Guide to UCAS
HANDBOOK

For 2027 University start dates

CONTENTS

Foreword

The majority of the students at St Bede's choose higher education as their next step. Each child's reasons may vary, but they are usually some combination of:

- It is essential for some career paths.
- To develop new transferable skills and subject knowledge.
- To increase confidence and independence.
- To meet new people.
- To learn how to live independently.
- As an investment in their future.
- Increased job prospects.
- Higher earning potential.

It is usual for some students to take the decision that studying at university is not the path they wish to follow. We encourage all our students to consider the wide range of options available to them, especially if they are not certain university is for them.

However, for the purposes of this booklet we are presuming a university application.

For parents and carers who have gone through this process before there will be little that surprises them. The aim is to set out the key pieces of information clearly – if you have questions though, please contact the sixth form team.

We hope that you find all the information enclosed helpful!

Philip Brookin
Deputy Head of Sixth Form

UCAS Application Process

What is UCAS and the Application Process?

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) is the UK's central organisation system for managing undergraduate university applications. All applications to UK universities must be made through UCAS.

Candidates can apply to up to 5 places (4 for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine) through an online application to www.ucas.com.

The form itself comprises of eight sections:

- **Personal Details.**
- **Choices.**
- **Education.**
- **Employment**: Details of any paid employment, including job titles and dates.
- **Personal Statement**: A statement explaining why you want to study the chosen course.
- **Reference**: An academic recommendation from a teacher or advisor.
- **Supporting Information/Additional Information.**
- **Finance and Funding**: Information on how you will pay for your studies.

The school will provide a reference which will include their predicted grades for each subject, any extenuating circumstances and supporting information.

Once completed and the fee is paid (£34.50), the student submits the form sending it to the school. The school will then check their application. If the school notices any mistakes in the application, the school will return it to the candidate to make amendments. The student will then need to resubmit it to the school (they will not need to pay again). If the application is ready then the school will submit it to UCAS which in turn will be sent to the universities.

Key Dates 2026-2027

<u>Early entry application UCAS deadline:</u>
Oxbridge/Medicine/Dentistry/Veterinary Medicine

A complete personal statement first draft: 7th September 2026

Internal deadline: 1st October 2026

UCAS deadline: 15th October 2026

<u>UCAS application deadline:</u>

Internal deadline: 13th November 2026

UCAS deadline: 13th January 2027

External Admissions

If you wish to study Engineering and Science, Dentistry, Medicine, Law, or want to apply to Oxbridge, certain courses may have an external admission test. You need to create an account to make a booking and buy a test (£70+), so create an account when registration opens (July/August). If you miss October tests, you will not be eligible to apply to Oxbridge.

External Admissions Test Dates

ESAT- Engineering and Science Admissions Test

- ESAT: Test Booking Opens: 20th July 2026
- Bursary Application Deadline (Oct): 21st September 2026
- Registration Closes (Oct Sitting): 28th September 2026
- Main Test Window: 12th–16th October 2026
- Results Released: 16th November 2026
- January Sitting (Mature applicants): 4th–8th January 2027

TMUA- Mathematics for University Admissions

- Registration/Booking Opens: 20 July 2026
- Bursary Application Deadline (Oct): 21 September 2026
- Registration/Booking Closes (Oct): 28 September 2026
- Test Window 1: 12–16 October 2026
- Registration/Booking Closes (Jan): 21 December 2026 (6 pm GMT)
- Test Window 2: 4–8 January 2027

TARA- Test of Academic Reasoning (Oxford/ UCL)

- Registration Opens (October Testing): 20th July 2026
- Registration Closes (October Testing): 28th September 2026
- TARA Testing Window (October): 12th – 16th October 2026
- TARA Results Released (October): 16th November 2026

External Admissions

UCAT- University Clinical Aptitude Test (Medicine and Dentistry)

- Registration: 20 May 2026
- Booking Opens: 23 June 2026
- Testing Begins: 13 July 2026
- Registration/Booking Deadline: 16 September 2026
- Last Test Day: 24 September 2026

LNAT- Law National Aptitude Test

- Registration: 1 August 2026
- Testing Begins: 1 September 2026
- Oxford/Cambridge Deadline: Must sit by 15 October 2026
- LSE/UCL/KCL Deadline: Recommended by 31 December 2026
- UCAS/Final Deadline (Most Unis): 14 January 2027

Oxford and Cambridge have other tests you may need to take, so please be aware of the following:

- **CAT** (Classics Admissions Test)
- **ELAT** (English Literature Admissions Test)
- **HAT** (History Aptitude Test)
- **MAT** (Mathematics Admissions Test)
- **MLAT** (Modern Languages Admissions Tests)
- **PAT** (Physics Aptitude Test)
- **TSA** (Thinking Skills Assessment)

Choosing your course

It is very important to think carefully about what you wish to study and where. Choose your five courses wisely and ensure that you have a range of choices. We recommend: 1-2 aspirational; 2 achievable and 1-2 "safety nets."

There are a number of things to consider when choosing a course or university:

Future Prospects and Motivation

- Is it something you **enjoy?** Will you invest the time and effort?
- Is it right for your **career path?** Have you checked with your what is required for your ideal employers and professional organisations?
- Graduate recruitment patterns. What are the **employment prospects?**

Course Style, Logistics and Location

- The **location and living arrangements**: Is it close to friends and family?
- How far will you need to travel? Are there transport links? Is it a city, small town or campus?
- Is the first year accommodation colleges, halls or flats?
- Does the course have a study and **assessment style** that suits you.
- The overall **university environment** - extracurricular, clubs, and societies.

Course Feasability and Suitability

- **Standard offers/tariff profiles**: are you likely to get in?
  - UCAS: use the search tools provided
  - Direct from University: find out the entry requirements directly from the university
- You can use **university league tables** to see which University is best for your chosen course. These websites can be found on page 18.
- **Open days and visit days**: When you visited, could you see yourself **there?**
- Your **finances.**

Choosing your course

Common Q and A's

What if the student is sure on some but not all of the 5 university choices?

Applications can be sent off with less than 5 choices. Students are able to add choices up to the 5 up until the closing deadline of the 13th January 2027 (15th October 2026 if it is an early entry course). We recommend students send their applications off with the choices they are certain on to meet the internal deadline and then add additional university choices as they final deadline approaches.

Can students make applications to different subjects?

For example: History at one university and Mechanical Engineering at another.

Yes, but it is not advised. If a student is not sure on which course, then perhaps they are not yet ready to commit to that decision. Also, candidates can only submit one personal statement with an application and personal statements need to be specialised towards a subject. Some universities and courses will require applicants to write an additional personal statement that is sent directly to that admissions team.

Early Entry Courses

Oxbridge, Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine
These courses have an earlier deadline (Internal: 1st October 2026 /UCAS deadline: 15th October 2026) and hence are termed 'early entry applications.'

Oxbridge
University of Oxford and University of Cambridge are world-renowned in both arts and science subjects. They seek to attract the brightest applicants regardless of background, but have a rigorous application process. You cannot apply to both Oxford and Cambridge in the same year, so will need to choose one. In addition to choosing your course and university, you will need to select a college. Colleges provide academic and pastoral support, and while all offer the same excellent standard of teaching, they differ in location, size and culture. Your choice of college should not affect your chances and, if you have no preference, you can make an 'open' application.

The personal statement may be used as part of the selection criteria and as a basis for interview questions. An Oxbridge personal statement should have a strong academic focus (more about personal statements on p13). Depending on the course, you may also need to complete additional elements, such as an additional application form, an extra personal statement, an admissions test or submitted written work. If selected, candidates will be interviewed in a format that reflects the tutorial/supervision style of teaching through academic discussion. Expect to discuss your personal statement, any submitted work and respond to abstract questioning. Interviewers are more interested in how you think and engage with ideas than in getting the "correct" answer.

Oxbridge is not for everyone. It is best suited to intellectually curious individuals who excel in critical thinking, enjoy academic intensity and thrive in supervisory, discussion-based learning.

Early Entry Courses

Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine

For Medicine and Dentistry, you will need to study and prepare for the UCAT exam. The test is used alongside other selection criteria such as your academic qualifications and interviews. You can read more about UCAT test dates on p5. You can only sit the UCAT test once a year so preparation is key. The highest scoring candidates spend up to 30 hours across 6-8 weeks preparing before sitting the exam. More guidance can be found directly from the website: https://www.ucat.ac.uk/.

The personal statement may be used in selection criteria. The aim is to write a reflective personal statement that conveys a realistic view of the profession whilst highlighting the key skills you have acquired and hope to gain.

If selected, candidates may be invited to interview. There are two types of interviews: Panel and MMIs (Multiple Mini Interviews). Interview questions will vary between universities, but all will be looking for similar criteria such as:

- Communication skills
- Emotional intelligence
- Problem solving
- Maturity
- Understanding of the profession and its challenges
- Professional responses to ethical scenarios
- Awareness of the NHS (Medicine/Dentistry)
- Current affairs in the media

Applicants should demonstrate a blend of high academic capability, genuine empathy, and strong communication skills, underpinned by resilience and a realistic understanding of the profession. Key attributes include teamwork, ethical awareness, integrity, and a commitment to serving communities, typically evidenced through work experience and volunteering.

University Offers

When will students hear back from Universities for 2027?

Universities must reply by mid-May 2027 if the student applied by the January deadline. Some universities reply very quickly after you've applied (within days or weeks), while others may take several months.

Applications to Oxford and Cambridge have an earlier application deadline, therefore they should get back to applicants by January 2027.

How do students respond to offers on UCAS?

Once universities make decisions, students log into their UCAS Hub account and view their offers.

Students may receive:

- **Conditional offers:** a place is offered if they achieve specific grades
- **Unconditional offers:** the place is guaranteed regardless of results
- **Unsuccessful applications:** the university has rejected the application

After receiving decisions from all universities (or once they are ready to decide), students choose:

A Firm choice: This is the student's first choice university. If the student meets the conditions of this offer on Results Day, they have committed to attending that University.

An Insurance choice: This is an (optional) backup option, and if you miss the conditions of your firm choice but still meet the conditions for the insurance, you will be able to attend this University.

University Offers

Advice for choosing a Firm:

Students should usually choose:

- Their genuine favourite course/university
- Somewhere they would be happy to attend for several years
- A course with entry requirements they realistically have a chance of achieving

Advice for choosing an Insurance:

A good Insurance choice should usually:

- Have lower entry requirements than the Firm choice
- Still be somewhere the student would genuinely like to study
- Be realistic based on predicted grades and past performance

A common mistake is choosing an Insurance with requirements that are almost identical to the Firm choice.

Example:

- Firm: ABB
- Good Insurance: BBC
- Risky Insurance: AAB

University Offers

Tariff Points and A Levels

Whilst most Universities specify A Levels, some Universities use Tariff Points. Therefore, it's important to know what conditional results you are working towards in both metrics. Please study the below tables to use as a guide if your choices have mentioned Tariff Points. There is a website link to a Tariff Point Calculator use can use on p18.

A Level Grade	UCAS Tariff Points
A*	56
A	48
B	40
C	32
D	24
E	16

Grades	Total Tariff Points
AAA*	168
AAA	144
ABB	128
BBB	120
CCC	96

Personal Statements

The personal statement is the only place on the UCAS application to highlight relevant skills, achievements, and work experience. It should aim to demonstrate very specifically how the applicants' aspirations, experiences and qualifications are relevant to their choice of study.

The statement has a maximum **4000 characters** spread across three questions:

1. **Why do you want to study this course or subject?**
2. **How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?**
3. **What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?**

Very competitive courses may use them in their selection process. Sometimes personal statements are used as a basis for an interview. They can also become important for 'near miss' applications.

The process of writing a personal statement can be daunting but it is a good opportunity for reflection. It can highlight to a candidate that they have chosen the right course.

If applicants don't have relevant experiences or don't like using the skills required for the course – then maybe that course isn't right for them. Or perhaps they need to do some work experience or more research to justify the choice to themselves.

Personal Statements

What counts as a relevant experience?

Example scenario: a student hoping to apply for Medicine.

A common misconception is that student need to acquire direct experiences for it to be relevant. Whilst work experience in hospital can be advantageous it is not necessary.

A better way to think about it is what skills are required for that job or degree course. For example: an ability to communicate with people of different ages in a professional setting would be advantageous to evidence. So, experiences in a care home, nursery or sports club would be relevant.

We recommend that students acquire experiences that they enjoy. This is in the hopes that it will lead them to careers and courses that they enjoy too. Strategic applicants might want to audit their skills and experiences. These students can then acquire experiences that address the gaps for their chosen path.

Personal Statements

Top tips:

1. **Be yourself**

A personal statement that is honest is going to be far more original and interesting than one that regurgitates what a student thinks an admissions tutor wants to read about. Have faith in yourself and your academic interests. A personal statement is meant to be personal.

2. **Evaluate your experiences**

Not everyone has access to the same opportunities: universities recognise that. Reflect on experiences and talk about what you learned from them, no matter how big or small they might seem. It's not what about what you've done, it's about what it's done to you.

3. **If you know how the degree will benefit you – tell them!**

Tell them about your specific career aspirations, goals or even how the degree will equip you for your life ahead. Admissions tutors like know how you plan on using their teaching.

Student Finance

What is Student Finance?

Student Finance is an organisation that helps students to pay for University so that you don't have to pay upfront. They offer two main loans:

- **A Tuition Fee Loan** (course fees, approx £9,790 annually)
- **A Maintenance Loan** (living costs like food, rent and travel)

If you are starting University in September 2027, you should apply for student finance in the Spring or Summer of 2027. Applications will usually open around March 2027. You can apply even if you do not have a University place yet, and even if your offers are conditional.

How to apply to Student Finance?

Students will apply online at Student Finance England (p18- Useful Resources). To apply you will need:

- National Insurance Number
- Passport details (if possible)
- Bank account details
- Parent/guardian income information (for Maintenance Loan assessment).

How much will I receive?

The Tuition Fee Loan will cover the cost of your yearly fee's. The Maintenance Loan is means tested, and based on your household income, if you will live at home or away, and if you will study in London or elsewhere.

Paying back student loans

Students will begin paying back their loan after leaving University, and once they are earning over the repayment threshold.

The 2027 rules are students will pay back 9% of earnings above £25,000. This will come out of your pay check each month alongside other taxes.

Student Finance

How much maintenance Loan could I receive?

	2026 to 2027
Living with your parents	Up to £9,118
Living away from your parents, outside London	Up to £10,830
Living away from your parents, in London	Up to £14,135
You spend a year of a UK course studying abroad	Up to £12,403

Figures for 2027- 2028 have not yet been released.

These figures are means tested. Depending on your household income, you may receive less than this, which means that many parents have to cover some of the cost of accommodation.

Many students also get part-time jobs to cover some of the costs.

Student Loan Interest

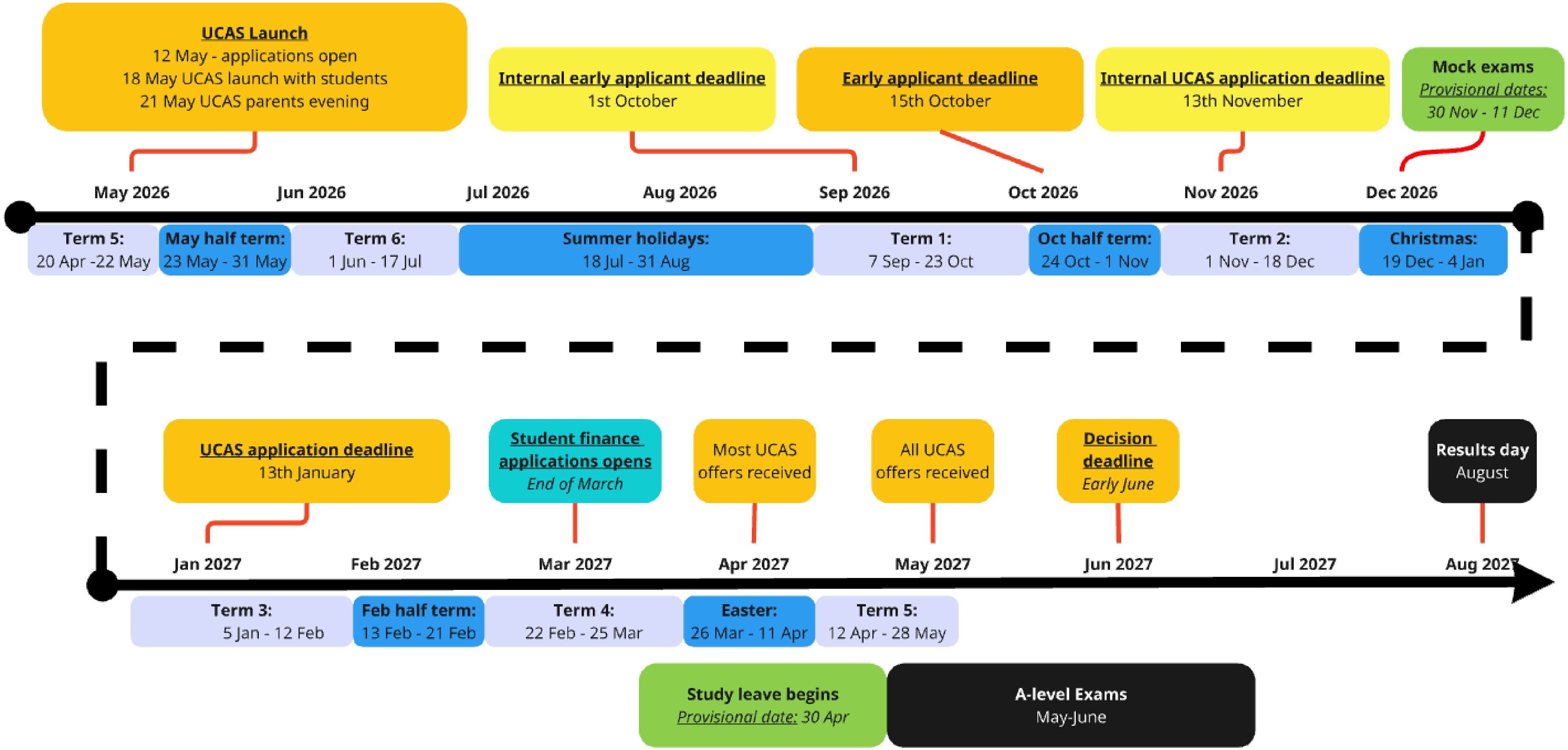
For students starting courses from 2027, interest will be around the rate of inflation (approx 3.2%). This means that the amount owed will increase over time, and many graduates never repay the full balance before its written off.

The loan is written off when the amount is paid, or 40 years after repayments begin, whichever is first. This means that student loans often act as a graduate tax, rather than normal debt.

Useful Resources

- **University league tables:**
  - https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/
  - https://www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide
  - https://www.timeshighereducation.com/
- **UCAS:** https://www.ucas.com/
- **UNIFROG**: https://www.unifrog.org
- **Prospects:** https://www.prospects.ac.uk/
- **Student Finance England**: https://www.gov.uk/student-finance
- **Student Loan Repayments**: https://www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan
- **UCAT Guidance:** https://www.ucat.ac.uk/
- **ESAT UAT UK:** https://esat-tmua.ac.uk/about-the-tests/esat-test/
- **LNAT Guidance:** https://lnat.ac.uk/
- **Choosing a course:** https://www.ucas.com/applying/you-apply/what-and-where-study/choosing-course
- **Guide to Oxbridge application:** https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/advice/oxbridge/the-ultimate-guide-to-the-oxbridge-application-process
- **UCAS Tariff point calculator:** https://www.ucas.com/applying/before-you-apply/what-and-where-to-study/entry-requirements/calculate-your-ucas-tariff-points
- **Personal Statement tips**: https://www.ucas.com/applying/applying-to-university/writing-your-personal-statement/how-to-write-your-personal-statement-for-2026-entry-onwards
- **St. Bede's Catholic College:** We have a range of resources that can help. For example, we have collated a list of example questions for all types of external tests, such as UCAT. Ask Mr Brookin or Ms McNeill for a handout or PDF.

Timeline of Key Dates



Notes

Notes

ST. BEDE'S COLLEGE
IN NOVITATE VITAE

Phone call
0117 3772200

Website
www.stbedescc.org

Email Address
sixthform@stbcc.org

School Address
Long Cross, Lawrence Weston, Bristol, BS 11 0SU