

## UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS: POLICY ON GUIDANCE TO STUDENTS

Last reviewed:	July 2022
Next review due:	July 2024
Reviewed by:	Head of Sixth Form Head of Careers and Higher Education

d'Overbroeck's prides itself on the quality of the guidance that it offers to students in making university applications, and on its students' success in securing places at top-quality tertiary education institutions.

### **1. University applications and continuity of A level study**

We believe that the process of application to university should be regarded as a natural aspect of A level study that complements students' academic work and gives students an additional incentive to perform to the best of their ability throughout their courses. Students and their parents should be aware that no special allowances can or should routinely be made as to expectations regarding academic progress in the Sixth Form simply because of the need to complete university applications.

Candidates for Oxford and Cambridge universities are expected to be of exceptional academic aptitude. As such, they are expected to be capable of completing the slightly more demanding application process without it causing interference with their ordinary A level work.

### **2. The application process**

The vast majority of our students go on to UK universities, applications to which are administered by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The application process is normally completed early in the second year of the Sixth Form (Year 13).

The principal elements of the application under the UCAS regime are the following:

- personal information (name, date of birth, nationality and residence, etc);
- information about previous education, including results in public examinations;
- personal statement by the applicant;
- reference from the school;
- predicted A level grades.

Many UK universities additionally require applicants to sit specific aptitude tests as part of the admissions process, depending on the proposed course of university study.

Applications to non-UK universities may have additional specific requirements.

### **3. Guidance on university applications**

We offer all reasonable assistance to students in the completion of their university applications, including assistance in preparation for aptitude tests of various kinds, and for university interviews.

A student's principal adviser in this regard is his or her Director of Studies. Directors of Studies advise students on university choices and applications, and are responsible for writing students' UCAS references (normally with the aid of comments provided by subject teachers) and for determining predicted grades (again with the assistance of teachers in the subjects studied). Directors of Studies also have primary responsibility for advising students on the drafting of their personal statements, and in general for ensuring that the application is completed in good time.

Students may, and frequently do, seek additional guidance from other teachers who have relevant knowledge and/or experience. This is encouraged as an aspect of the school's culture of informality and commitment to the sharing of expertise. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience that teaching staff can offer, in a range of ways, including:

- advising on specific degree courses;
- advising on additional reading and other research to help students to decide which courses are best suited to them, and to support their applications;
- advising on personal statements;
- offering practice for any interviews required as part of the admissions process.

While staff are generous with their time and expertise in advising students, it is important that students and their parents should appreciate that the degree of assistance that can be given is limited to what is reasonable.

The school provides an extensive range of written guidance on all aspects of university applications, via the Careers and Higher Education Hub on Microsoft Teams. In the interests of efficiency students are expected to avail themselves of this guidance prior to seeking individual support with the specifics of their applications.

### **4. Guidance on personal statements**

A UCAS personal statement is expected to be the applicant's own work: its principal function is to enable the universities' admissions officers to gain an insight into the applicant's enthusiasm and aptitude for the course in question. It follows that the amount of guidance that students may reasonably seek from others in writing such statements is limited. For example:

- teachers may give general advice on content, style, and expression; but it is not appropriate for students to expect (or allow) teachers to write any significant portion of the document;
- it is inappropriate for a student to seek advice from a plurality of teachers simultaneously. Such a practice wastes teachers' time through needless reduplication of effort, and is contrary to the spirit of the principle that the statement should be the applicant's own;
- a teacher shall not be required by a student or his/her parents to give assistance where, in the teacher's judgement, the nature or extent of the assistance sought goes beyond what is reasonable.

## 5. Conditional offers and predicted grades

Most offers of admission to UK universities are ‘conditional offers’ – that is, offers for which there is a condition of acceptance: they can be accepted by the applicant only if the applicant achieves the A level results specified in the offer. Such offers are normally made by universities on the basis of the application viewed as a whole, including the predictions of the student’s likely A level results made by the school and included in the application. It is vital to the operational integrity of the process that such predictions be realistic.

Students should bear in mind at an early stage in their A level courses that their references and predicted grades will be largely determined by their attitude and their academic performance as manifested in the first three or four terms of Sixth Form study. This is especially important in the case of applications to Oxford and Cambridge, for which there is an early (mid-October) application deadline.

A decision as to the predicted grade in any given subject stated in a university application is ultimately a matter for the applicant’s Director of Studies, who will normally reach his or her decision via consultation with subject teachers. It is an abuse of the integrity of the process for a student or his or her parent(s) to put pressure on Directors of Studies or subject teachers to inflate their predictions.

The nature of UCAS predictions is slightly different from those of internal predicted grades. Internal predicted grades are “*a teacher’s best assessment of the grade which a student will receive in A level examinations at the end of the course*”.

The grade that we predict for UCAS, whilst still being realistic, should be *a reflection of the student’s likely performance in their A level on a good day* given all their other strengths and weaknesses.

## 6. Special requirements regarding submitted work

Some universities (Oxford and Cambridge are notable examples) require submission of samples of students’ marked written work in support of applications for some university courses.

The universities in question impose strict requirements on such work: most importantly, it should not have been specially written for, nor corrected for the purpose of, the application. A teacher is required to certify that the conditions have been satisfied.

The purpose of such conditions is clear: the universities wish to make a fair and objective assessment of the current academic attainment of applicants at the time of the application; and they aim to do so without interfering with the applicants’ academic progress, as they would inevitably do if they required submission of a piece of work composed especially for the purposes of the application.

While providing all reasonable assistance to students in their applications, d’Overbroeck’s also supports universities in their aim to ensure an equitable admissions process, and is in any case obliged to comply with the requirements imposed by the universities.

Students and parents are required to respect such constraints on the extent of the assistance that can be offered. They should be aware in particular that:

- staff shall not be obliged or encouraged to make false certifications as to the nature of work submitted in support of applications;
- an attempt on the part of a student to encourage or oblige a teacher to make a false certification shall be regarded as a serious disciplinary matter.

## **7. Oxbridge Admissions Tests**

We will support students with their preparation for these tests, although the nature of Oxbridge admissions tests is such that success cannot be 'taught', rather it depends to a large extent on the skills which the applicants have built up over a number of years. Hence the support that we provide will be in the nature of advising applicants on how better to marshal their current understanding and abilities to meet the needs of the test.

## **8. Responsibilities of Heads of Department**

The role of the HoD in this has two main elements:

- to be aware of the nature of admissions tests for subjects within their field;
- in conjunction with the Head of Oxbridge admissions, work out an appropriate structure for applicants requiring help with these tests to be advised and supported. The level of support that a HoD can provide will vary from case to case:
  - a) In some cases the HoD may be able to supply this support unilaterally.
  - b) Sometimes the nature of the tests may be such that additional expertise is required from inside or outside the organisation.
  - c) In other cases, the HoD may not be in a position to provide support themselves, in which case their role will be to guide applicants to access the support that has been agreed to be available with the Head of Oxbridge applications.

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