounds better than 'I partook in' which may be more formal but sounds pretentious.

Finally, when your Personal Statement arrives at UCAS it is automatically scanned using what they claim to be the latest software to check for plagiarism. This software not only checks for the usual examples from 'rent-a-statement' sites on the internet but also every other Personal statement that has ever been sent to them. If it is proven to be plagiarised the text is turned to red so that all of the universities that you have applied to can see that you have stolen it!

The first two parts of your statement are likely to be make or break for your application and make up the majority of your 'academic' section.

### **Part 1**

Why do you want to study at university and why have I chosen this course? You must grab their attention. Avoid the word 'passion' at all costs but do communicate a deep seated interest and desire to study this. Be honest about what sparked your interest in the subject and identify key influences. If you use a quote, ascribe it and explain why it is relevant to what you are saying. Do not put in quotes just to sound impressive.

### **Part 2**

I like to call this the 'prove your love' paragraph. You need to make high quality references to things you've done that provide evidence for your interest and understanding of what you are applying to read. This is the one which students find the most difficult and is also the most critical one. It is not enough to imply that you turned up to most of your lessons and quite enjoyed. The head of admissions at Kings College in London said that they wanted students for whom the subject they were applying for sounded like their hobby! In other words, if you love this subject so much what else have you done over and above the class work. Examples might be work shadowing, wider reading (books, journals, articles, research papers etc), wider listening (podcasts etc), visits, lectures, work experience, research, EPQ's etc. What particular areas of your subject have interested you and which ones are you wanting to pursue at university? You need to be analytical don't give just a passing mention to a weeks work experience or a major academic project. If it is an impressive achievement, you should give some space to analyse it properly and say what you learnt from it. This is undoubtedly the area where a lot of students start to panic and desperately start thinking of what they can do over the summer to gain the relevant experience. Reading some of the sample Personal Statements in the study room is a good way of seeing the wide range of different ideas previous students have come up with.



**Part 3 & Part 4**

What kind of person are you – character profile. What are your interests and hobbies? What contributions have you made to school life and/or the wider community? Often experiences can be presented in terms of ‘soft skills’ like time management, organization and commitment. For example, working in a busy call centre shows you can deal with aggressive calls, calm people down and get clear information to resolve cases – all great skills for an aspiring lawyer. Volunteering in an old people’s home demonstrates empathy with vulnerable people – skills a medical student needs. Anything that you identify must be linked to specific skills which must be linked to the course. Winning man-of-the-match in your last game for Bierton badgers or Stewkley weasels is not going to have any bearing on your likelihood of passing a degree in sociology!

**Part 5**

What is your ultimate goal after university? What are your career intentions and how will this help you get there? You also need to make your closing comment (Less is more)

## **Notes for other prospective specialists**

### **Notes for prospective lawyers**

Law is a very competitive subject and career. Exeter University, for instance, in one year recently was offering 70 places for its LLB course and had over 2,300 applications. In the application process you can apply for up to five universities, so you could say that those applications could be distributed between five institutions but that would still mean seven applicants per place and six other people therefore competing with you to get there. So how can you improve your chances of being one of the successful candidates?

The first, vital requirement is to get a good set of GCSE grades. Any less than mostly As and Bs will put you at a severe disadvantage for top university places and for the likes of Oxbridge, LSE, Durham, Bristol, Exeter etc it will need to be more A\*s and As than other grades. You do not have to take law as an A level, although any study of it you can do will give you an insight into what law is about and test whether it is for you and whether you have the right skills. It is not true nowadays that taking law will actually count against you. Most schools do not offer it however and students apply for law from a background of maths and the sciences as much as from the arts and modern languages or any combination of them all. However, they will look for what are regarded as traditional academic subjects, especially at the most prestigious universities. You should be getting the equivalent of As and Bs at the end of Year 12 to ensure predications of AAA-ABB and that as the target at the end of Year 13.

Alongside the grades you also need to do some work experience or work shadowing with a law firm or someone in the profession. Visiting courts and keeping up to date with current legal issues is essential. If your school has a law club, you should take a leading part in it and get involved in discussions, debates, mock trial competitions etc and anything that will sharpen your analytical and communication skills. If the school doesn't have a law club, why not start one? Taking on responsibility is important for your CV as it shows you are organised, able to take a lead and also work as part of a team. Some wider reading is also useful, especially on legal principles and case law. Those, who apply for certain universities, will need to sit an extra exam, the LNAT, and there are details below. This is a critical thinking test and practice papers can be found on-line and you should do some practice before facing the real thing in early November of Year 13.

The LNAT (Law National Admissions Test) is required by those, who apply to:

Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Glasgow, King's, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford UCL.

### **Notes for prospective history specialists**

History is one of the most popular subjects at university. That means that there are lots of courses but also a lot of competition for the best ones. You will need a reasonably good set of GCSE grades, including at least a B in History – for top universities you've got to have a good list of A\*s and/or As with one of them being in history. You need to be doing well by the end of Year 12 and be predicted high grades for Year 13. For top universities that means AAA-ABB at A-Level and at least one of the other grades needs to be in a traditional academic subject and preferably an essay-based one.

Alongside your A level grades and work you need to show your enthusiasm for the subject via wider reading and adopting some specialist topics. Take three topics from your GCSE and/or Year 12 work (two foreign and one British vice versa) and go into them in more depth. This will help your chances of getting good grades as well. Do the same in Year 13 and, if you do an IB extended essay or EPQ, it will give you the chance to choose anything you want and get involved in historical debate about it. It is important that you choose some things other than just modern history. Admissions tutors are fed up of students who only seem to know about the 20<sup>th</sup> century in general and Stalin and Hitler in particular. If there is a university history department nearby, go to some of their public lectures. The key is to go beyond just factual knowledge of what happened to involvement in historical analysis and debate, looking at different peoples' views on topics and deciding which, if any, you agree with and why. History is essentially about discussion and argument and you should take every opportunity to sharpen your skills via debating, school council, general politics etc. For history they want people who are awkward, argumentative, bolshie and bloody-minded, not accepting received wisdom, but questioning everything. Every parent's nightmare can be a history admissions tutor's dream!

#### **Note for prospective English specialists**

English is a very popular degree subject and therefore demanding in terms of grades. If you do not have a good set of GCSE grades, you are at a big disadvantage and at least a C is also needed in maths or else you have to ask for special exemption. This would make you uncompetitive for most of the more traditional and prestigious universities. You need good results at the end of Year 12 with the same, or even higher, predicted at the end of Year 13 with an A in English and preferable the same in another essay-based subject. For Oxbridge you would need a few A\*s at GCSE, ABB at least in Year 12 and the likelihood of gaining three As (with an A\* in English) in Year 13.

On top of grades the key is that your personal statement and reference reflect your great enthusiasm for the subject. This in turn is reflected by your reading – preferably lots of it. Don't just read the set texts for GCSE and A level, read around them. Read other works by the same authors and then experiment with wider reading – dip into lots of other authors, poets, playwrights etc. and see what grabs you. One Oxford college a few years ago gave interviewees the following list to write 20 minutes before the interview, saying they would discuss it and the reason why the particular works had been chosen.

*“You are asked to recommend works in each of the following categories in order to construct the ideal reading list for A level study. Which works would you choose and why?”*

*One twentieth century novel, one pre-twentieth century novel, one twentieth century play, one pre-twentieth century play not by Shakespeare, two Shakespeare plays, a collection from a twentieth century poet, a pre-twentieth century poet, one foreign novel, one work of philosophy.”*

They are interested not just in what you have read but in what you think about what you've read. Some of those interests may dictate which universities you apply to. Some universities will give you the chance to specialise in highly specific areas of literature such as American literature, creative writing, mediaeval literature etc. Involvement in writing for the school magazine, the local papers, the school web-site etc. would all be useful and getting involved in activities such as debating would



help you to develop the vocabulary and communication skills that are vital for an English specialist. Even if you are not called for interview in pursuing a place, you will certainly be expected to take a full part in seminars and discussions once you get to university so take every opportunity to practise those skills.

### **Russell Group universities**

Currently the universities covered are:

Birmingham	Bristol	Cambridge	Cardiff
Durham	Edinburgh	Exeter	Glasgow
Imperial	King's	Leeds	Liverpool
LSE	Manchester	Newcastle	Nottingham
Queen's, Belfast	Oxford	QMC	Sheffield
Southampton	UCL	Warwick	York

### **Skills deficit audit**

A survey was conducted at Russell Group universities across all departments to highlight the skills that it was thought – (a) all undergraduates need to have (b) that applicants increasingly seem to be lacking and therefore (c) applicants ought to try and reflect via both their personal statement and reference.

- 1) An ability to work independently
- 2) An ability to write a clear and coherent essay or report
- 3) An ability to think critically
- 4) An ability to solve problems
- 5) An ability to manage time effectively
- 6) An ability to contribute to a discussion
- 7) Numeracy
- 8) An ability to work in a team

These are regarded as the core skills, with the ability to work independently as the first and foremost. Any lecture of one hour should, they believe, lead to five or six hours of personal study, so it is essential that students know how to do follow up work, use books and research for themselves. Anything that indicates that they have these skills is bound to win points in any application.

## Subject specific reading lists

The following is meant to be a selection box of ideas to choose from and consult. It is not suggested that you try to read all of them in any subject, but that you select what you think might be interesting. That's the point really – dip in, experiment and see what grabs you. Hopefully some of them will inspire your interest even more. A while ago the Russell Group universities published a list of skills that they wanted to see in students, who applied to them. They included-

- 1) Evidence of being an independent learner
- 2) Evidence of an ability to do research
- 3) Evidence of an ability to write a clear and coherent essay
- 4) Evidence of an ability to think critically and solve problems
- 5) Evidence of an ability to contribute ideas to a discussion or debate.

Following up on the suggestions below will be evidence of independent research and will give you plenty of ideas. Above all, it should show you whether your interest in a particular subject is great enough to want to study it to a much higher level. The lists are by no means definitive. Talk to your teachers at school and get ideas from them. Talk to students who are taking your subjects at a higher level. If there are former students from the school, who are up at university doing courses you think you would be interested in, arrange to be put in touch with them. Meet up with them when they come home and look at some of their notes. When you come to apply for university, admissions tutors will be very impressed if you can say that you have already looked over first year undergraduate work.

### Biology

Biology covers all of human biology, zoology and botany so you need to decide whether you want to study all aspects of it or just some of it. You might also want to experiment with finding out about specialist areas such as virology, microbiology, marine biology and genetics to see whether you'd like to specialise from the beginning or study more generally before deciding on any more specialist options.

Books to look at – *The Chemistry of Life* (Steven Rose), anything by the geneticist Steve Jones (note particularly *Language of the Genes and Almost Like a Whale*), *Genome* (Matt Ridley), *The Wisdom of the Genes* (Wills), *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (Daniel Dennett), *The Selfish Gene and The Extended Phenotype* (Dawkins), *Virolution* (Ryan), *Life Ascending* (Nick Lane), *The Revenge of Gaia* (Lovelock), *50 Genetic Ideas You Really Need to Know* (Henderson), *Zoobiquity* (Horowitz and Bowers), *Creation: The Origin of Life* (Rutherford), *Y: The Ascent of Man* (Steve Jones), *Great Myths of the Brain* (Christian Jarrett).

Read journals such as *Nature* and *New Scientist* in particular, but all scientific journals will have biological items in them. For biochemistry a good *Handbook of Biochemistry/Principles of Biochemistry* textbook is useful for back-up reading as you do topics at A level. For genetics, familiarise yourself with sex-linked conditions, genetic ratios and for population genetics the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium and find out about case studies. For zoology look at taxonomy (the science of classification – what do 'species' and 'genus' mean?) and at such things as the place of primates within it. TV programmes by David Attenborough and George McGavin are always of interest. For web sites try [www.arkive.org](http://www.arkive.org), [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.thenakedscientists.com](http://www.thenakedscientists.com) Go to biology web sites on *Wikipedia* and google 'hot' biology web sites. There are loads on all sorts of topics.

## Physics

Books to read – anything by John Gribben (note particularly *In Search of Schrodinger's Cat* and *In Search of the Multiverse*), John Polkinghorne on the quantum world (he is an astrophysicist who is also a theologian), *The Physics of the Impossible* (Kaku), *The Quantum Moment* (Crease & Goldhaber), *The particle at the end of the Universe* (Sean Carroll), *Hyperspace* (Khan), *QED and Surely You're Joking* (Feynman), *The Trouble with Physics* (Smolin), *Chaos* (Gleich), *Quantum* (Kumar), *How to teach Quantum Physics to your Dog* (Orzel), *50 Physics Ideas You Really Need To Know* (Baker), *The Elegant Universe* (Greene), *Just Six Numbers* (Rees), *About Time* (Frank), *The Wonders of the Solar System* (Brian Cox – anything by him is good). Also anything by Jim Al-Khalili and the *Short Introduction* series has a very good one on Chaos theory. The *Infinite Monkey Cage* is an excellent radio programme (on Radio 4 and iPlayer) featuring Brian Cox and Robin Ince and combining theoretical physics with stand up comedy (podcasts are available of all their programmes).

Read *New Scientist* and *Scientific American*, if you can get hold of it. For web sites look at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.thenakedscientists.com](http://www.thenakedscientists.com), [www.galaxyzoo.com](http://www.galaxyzoo.com), google physics web sites including *The Physics Classroom*, *The Student Room* etc and the web site of Institute of Physics.

## Maths

Maths departments seem to be interested only in the maths you've done, so the more you do the better – further maths, further further maths, STEP level papers etc.

Books of interest however might include – *The Music of the Primes* (Marcus de Sautoy), *The Great Mathematical Problem* (Ian Stewart), *Fermat's Last Theorem* (Singh), *Does God Play Dice and Nature's Numbers* (Stewart), *Easy as Pi* (Ivanov), *The Music of the Primes* (du Sautoy), *Just Six Numbers* (Rees), *In Code* (Flannery), *Numbers, Sets and Axioms* (Hamilton), *The Universe and the Teacup – the Maths of Truth and Beauty* (K.C.Cole), *Algebra and Geometry* (Beardon), *Hidden Connections*, *Double Meanings* (Wells), *Elastic Fishponds...The Maths that governs our World* (Elwes), *The Norm Chronicles* (Blastland and Spitgethaltes).

For web sites look at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.nrich.maths.org/public](http://www.nrich.maths.org/public), [www.mathsnetalevel.com](http://www.mathsnetalevel.com), [www.planetmath.org](http://www.planetmath.org)

## History

What you do by way of wider reading depends on the period(s)/topics you want to study or just want to dip into because they sound interesting. A good idea is to choose a couple of topics from your Year 12 work and go into them in more depth as 'specialist subjects'. Then do the same in Year 13. If both are very 20<sup>th</sup> century based, read up a few topics on other periods – admissions tutors are fed up with candidates who seem only to know about Hitler and Stalin and are unaware of anything before 1900.

Arrange with your subject teacher(s) to do one or two term time essays as 'extended essays' in preparation for possible sending them up to university or to have referred to in your application. If you are interested in philosophy of history, look at a couple of the following titles – *The Aims of History* (Thomson), *The Death of the Past* (Plumb), *The Pleasures of the Past* (Cannadine). Look at political philosophy (Machiavelli, Marx, Mill – the 'Very Short Introduction to....' series' is very good) and/or one or two political biographies. General history books of interest are *Long Shadows* (Paris) a study of propaganda and attempts to subvert the historical record, *Voodoo Histories* (Aaronovitch) a

look at conspiracy theories over the ages and *Virtual History* (Ferguson) a look at what might have happened if certain momentous events had turned out differently. Read book reviews – that way you hear what the book says and the view of the reviewer, two for the price of one! Other suggestions are: *Edward I* (Marc Morris), *The Winter King – Henry VII* (Thomas Penn), *Bosworth: the birth of the Tudors* (Chris Skidmore), *Napoleon the Great* (Andrew Roberts), *The English and Their History* (Robert Tombs – expensive but very good).

The other key thing, if you are not already, is to become every parent's nightmare – awkward, argumentative and bolshie. It doesn't have to be at home – don't get kicked out! – but get involved in debating and public speaking, take every opportunity in class to argue and express opinions, taking nothing for granted. There is no such thing in history as 'received wisdom'.

There are load of history web sites (just google 'history web sites') and any topics you follow up, no matter how obscure, will have other links. *History Today* and the *BBC History* reviews are among a host of general, as well as specialised, magazines available.

### **Geography**

You need to decide whether you are a 'whole' geographer or interested more in either the physical side of the subject or the human. That will determine what you want to specialise in and read up about. Choose two or three topics from your work in Year 12 and go into greater depth in them. Arrange with your subject teacher(s) to write a couple of your Year 12 essays as 'extended essays' so that they can be sent or referred to in references for university.

Books that have been particularly recommended are – *Earth, An Intimate History* (Fortey), *Globalism and regionalism and Capitalism as if the Earth mattered* (Porritt) *Future Shock* (Tofler), *A Blueprint for Survival* (The Ecologist and Penguin books), *Population Geography* (Jones), *The Skeptical Environmentalist* (Lomberg-indeed anything by him), *Jungle: A Harrowing True Story of Survival* (Ghinsberg), *Surviving Extremes* (Middleton – he teaches geography at Oxford), *Earth From Space* (Johnston), *Belching Out the Devil: Global Adventures with Coca-Cola* (Thomas), anything by James Lovelock on Gaia and for the human and cultural side *Tribe* (Bruce Parry) or anything by the Prof. of Geog. at UCLA Jared Diamond.

*Geography Review* for case studies, become a junior member of the Royal Geographical Society and consult [www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com) for environmental geography. Look at the website of Danny Dorling for lots of excellent statistical material and his book *So You Think You Know About Britain*. You can get other ideas form [www.gapminder.org](http://www.gapminder.org), [www.facingthefuture.org](http://www.facingthefuture.org), [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.gogeo.ac.uk](http://www.gogeo.ac.uk)

### **Chemistry**

For wider reading try – *The Chemistry of Life* (Steven Rose), *Chemistry* (Brook), *Principles of Biochemistry* (White, Handler and Smith) as a backup to all you're A level topics, *Chemistry for Changing Times* (Hill, McCreary and Kolb), *Materials Science* (Ramsden), *The Periodic Kingdom* (Atkins), *Mendeleev's Dream – the search for the elements* (Strathern), *Periodic Tables – The Curious Life of the Elements* (Aldersty and Williams), *The Disappearing Spoon* (Kean).

Also check out the periodicals *New Scientist*, *Nature*, *Chemistry World* and *Education in Chemistry*. For web sites look at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.thenakedscientists.com](http://www.thenakedscientists.com), google chemistry web sites and

there are several on different areas of chemistry and form a number of UK and US universities. Link up with other sites to do with biology and material sciences.

### **Politics/PPE**

You don't have to be politically committed but, if you are, use all the contacts you can to get work experience, work shadowing etc – of the local council, your local MP, even your Euro-MP. Political autobiographies are interesting, though biased – among recent ones those by Chris Mullin and Jack Straw are to be recommended. In more general terms *The Origins of Political Order* (Fukuyama), *The Dilemma of Democracy* (Hailsham), *The Third Way and its Critics* (Giddens), *Plato to Nato* (Redhead), *British Politics* (Madgwick), *Mind The Gap* (Mount), if you're into American politics Barak Obama's book and George Stephanopoulos *All Too Human* is a study of Clintons first election campaign. *Sophie's World* (Gaarder) is a general introduction to philosophy and there is *What Philosophy Is* (O'Hear).

In terms of work of philosophy, you need to be careful not to dive in at the deep end and put yourself off the subject for life. Platos's *Gorgias* is a very good starting point as it's short and examines two just key themes, 'oratory is deceit' and 'might is right'. It does so very clearly and is a good introduction to the 'Socratic method'. You might like to take a theme such as 'truth' and look at how different philosophers have viewed it – *What is Good?* By A.C.Grayling is a very good starting point). You might be interested in taking a look as such 'isms' as Fascism, Communism, Totalitarianism etc – this would particularly link with an interest in history. Peter Cave has just produced *How to outwit Aristotle* and Julian Baggini's *Do you think what you think you think?* Is excellent. You could also try *The Philosophical Life* (James Miller) and *What do we really know?* (Simon Blackburn).

For web sites look at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.politicsinspires.com](http://www.politicsinspires.com), google philosophy web sites and you may be interested in *The Philosophers' Magazine* or *Philosophy Today*. There are hundreds of politics sites, depending on your interests. For economics see the separate section. Get involved in debating and public speaking and, of course, keep up to date with current political awareness choose an area such as US or European politics or the politics of another area that really interests you such as Africa, Asia or South America and familiarise yourself with the key issues there.

### **Medicine**

The key thing with medicine is to show that you have the personal qualities they are looking for as well the academic ones. That means getting as much experience as you can of working with others, who are in some way or other requiring help. Your school may have a special needs department, in which case offer to help with younger students who may be on the autism/Asperger's spectrum or who have other specific conditions. Use that experience to learn more about how to identify the condition, treat it (if possible) or at least alleviate it. Help with one to one mentoring work to show you have good inter-personal skills. Apply to your local NHS Trust to get experience at a local hospital, clinic or GP's practice. Ideally get all three and, when you do, milk it for all it's worth in terms of letting people know that you want to learn and experience as much as possible. Keep a portfolio of all your experiences and follow up on all you see by researching the various conditions you come across and learn more about them. If you are finding it difficult to get contacts within the

local NHS Trust, contact your local Rotary Club. It will have practising and retired medics among its members, who will have contacts and be willing to help.

For reading you might like to try – *Hippocratic Oaths* (Tallis), *A very short introduction to Medical Ethics* (Shore intro' series), *The Rise and Fall of Modern Medicine* (Le Fanu), *NHS Plc – the privatisation of health care* (Pollock), *Betraying the NHS* (Mandelstram), *NHS SOS* (Davis and Tullis), *The Political Economy of Health Care* (Tudor Hart), *Complications: A surgeon's notes on an imperfect science* (Gawande), *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (Glover), *How doctors think* (Groopman), *Diagnosis; Dispatches from the Frontlines of Medical Mysteries* (Sanders). Keep up to date with and follow up any news items on new medical discoveries and break-throughs. Join the junior BMA and read the *BMJ* (*British Medical Journal*), look at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)

For **veterinary science** get as much experience with animals as you can. Contact local vets, farms, wildlife parks, sanctuaries, zoos etc to get experience with more than just domestic pets.

For **optometry** read: *A Very Short Introduction to the Eye* (Michael Land), *Cure Your Eye Problems* (Healthy Body Books), *The Eye Book* (Grierson), *OphthoBook: Clinical Ophthalmology* (Timothy Root).

For **pharmacy** get experience with at least one pharmacy practice and, if possible, with a pharmaceutical company. Read anything by Ben Goldacre and check out his web site as well as [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)

For **dentistry** get experience with a dental practice and, if you can, a hospital department which deals with more complicated surgery. Things that show you have good manual dexterity also help. Running a dental practice also involves business skills so involvement in something like a Young Enterprise company would be useful.

For **psychology and psychiatry**: Anything by Oliver Sacks, *Mindsight* (Daniel Siegel), *The Element; how finding your passion changes everything* (Ken Robinson).

## Law

Most law books are very intimidating and full of jargon so go easy to start with – *The Justice Game* by Robertson is an excellent and very readable book by someone who has been involved in some of the leading human rights trials of the last 50 years, *Getting into Law* (ed. Lygo), *The Search for Justice* (Rozenburg), *Understanding Law* (Adams and Brownsword), *Law and Modern Society* (Atiyah), *On Evidence* (Murphy – just dip into this), *The Rule of Law* (Bingham), *Bonfire of the Liberties: New Labour, Human Rights* (Ewing) – look at general introductions to different areas of the law such as human rights law, contract law, tort, criminal, land law etc. and see which areas you find more interesting. Also very good is the *Very Short Introduction To....* series e.g. to *Human Rights* (Clapham), *...to the Philosophy of Law* (Wacks) and *the New Penguin Guide to the Law*. You could also try *On Liberty* (Shami Chakrabati), *The Spectre at the Feast* (Andrew Gamble), *The Establishment; and how they get away with it* (Owen Jones).

Spend a morning or day at the local Magistrates' Court and tell the usher why you're there – they may be able to arrange for you to meet the magistrates. Spend a day at a nearby Crown Court – if you live near London, visit the Old Bailey where there are 18 courts – you will find the ushers helpful in telling you what's on and where. Get work experience with a solicitor and/or barrister if you can –

get in touch with your local Rotary Club for contacts if neither you nor the school have contacts you can use. Get involved in public speaking and debating and mock trial competitions.

There are two radio programmes that are very good and there are pod casts of them on iPlayer – they are Law in Action and Unreliable Evidence. Useful web sites are [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.lawstudent.tv](http://www.lawstudent.tv), [www.lawcom.gov.uk](http://www.lawcom.gov.uk) (for Law Commission reports) and [theguardian.com/studying-law](http://theguardian.com/studying-law).

### **Modern Languages**

This is a bit tricky as there isn't much literature in the A level course these days. Do some literature though, mostly in translation, but as much as you can in the original.

Listen to radio broadcasts, use newspapers and get as much feel as you can for the cultures, politics, economics, social issues and dip into the history as well. For France it would be odd not to be able to appreciate its contribution to world history via such as the French Revolution or in the case of Spain the impact of the Spanish Civil War or meso-American conquests. Where there has been a significant impact on philosophy as well, an introduction to that would be good e.g. in French Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, Sartre or in German Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche etc. The *Very Short Introduction* series is a very good starting point. You might also want to dip into Linguistics and see whether that is an option you would like to take up at university.

### **Architecture**

Build up your own portfolio of art work, drawings etc and your reading will be dictated by your own tastes. What buildings in the world do most for you and why? Then read around their history and who designed them. There are a number of works comparing English cathedrals for instance – a good place to start because of the design issues that were faced and overcome by builders of a much earlier age. If there are National Trust properties near you, look at their architecture and find out about restoration work and how that is undertaken. Familiarise yourself with different architectural styles and the work of different architects (whose work most inspires you and why?)

Work experience with a couple of different architects would be useful, particularly if they do very different types of work. Contact your local council's planning department and see if you can do some work shadowing there. If your school is having any building work done, ask to be introduced to the architects and site managers and monitor what goes on. You might even want to design a better school or Sixth Form centre and submit your own ideas. Do some research on materials science too, sustainability projects and some of the latest research on energy saving and even buildings that have self-regulating and self-correcting control mechanisms. Architects are not people who just work at desks by themselves so any evidence of working with a team and taking a lead role would be useful. The local Rotary Club will have contacts with architects if your school doesn't.

Useful web sites are – [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), the 'best architecture' web sites, [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com) (the Royal Institute of British Architects site) and keep abreast of the Stirling awards, the top prize for architecture in the UK.



## **English**

It very much depends on what you are interested in. Ideally choose one or two novelists, one or two poets (admissions tutors are always complaining that too few candidates have much knowledge of poetry), one or two playwrights and literature from more than one period of history (so that it's not all 20<sup>th</sup> century or all Shakespeare).

Experiment and dip in to different genres of literature and find out what really excites you to read more. Reading other works by the authors you have for GCSE or for A level will give you different perspectives on their work and allow you to make interesting comparisons. If you are interested in creative writing, build up a portfolio of your own work. If you are thinking about journalism as a career, write for your school magazine or newspaper – if there isn't one, why not start one? Local newspapers are usually very pleased to accept a copy about events, sports fixtures and things going on in schools, so write reports and send them in. Unsurprisingly for English, the advice is 'read, read, read' but make it for pleasure rather than it become a burden.

## **Engineering**

Maths and physics are the two important subject here so you need to protect those. You then need to decide whether you want to specialise in one particular area of engineering (civil, mechanical, electrical, aeronautical etc) or whether you'd prefer to do 'general engineering' with an introduction to all of them before deciding how to specialise. Visits to university engineering departments should help that decision and in Jan/Feb of Year 12 sign up for one of the Headstart courses that operate each summer and that give you the chance to go to a top engineering department for a whole week in the summer and work on an engineering project. It is a brilliant introduction to what the subject would be like at university, it really tests out whether it's what you want and it looks really good on an application form.

You may also want to consider the option of a gap year and gaining a placement with a major engineering company for six to nine months between school and college. The Year in Industry scheme helps to organise these and, if they go well, you will probably end up with the offer of a job during college vacations or even a guaranteed job at the end of your course. It's even been known for companies to be so impressed with the work that was done on a placement that they sponsored some students through university altogether.

For further research check out [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.discoverengineering.org](http://www.discoverengineering.org), [www.raeng.org.uk](http://www.raeng.org.uk) (the Royal Academy of Engineering site) and there are lots associated with the different disciplines within engineering.

## **Economics**

The Victorian historian, Thomas Carlyle, called economics 'the dismal science' and that leads to the debate as to whether it is a science or a discipline. The further economics is taken, then more mathematical it becomes so you need to protect your maths and not taking it for A level will prove a big disadvantage for any top university.

You need to keep up to date with current economic issues and debates – not difficult these days with the emphasis on the problems with the global economy and this will overlap with politics and debates on taxation, welfare, borrowing, public spending, currency crises etc. If you are taking the subject at A level, pick two or three topics (a combination of macro-and micro-economics) and study them in depth. Arrange for a couple of essays to be done as 'extended essays' and marked accordingly and get involved in such as the Bank of England Challenge on controlling inflation.





If you are planning to go into finance or banking, work experience with a bank or finance institution will be important. Give yourself a notional £20,000 each year and see how you would invest it and (hopefully) make a profit – best to make this ‘notional’ just in case!

Good reads are – *Freakonomics* (Levitt and Dubner), *What Money Can't Buy; the moral limits of the markets* (Michael Sandel), *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (a study of globalisation)(Friedman), *Small is Beautiful* (Schumacher), *The Ascent of Money* (Ferguson), *The Price of Inequality* (Stiglitz), *End This Depression Now* (Krugman), *How the West Was Lost* (Mayo), *22 Things They Didn't Tell You About Capitalism* (Chang). *The Undercover Economist* (Harford), *The End of Poverty* (Sachs). *The Very Short Introduction to Marx* is a good study and look at the ideas of current leading thinkers in economics such as Amartya Sen (his theories on foreign aid creating dependency) and Joseph Stiglitz and of presenters such as Robert Peston and Stephanie Flanders.

Look at web sites such as [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com), [www.CNNMoney.com](http://www.CNNMoney.com), [www.econtalk.com](http://www.econtalk.com), [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com) (Financial Times site).

### **Qualities required to be a good...**

**Historian:** Sceptical, don't take anything for granted or simply accept 'received wisdom' or 'accepted interpretations' without questioning them. Curious, want to know why and how things happened. Objective, open-minded. An avid reader, patient, persistent, have an eye for detail (as you need when doing research). Have an empathy for the culture, climate and context in which things happened, things were written etc.. Be articulate, a good analyst and debater – as some history teachers have said. They want every parent's nightmare – people who are awkward, argumentative and bolshie. Preferably can write well too.

**Mathematician:** Very logical and rational, enjoys the challenge of problem-solving, doesn't like to be beaten by things and certainly not by the same type of problem twice. Very determined and patient, prefers an elegant solution not just something that's right. Intrigued by patterns in the world around them and want to understand them.

**English Specialist:** A good analyst, who is keen on language, its structure and uses. A keen communicator and avid reader, keen to explore and understand the context in which things are written. Empathetic, open-minded – sceptical to a certain extent, not blindly accepting traditional interpretations but an independent thinker, coming to independent conclusions. Objective. Articulate and can write clearly and concisely.

**Chemist:** A keen scientist, i.e. wanting to understand how and why things happen, a good analyst, taking nothing for granted, keen to test things out and do research and patient, determined, even painstaking when doing it. Having good practical skills, an eye for detail. Good at working in a team.

**Physicist:** A keen scientist, i.e. wanting to understand the world and how it came about, a good analyst, taking nothing for granted, keen to test things out, very logical, a good mathematician. Open-minded enough to embrace new theories and evidence. Patient and with an eye for detail when conducting experiments and research.

**Medic:** The capacity to get top academic results, a keen scientist and problem solver, keen to take on life-long learning and with a capacity for hard work and coping with stress. Empathetic, optimistic, dedicated, able to inspire other peoples' trust and confidence, a good communicator and team worker, able to shoulder responsibility, caring and having a strong sense of moral integrity.

**Dentist:** A lot of the above along with good practical and business skills. Even more important to inspire other peoples' trust and confidence, especially children's, as so many are scared of dentists.

**Lawyer:** Logical mind, analytical, with a capacity for hard work, eye for detail and ability to cut through to essential points in arguments. Articulate, well-read, empathetic, ideally having a strong moral sense, well organised and self-confident.

**Economist:** Analytical, logical and intuitive. An avid reader but with good mathematical ability and keen on statistics. Having good debating and communication skills, sceptical and questioning, can write well and with a strong sense of wanting to get to the bottom of why things happen as they do.

**Philosopher:** A keen sense of language and meaning matched with a strong desire to understand things. Capacity for logical thought, well read, open-minded, with good communication skills and with a natural empathy for historical and social context.

**Engineer:** A keen problem solver, with strong mathematical ability, analytical powers and the capacity to see the full picture and finished products. Fine eye for detail, meticulous, patient, determined, a good communicator and team worker and able to work under pressure.



## Useful web sites

Each of the following should prove of value:

[www.ukcoursefinder.com](http://www.ukcoursefinder.com)

[www.bestcourse4me.com](http://www.bestcourse4me.com)

[www.purepotential.org](http://www.purepotential.org)

[www.push.co.uk](http://www.push.co.uk)

[www.thestudentroom.co.uk](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk)

[www.fasttomato.co.uk](http://www.fasttomato.co.uk)

[www.opendays.com](http://www.opendays.com)

[www.thebigchoice.com](http://www.thebigchoice.com)

[www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk)

[www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com)

[www.guardian.co.uk/education/universityguide](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/universityguide)

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

[www.uniaid.org.uk](http://www.uniaid.org.uk)

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

[www.hero.ac.uk](http://www.hero.ac.uk)

[www.yougofurther.co.uk](http://www.yougofurther.co.uk)

## **Note for prospective medics**

Medicine is one of the hardest subjects to get accepted for and the qualities looked in a potential medic are personal as well as academic. A strong academic background is essential and any less than four or five As at GCSE would put you at a considerable disadvantage. You need to take chemistry at A level and preferably biology as well as, without it, there will be a number of medical schools you won't be able to apply to. You need excellent results at the end of Year 12 to remain competitive and then the potential for AAB at the end of Year 13. There isn't much room for slippage!

For universities like Oxford and Cambridge, tutors have written that they are looking for 'people who have near perfect qualifications and who will thrive on the academic course. We also want people who have interesting views on a wide range of issues. The broader the interests, the more interesting the people. The ideal candidate does well and takes advantage of other opportunities in life.'

According to the Dean of Medicine at Cardiff in a talk at a UCAS conference, the qualities being sought in a prospective medic are:

- 1) The potential for high academic achievement.
- 2) Evidence of a caring and committed attitude toward other people.
- 3) An understanding of the demands of medical training and practice.
- 4) An ability to communicate effectively.
- 5) A willingness to accept responsibility.
- 6) A broad range of social, cultural and /or sporting interests.

A medic must be able to cope with the academic, physical and emotional pressures of the training and the job, have strong integrity and some humility. An interest in other people also helps unless you aspire to become a forensic pathologist!

There are many ways in which the qualities above can be demonstrated. Work experience at a hospital or work shadowing a doctor shows you have gained insights into what medical practice involves and that you have communicated with medics. Working with the handicapped, the disadvantaged or ill will show that you have the coping skills. Becoming a prefect at school will show your ability to interact with others of a range of ages and levels of ability and there are ample opportunities in school (and outside) to take on responsibility, show management skills and demonstrate teamwork. You should also look up books and articles that can keep you up to date with latest research, ethical issues in medicine etc.

Anyone who applies for medicine will probably have to take one or both of the BMAT and UKCAT tests and details are attached. They are taken in the autumn term of Year 13 and there will be chances to practise before the actual test. The results are usually put together with your other scores and A level predictions to decide who will be interviewed. Whereas the interviews that take place for most other subjects are relatively straightforward and informal, the ones for medicine can be quite daunting, sometimes being conducted by a panel of interviewers rather than just on one-to-one. They are a vital part of the chance to gain an offer and are the real opportunity to prove that you have the communication skills – the ability to achieve a ready rapport with others-that they are looking for. All, who are called for interview therefore, should be offered the chance of a rigorous run-through with a thorough de-brief in time to prepare for the real interview.



There are many external organisations, that offer study days on applying for medicine, interviews etc. These can be very expensive and should be avoided. We will try to prepare you just as well.

List of medical schools

(\*=requires the BMAT test, ^=requires the UKCAT test)

Aberdeen^, Birmingham, Brighton^, Bristol, Cambridge\*, Cardiff^, Dundee^, East Anglia^, Edinburgh^, Glasgow^, Hull/York^, Imperial\*(^for the Graduate programme), Peninsula^, Queen's Belfast^, QMC, Sheffield^, Southampton^, St Andrews^, St George's^, UCL\*, Warwick (^ for Graduate programme)

\*also for Biomedical Science at either Imperial or Oxford

On an application form for university (called a UCAS form) you can usually apply for up to 5 courses, all of which can be the same subject. With medicine however, you are only allowed to apply for four medical courses. The fifth choice is left for a possible alternative, if you want one. This can in theory be anything, but is usually a para-medical course such as biomedical science or pharmacy.

## Note for prospective Oxbridge applicants

Oxford and Cambridge are the most famous of our universities and a place there can sometimes be regarded as being the ultimate prize for any student. That should not necessarily be the case. In some subjects there are courses elsewhere that are at least as good and that might contain more appropriate course material and more appropriate teaching and assessment methods. Do not aspire to Oxford or Cambridge simply because of their reputation. The course must be one that you'd like and you have to be up for the method of teaching they use. As at all other universities you attend lectures and go to smaller group tutorials. At most places however those tutorials will take the form of seminars involving a number of other students; at Oxbridge it may be only two of you, three at most. This will be with a leading figure in your field of study so you have to be on top of your subject in order to keep up and you will be expected to have views on and discuss all the latest ideas on the topic you're covering. You will have to do a lot of reading and research by yourself and probably a lot more work than will be set elsewhere. You need to be sure that you want that sort of challenge and that you will enjoy the pressure cooker environment that Oxbridge colleges tend to foster. You will be surrounded by people, who have a real appetite and enthusiasm for learning, who will question everything, revel in academic discussion and debate and who will have a genuine desire to push the limits of knowledge in their subjects. If you share that passion, Oxbridge may well be right for you and, if you have the right results background, don't be afraid to give it a go.

Do not be put off by any of the myths about Oxbridge – that it is only for the rich, for those who've been to public schools, that it is very snobbish and that the costs are much greater than going anywhere else. They are all false. Because of the endowments of many of the colleges, Oxford and Cambridge are no more expensive than other universities, indeed they are cheaper than most and they have many more scholarships and bursaries to help students pay their own way through. They are only interested in people as students and in what they can contribute to college or university life, not in where they have come from, which school they went to etc.

Admissions tutors are only interested in getting the best students, regardless of background. Inevitably it will be expected that the best students are those who have already got outstanding results. They will expect you to have mainly A\*s and As at GCSE and As with top marks at AS. The standard offer of a place will then be something like A\*AA at A2. There is no point applying, if you are not going to get in that region of results or are not interested or committed enough to compete for them. Most who apply to Oxford and Cambridge will be predicted to get three, four or even more As at A level. Most will still be rejected as there are on average four people applying for each place. So what more have you got to do to get an offer?

Those, who are at the cutting edge of their subject or who aspire to be there, will automatically read around it, take every opportunity to inform themselves more, will want to know what the latest research and ideas are and have their own views on them. Mathematicians will relish the challenge of problem solving to such an extent that they will do much more advanced work than A level covers. They will read first year undergraduate work, books on topics such as number theory, Fermat's last theorem, *Does God Play Dice?* Etc. The equivalent will be true for those studying other subjects.

Take every opportunity to read and to reflect on that reading. Read research magazines – *New Scientist*, *Scientific American*, the *British Medical Journal*, *Royal Geographical Society Review*, *History Today* – whatever is relevant to your subject. Check out books at your local bookstore.



The Cottesloe School  
**SIXTH FORM**

In case of Historians, check latest history book reviews as that way you get both a summary of what the book says and the opinion of the reviewer, so two sets of things to comment on. Get appropriate work placements and milk them for all you can get from them in terms of experience and ideas. Potential engineers should sign up for Headstart courses and scientists should look for placements with research companies. Take advantage of university summer schools and, when you go to open days, talk to both staff and students and get ideas from them or, when they come home, look over their books and notes. All of these things will not only increase your chances but they'll act as a real test of whether you're really up for it. If it seems like too much work, maybe you aren't. If you enjoy it, you certainly are.

Your personal statement on your eventual application form will mention all of the things you have done. The reference should then build on that. These and how you come across in your interview (described as 'a rigorous mental workout') should all reflect that your first and foremost aim for the next three years or more is to study a particular subject and to try to make a contribution to your field of study. Towards that and to ensure that any application you make is as strong as it possibly can be, you should be building up a portfolio of such evidence. Every month from now on make sure that you do at least three things extra, specific and particular towards building up your body of evidence that you are indeed one of the prospective students they are looking for. Hopefully it will also confirm to you that your chosen subject is one that you enjoy so much, it doesn't really seem like extra work at all.

Believe in yourself and go for it – and best of luck.



**Getting Started with your Personal Statement**

This worksheet is designed to help you get together all of the information you could include in your Personal Statement. You can then use this as a starting point for your first draft.

**COURSE CHOICE:**

Remember, as a rough guide, use half the Personal Statement to write about your chosen course. Some competitive Universities or courses may require a larger proportion of the Personal Statement about the chosen course.

**Why have you chosen the course?**

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**What interests you about this subject area?**

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**What specific topics do you enjoy and why?**

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**What other experiences or research have you undertaken beyond your course curriculum (i.e. further reading, conferences, visits)?**

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## UCAS Preparation

Estimate 'A' Level Grades/UCAS Point Score

A2	UCAS Points		AS	UCAS Point Score
A*	56		EPQ only	24
A	48		A	20
B	40		B	16
C	32		C	12
D	24		D	8
E	16		E	4

Vocational Qualifications	
Distinction*	56
Distinction	48
Merit	32
Pass	16

### Estimated grades

A2 Subject	Grade	UCAS Point score
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
AS Subject		
TOTAL		



Use websites on page 26 to research potential course and likely entrance requirements. All of these will allow you to tailor your by a series of criteria e.g. location, course related jobs etc.

**Complete the table below**

<b>Optimistic</b>		<b>Should be</b>		<b>Back Up</b>	
University	Entry Criteria	University	Entry Criteria	University	Entry Criteria



## Interview questions exercise (General)

1. What has attracted you to read .....  
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2. What qualities do you think are called upon to study this?  
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3. What evidence is there that you have these qualities?  
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4. What wider reading have you done and what ideas/theories/examples have impressed you?  
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5. What wider experience have you gained and what have you learnt from it?  
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6. How do you see yourself using your degree?  
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**The former students who are coming in might be good people to talk to about this.**



## Interview questions exercise (Subject specific)

Using the section at the back of the booklet (or separate copies) or by internet research find at least 5 subject specific questions. Use the advice in the booklet and further research to answer them

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**Now go on to YouTube and see if you can find some video examples or advice.**

## UCAS Passport Log

In order to help you complete your UCAS Personal Statement (application) next year you will be keeping a record of all of the things that you do this year which can add to the relevant experience, knowledge, personal skills and characteristics which will set you aside from the thousands of other students who will be applying for the same courses as you. The time you spend now preparing will pay dividends in June when you start writing your application.

What should I be recording?

### Work experience

You don't need to have tonnes of work experience to sell yourself to university admissions tutors. It goes without saying that any experience that you can gain in the field you wish to study is extremely valuable even if it is a couple of days work shadowing.

According to a report by education charity the Sutton Trust - which analysed more than 300 personal statements - there's lots of variation in the types of work experience applicants list in their personal statement. It highlighted that pupils from independent schools are more likely to have placement opportunities in prestigious companies than those from state schools.

But even if your stint as a volunteer or your Saturday job doesn't sound as glamorous as a high-flying internship with a big company, it's important to make whatever level of work experience you have really count, highlighting how skills you've developed through your experience are relevant to the course you're applying to.

We've used some real-life examples from the Sutton Trust's report to help illustrate our tips...

The 'dream' work experience gig

*'I've worked for a designer in London, as a model... On the trading floor of a London broker's firm... With my local BBC radio station... Events planning with a corporate five-star country hotel... In the marketing team of a leading City law firm... Most recently managing a small gastro pub.'*

Even an impressive list of work experience placements isn't an asset to your personal statement unless you reflect on what it was you did, what you learnt from it and how it's relevant to the course you're applying to - name-dropping alone won't impress an admissions tutor.

Don't just list everything you did – random lists are a pet hate of admissions tutors. Instead, pull out a particular activity that's relevant and demonstrates your skills and qualities.

Stay focused - impress admissions tutors by using your work experience example to answer the all-important question 'why should we give you a place on this course?'

The 'back to reality' experience

*'I have two part-time jobs in the hotel and catering industry.'*

*'Last year I worked in Aldi and in a local bakery, which gave me experience of dealing with a variety of customers' demands.'*

It's far more likely that you will have had a part-time job in a shop than in a top company, but that doesn't mean you can't demonstrate your potential to admissions tutors.

Be specific - describe a situation you've dealt with. What was it you did to handle the situation? What did you learn? Which skills have you developed as a result?

Keep it relevant to the course - think about the skills you've acquired that will be useful to your degree work. If you've developed strong communication skills as a result of interacting with customers, then mention how you would put them to good use when presenting your ideas in seminars or arguing persuasively in essays.

### **Extra-Curricular**

Include any clubs, teams, curriculum support or volunteering that you are involved with. Like work experience, this can a good way of proving that you have the soft skills necessary to succeed at university – determination, leadership willingness to take responsibility etc. Talking about other interests or hobbies helps inject some personality into your statement - but before it goes in, ask yourself 'so what?' If you helped support a year 8 Geography, class what did you learn from it that might be useful at university? Do not refer to minor achievements that contribute nothing to your personal profile – the fact that you won man of the match for Stewkley Weasels two years ago is of no consequence!

### **Extra Research**

You will need to 'prove your love' for the subject which you are applying for. You will need to convince them that this is your life's goal not merely something of a passing interest. Make sure that you are **READING, LISTENING, VISITING AND WATCHING** around your subject.

**Reading** – There are reading lists suggested in this booklet but speak to your teacher about journals and periodicals which have up to date information. Make a note of interesting ideas, theories, developments, people etc. – you can refer to these in both your personal statement and your university interview.

**Listening** – Podcasts are brilliant. There are literally thousands of them out there and they provide fascinating up to date information on a whole myriad of different topics. The head of admissions at Oxford University said to me that if your students do nothing else get them listening to radio 4 podcasts. Apple itself has its own educational platform. As a matter of course, I search the internet for any podcasts relating to the topics which I teach at A Level. You should be doing the same after each lesson. When you find a good one make sure you subscribe to it and tell others about it.

**Visiting** – Try and see your subject up close. If you want to study Law, get to the local courts. If you want to study history get to the relevant Museums. If you want to study politics, get to the Houses of Parliament! Go see your local MP. There are numerous businesses locally, regionally and nationally that will be more than happy to let you come and see what they do.

**Watching** – You lot spend half your life gawping at your iberrypod so try finding some subject specific clips – again I will do this as a matter of course for whatever I am teaching – **so should you!!** Youtube is not just for watching overweight people falling over in hilarious fashion!



You will find sample lessons from teachers, students and exam boards, lectures from universities and clips from TV programmes on specific topics – trust me, you have only scratched the surface of what is on there.

If you are studying Film, go and watch films, if you are studying psychology, go and find some lectures, if you want to be an architect go and watch one in action – work shadowing is great experience.

### **Soft skills**

These are the personal skills which the university, or indeed any employer, would deem to be desirable. Reliability, hardworking, dependable, leadership, willing to take responsibility, communication, ability to work independently, ability to work within a group, ability to overcome failure, growth mind-set, altruism and ability to speak to an audience to name but a few. Often personal interests, hobbies, positions of responsibility, part time work, voluntary work etc can give you the opportunity to prove and demonstrate that you have these. If there are any chances to do something, say something, be somewhere, help someone, be a part of something, start something, create something, go somewhere, be someone, build something, represent something then for goodness sake **DO IT!** In the words of Anthony Keidis 'Life is more than just a read through' start taking and making opportunities for yourself when they are still offering themselves up on a plate.

### **In School opportunities**

Curriculum support – looks absolutely great on your CV/Personal statement

Duke of Edinburgh – numerous skills can be developed and talked about

Volunteering – Carey lodge & local schools are all grateful for the support of any students

Form time support for literacy and numeracy – immediately gets you in the Headteacher's good books and demonstrates a clear desire to help other people.

Debating society – develop your public speaking skills

UCAS reps – help to coordinate and maintain the UCAS resources

Open evening reps – help departments at Year 6, Year 9 and Sixth Form Open evenings

### **Out of school opportunities**

Community projects

Enterprise schemes e.g. National Citizen Service (NCS)

University summer schools/Sutton trust

Charity work

Youth clubs





## UCAS Passport Log

Extra Research (Reading, listening, visiting, watching)

Date	Title	Details



**Extra-Curricular**

Date	Title	Details



**Work Experience/Work shadowing**

Date	Title	Details

