



## POST A-LEVEL PATHWAYS GUIDE



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# Introduction

We have written this guide, along with the rest of the Sixth Form team, with the aim of giving our L6 girls some reassurance about their next exciting steps. Whether they are considering a university application, study abroad, a gap year, an apprenticeship, an internship or employment when they leave us, we aim to provide up-to-date advice and guidance to support them in their research and preparation.

The process of choosing a Higher Education course and institution is tremendously exciting, although sometimes bewildering. UCAS lists about 50,000 courses for 2019 in the UK alone. In addition, there are numerous specialist colleges of Art (including Textiles and Fashion), Drama and Music, which do not all employ the UCAS route of application, and nor do applications for overseas universities. Careful preparation is needed if students are to find the right course for them at the right institution.

We hope this guide will provide both students and parents with comprehensive information to help guide them through their chosen Post A-Level Pathway. We use a number of SCOPE sessions over the course of the Spring Term to encourage the girls to start thinking about this process and all of the opportunities available to them. In addition, we have invested in BridgeU, an online platform to make the application process as interactive and thorough as possible. Subsequent to the sessions which will take place in the Spring Term, the next steps in the process will take place during L6 Activities Week i.e. after internal and AS examinations, during which the girls will receive expert guidance on personal statement writing and will have the opportunity to visit some universities for themselves. We look forward to working with the girls as they make exciting decisions over the next few months.



Mr Carl Gladwell  
Acting Head of Sixth Form



Mrs Jacki Deakin  
Director of Studies

# Who's Who?

A guide to the team who can best guide and advise you on your chosen pathway as you prepare for life after St Cats.



**Mr Carl Gladwell** – Acting Head of Sixth Form (from November 2018), Post Qualification Application (PQA) Coordinator and UCAS Administrator. Mr Gladwell supports all girls applying to university during their gap year. Contact: [carl.gladwell@stcatherines.info](mailto:carl.gladwell@stcatherines.info)



**Mrs Kate Hawtin** – Head of Sixth Form (currently on maternity leave) and overall UCAS Coordinator with overseas university application specialism. Contact: [kate.hawtin@stcatherines.info](mailto:kate.hawtin@stcatherines.info)



**Mrs Susan Weighell** – Director of Careers Education. Contact: [susan.weighell@stcatherines.info](mailto:susan.weighell@stcatherines.info)



**Mrs Jacki Deakin** – Director of Studies and UCAS Administrator. Contact: [jacki.deakin@stcatherines.info](mailto:jacki.deakin@stcatherines.info)



**Dr Elodie Nevin** – Oxbridge Coordinator (Arts & Humanities). Contact: [elodie.nevin@stcatherines.info](mailto:elodie.nevin@stcatherines.info)



**Mrs Claerwen Patterson** – Oxbridge (Sciences) and Medicine Applications Coordinator. Contact: [claerwen.patterson@stcatherines.info](mailto:claerwen.patterson@stcatherines.info)

The Sixth Form Tutor team also act as UCAS Advisors. Other colleagues on the Oxbridge team are Mr Worthen, Mrs Ashby, Dr Taylor, Dr Puech and Mr Nguyen.

# UCAS – THE BASICS

## Choosing the time to apply

Applications to *five*\* universities of your choice can be made either for 2021, for 2022 (deferred) or (2022 by Post Qualification Application) via the UCAS website. For 2021 entry, we ask girls to submit their application by Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020 (before Autumn Half-Term) at the latest (N.B. see details further on for Medical/VetMed/Dentistry/Oxbridge). We will then guarantee sending the UCAS form by half-term. Advice on the best option for each student will be readily available from the Director of Studies, Head of Sixth Form, Sixth Form Tutors and the Head of Careers. Clearly there are many complex issues here and each girl must select the right option for her.

\*Applications are made to 4 Medical/VetMed/Dentistry schools and applicants may also add a fifth choice for a different course.

## Personal Statement – a key part of the UCAS application

This is your opportunity to demonstrate the thought and consideration that has gone into your choices and to give a flavour of who you are – personality, strengths, skills, hobbies and interests.

In order to make sure that you cover all aspects, construct your statement through key paragraphs – keeping each short and succinct. Begin with bullet points and build it up. Don't start by writing it in full, as the process of cutting back is much harder! It will probably take several attempts to convey all that you'd like to say. Remember that your personal statement will be seen by each of your five choices, so don't make it specific to one institution, or you could alienate the others. Some universities, depending on the course, may offer the opportunity to send an additional statement which must be closely linked to that particular course.

Please note that the Personal Statement should follow the 80:20 rule - 80% of the statement should express a candidate's interest in their chosen course, and their suitability as a candidate, with 20% (definitely less for Oxbridge) on other interests and the transferable skills gained from them. The girls will attend a "How to write your Personal Statement" session from a University Admissions Tutor during Activities Week and will be asked to begin their first draft immediately after the session. Girls will then be expected to complete their first draft over the summer holidays and have it ready to show their tutor at the very start of the Autumn Term.

## Open Days

It is important to visit the universities to meet the academic staff, current students, and to see the facilities on offer. Lower Sixth Activities Week dedicates three days for you to attend Open Days (Weds to Fri) and you are also permitted to take two days out of school for individual university visits once you have completed a University Visit form that has been signed off by your teachers and the Head of Sixth Form. You can also make private visits to universities if an Open Day date does not suit your schedule. Simply telephone the relevant university department and arrange to visit. Many universities offer Saturday Open Days so that parents/guardians can attend too.

## Interviews

If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge, or Medicine, Veterinary Medicine or Dentistry, you will be required to work to the **earlier application deadline** of 1<sup>st</sup> October and an offer of a place will be subject to successful admissions tests (for some subjects) and a successful interview. This may also be the case with some other courses (e.g. some Maths related courses at Imperial College) at other institutions so do check carefully. In addition, any Cambridge applicant will be required to complete a Supplementary Questionnaire (SAQ), provided by the university. Some Medical/VetMED/Dentistry schools will also ask you to complete further forms once your UCAS application has been submitted. If you are called for an interview, then this permission will be granted in addition to your open day visit provision. Please note that you had the opportunity in your UCAS form to enter dates for which you are unavailable. Please note that if an interview clashes with a major school commitment, you should raise this immediately with the Director of Studies or Head of Sixth Form, who will help you to resolve it. Admissions tutors are very understanding and recognise that their potential undergraduates are committed young people! Practice interviews are arranged via the Oxbridge Co-ordinators and/or the relevant Head of Department. In some cases we are able to arrange interview "swaps" with other local schools and bring in appropriately qualified and experienced professionals to assist with this process

Should you be applying for another course where you may be called for interview, then you should make staff aware of this sooner rather than later so that we have time in which to arrange appropriate interview practice e.g. Physiotherapy, some Sports Science courses.

# Medicine Courses

Obviously, the choice of a medical, veterinary or dentistry course is not a last-minute decision, and the process of guiding students will start early on. The information below gives a timeline in order to explain the various stages of the process. However, the way in which applications are assessed, and the different weightings given to academic results, Personal Statement, Work Experience and Personal Attributes and Information vary considerably from university to university. Therefore, any Medical/VetMed/Dentistry application must be very strategic, and courses must be thoroughly researched to ensure that the methods of assessment for any particular course play to the applicant's strengths.

## Upper Five Autumn Term



### 1-2-1 interviews for AS options

All U5 girls have a 1-2-1 interview with a senior member of staff. Any girl considering med/vet/dentistry must study Chemistry (absolutely required) and Biology (almost always required). The choice of other subjects is less important and different courses/med schools will have a different take on this.

### Oxbridge Tutes – ongoing throughout U5-U6

Students should explore what a medical career might involve and gain a flavour of the type of questions asked in the tests required by medical schools, in sessions which take place within the 'Oxbridge Tutes' program. Girls should continue to attend these throughout U5-U6.

### Oxbridge and Med/Vet/Dentistry talk

Towards the end of the Autumn Term in U5 the members of staff i/c of the Oxbridge and Medics/Vets/Dentists preparation program address the girls and explain what is required, particularly in terms of the GCSE portfolio i.e. a high number of 8/9) grades, to support a successful Med/Vet/Dentistry and/or Oxbridge application.

## Lower Sixth Autumn Term



### Academic work

The aim throughout the L6 must be to ensure that very high grades are secured as an application will not be successful without a very strong academic background.

### Work experience

Where possible the planned work experience (Autumn Term, prior to half-term) should be in a medical field. The school is also able to supply contact information for girls to be involved in regular volunteering (if they are not already involved in something suitable via the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme) e.g. feeding program at Royal Surrey Hospital.

### Medical Reading Club

Takes place Monday lunchtimes in the speech hall library. Discussion of relevant books/articles/issues important for medical applicants

### Medical Society

Regular meetings take place from the Summer term onwards, on alternate Tuesday afternoons, in in Lab 7 from 4:30-5:30pm. Girls wishing to study Medicine, or medical related subjects, should attend these sessions.

## Lower Sixth continued...



### SUMMER TERM Post AS Biology

#### The BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) preparation

Weekly sessions take place with Mr Canales-Navarrete to help them to prepare for the BMAT examination (should they choose to sit it). The day and time will be arranged to fit in with timetables. In addition, girls need to practise the skills required for all 3 papers and should seek subject specific assistance from the Heads of Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Maths, as appropriate. They are required to write one essay per week, including 2 essays over the summer holiday, to practise the skills required for Paper 3.

In Summer 2017, the Cambridge admissions board decided to introduce an alternative testing day for candidates wishing to sit BMAT, however, this is not applicable for candidates applying to Oxbridge who must take the Autumn sitting on Wednesday 4 November 2020 note this is unusually NOT during the Autumn Half Term break. Please discuss your options carefully with your mentor. The alternative testing day is designed to allow candidates who wish to know their results before deciding to apply for medical schools requiring BMAT.

Whilst it may appear to be an attractive proposition to "get it over and done with" and to have results to hand before the deadline for UCAS applications to medical schools and therefore to have a good idea about whether or not the score is good enough to make it worthwhile applying to medical schools which require BMAT, there are some other very important issues of which applicants should be fully aware. Please note that VetMed students are no longer required to sit BMAT for any Vet school.

- Firstly, not all universities - including Oxford, for example - accept the alternative, summer date.
- Candidates are only allowed to sit BMAT once per academic year so there is no case of "having a go" and then "having another go" in order to try to improve on the previous score.
- Moreover, the early BMAT is not taken at school but is offered at a relatively small number of independent centres.
- Our extensive experience informs us that many candidates find it difficult to get down to the preparation independently over the summer holiday and rely heavily on the preparation provided at school. Whilst we would offer support to every applicant it would be very difficult to fit in the necessary preparation prior to the end of the Summer Term.

It is therefore our very strong recommendation that our girls choose the November sitting. The girls would be taking the November BMAT at the same time as all other girls sitting tests for entry to Oxford and Cambridge and we have found that girls are encouraged and inspired by the collegiate approach and the sense of all being "in it together".

As always, we are willing to discuss this further on a case by case basis should a candidate wish to consider the earlier option, but it is our perspective that there is not a compelling argument for the earlier sitting. Our girls are well known to us and our success rate with our Medical School applicants is testament to our ability to guide them towards the right courses for them.

<https://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat/bmat-october/>

#### The University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) preparation

Preparations also begin for the UCAT: girls are directed to resources, which they use to help them practise the questions over the summer holidays. Opportunities sometimes arise for further training and we will make girls aware of them as they occur.

<https://www.ucat.ac.uk/>

## Upper Sixth Autumn Term



### Beginning of Autumn Term:

Girls have further opportunities to discuss their particular choice of medical schools which may have changed in the light of any AS results /or whether or not they will still need to sit BMAT.

Entries for BMAT confirmed (date TBC by the Exams Officer)

Girls sit a mock examination for BMAT (date TBC)

Entries for BMAT confirmed

### Approximately 2 weeks before half term:

Girls sit a further BMAT practice exam.

**Wednesday 4 November 2020**

The BMAT exam takes place in school under public exam conditions.

### Interview practice:

The students have a minimum of three main sessions of interview practice:

1. An initial session to discuss choices of universities and to introduce the types of questions asked, with an experienced member of the medical profession
2. An MMI and situational judgement session
3. Individual interviews with a GP and lay person (joint with Charterhouse school)

In addition, the applicants should make appointments with members of the Biology department for interview practice before each of their interviews.

Further information can be found on the BMAT and UCAT websites:

<http://www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/bmat/>

<https://www.ucat.ac.uk/>

# UCAS Preparation – Key Dates

 = Particular guidance for those wishing to study Medicine, Veterinary, Dentistry courses

## SPRING TERM 2020



UCAS preparation is delivered through our SCOPE program

1. Visits from Universities' representatives (previous guests have included University of Surrey Recruitment Representatives, St Andrew's Schools Liaison Officers) start the ball rolling.
2. Students start their personal research into possible Higher Education courses and Universities, plus gap year opportunities if appropriate. We provide the girls with an online platform, BridgeU, which can help them to select possible courses.
3. Students can organise individual consultations as required with members of the Post A-Level Pathways team (see Who's Who – Page 3).
4. Girls should start to complete their "UCAS log". This is an ongoing document detailing steps they have taken to prepare for their application, such as extra reading, relevant work experience, attendance at discussion groups etc.

## SUMMER TERM 2020



**Open days** – students start to attend university Open Days. Lower Sixth Activities Week dedicates some time for students to attend Open Days.

**Lower Sixth Activities Week** also includes visits from external speakers on the topic of Higher Education, training in writing the personal statement, with girls submitting their first draft. and complete UCAS applications:

- Personal details
- Additional information
- Education
- Employment
- Student Finance
- Begin personal statement
- Begin choosing courses

The Sixth Form essay competition is launched, and girls should ensure that they have a meeting with their relevant HoD before the end of term.

 Students wishing to study **Medicine** are invited to practise BMAT with the Medical School Application Coordinator.

## AUTUMN TERM 2020



**1<sup>st</sup> September:** UCAS applications officially open. By **Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> September**, we expect that girls will have

- Researched what to study and where and visited most of their preferred universities
- Checked the entry requirements for their preferred courses including GCSE results in Maths/English
- Written a final, completed version of their Personal Statement
- Begun to add Choices to their UCAS application and to have completed further relevant work experience, if required/necessary
- Furthered their preparations for any Entrance Tests (Oxbridge/Med/Vet etc.), and hand in any work set over the summer holidays

Week commencing **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September:**

We will release UCAS grades to the girls although they will already have a very good idea of their grades on the basis on any AS results and internal exam results  
**Second Thursday of Autumn Term: UCAS Evening (Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020)**  
Girls and parents have an individual appointment with the tutor so that they can discuss the UCAS grades and any adjustments to chosen courses in the light of these grades. *Parents, please put this date in your diary now.* The Post A-Level Pathways team are also on hand to lend guidance and support to both students and parents at this evening. If necessary, follow-up appointments can be made with them after this evening.

 **1<sup>st</sup> October:** deadline date for Oxbridge and all other **Medical, Veterinary and Dental** forms to be submitted internally.

SCOPE sessions allow time for students to complete their UCAS application forms and to finalise drafts of their personal statements via BridgeU.

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October:** We guarantee to process any UCAS forms submitted internally by this date so that they will be sent by half term.

We advise that **all** UCAS applications be made before half term.

## SPRING TERM 2021



**UCAS closes 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021 (TBC)**  
Interviews and offers continue

**N.B.** Medical / Veterinary School offers typically do not come out until very late, often the end of March, despite much earlier interview dates.

Similarly, some universities, including Durham and St. Andrews are typically late in making offers.

## SUMMER TERM 2021



Early May 2021: (Date TBC)  
deadline for making Firm and Insurance UCAS decisions, if all offers received by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

**\*\*\*Examination results\*\*\***

As yet the dates for publication of CAIE Examination Board results have not been published (English and Biology).

All other examination board results are released from 0700 hours on **Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021 (TBC).**

Offers which are met are taken up, students who fail to meet offers may enter Clearing, but any student may withdraw from UCAS at this stage and reapply in the following year. Staff are on hand to support any student for whom results have not gone to plan or who subsequently change their mind.

Students interested in applying to Oxbridge will almost certainly be required to complete either a pre-interview assessment, or an at-interview assessment. In order to sit a pre-interview assessment, you will need to inform the School's Exams Officer that you wish to register, in accordance with the deadlines specified.

Further information on the admissions tests currently required by Oxford and Cambridge can be found on the Oxford and Cambridge University websites:

**Oxford University Admissions Tests:**

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests?wssl=1>

**Cambridge University Admissions Tests:**

<http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/admission-assessments>

**UPPER FIFTH  
AUTUMN TERM  
2019**



Oxbridge talk to all U5. Introduces the girls to the courses and requirements.

Potential Oxbridge students are encouraged to speak to their teachers or HoD about extra reading relevant to their possible area of study.

**LOWER SIXTH  
AUTUMN TERM  
2019**



The UCAS Log is introduced (to all L6) as the place for girls to record their academic and extra-curricular achievements as well as extra reading, attendance at Dialogue and other relevant discussion groups and work experience. This is an opportunity for potential Oxbridge students to demonstrate their academic commitment.

**LOWER SIXTH  
SPRING TERM  
2020**



Talk to all L6 before the internal examinations to remind girls about the courses available and to plan for Open Days at Oxbridge and sign up for the Oxbridge Preparation Day.

Girls organise meetings with the HoD, for their chosen study area, to discuss their UCAS preparation Log.

**LOWER SIXTH  
SUMMER TERM  
2020**



**(POST AS LEVEL/INTERNAL EXAMINATIONS)**

Girls meet with their Oxbridge Mentors and discuss further extension work (e.g. the Sixth Form essay competition), entrance tests, their personal statement and material relevant to their reference.

**Oxbridge Preparation Day**  
This takes place during activities week. Potential candidates hear more about the application process and have practice interview sessions with an external company.

Over the summer holidays, they should be working on their personal statement and practising entrance exam questions.

**UPPER SIXTH  
AUTUMN TERM  
2020**



Hand in Sixth Form essay.

Finalise personal statement with Mentor and UCAS application by end of September.

Attend practice sessions for entrance papers.

Prepare presentation on Sixth Form Essay, dates of presentations TBC

Sit entrance exams (end of October/ beginning of November).

**After half term**

Results at end of November.

Attend Oxbridge Teas to practise interview technique

Organise further interview practice with Mentor/other people recommended by a Mentor.

Interviews at beginning of December/mid-December for selected candidates.

# Additional Tests

A number of university courses, not just Oxbridge, require an additional test to be taken by applicants. Deadlines for these tests vary and applicants are advised to research thoroughly whether their chosen course or university requires the test to be taken. The list below is up to date at the time of printing of this booklet, but it is possible that further tests will be added in the near future. It is **therefore important to check entrance requirements for all courses.**

## **BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT)**

For entry to Medical Schools. Please note that Veterinary Schools do NOT require applicants to sit the BMAT.

## **Health Professions Admissions Test (HPAT)**

For entry to certain medical courses at the University of Ulster and the Republic of Ireland Medical Courses.

## **The National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT)**

For entry to Law.

## **Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) UCL**

For entry to European Social and Political Studies at University College London (UCL).

**University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT)** For entry to Medical and Dental Schools.

# Applying for University Overseas

The team has experience of supporting girls making applications to universities in the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Australia and Europe. Mr Gladwell is currently assisting with overseas applications. In the absence of UCAS for this process, the girls inevitably need to be as proactive as possible in organising their own application and seeking support. We have seen an understandable growth in applicants to US universities in recent years and we are happy to give advice on SATs and personal essays, as well as providing all of the necessary school data and references via the Common App. For a useful timeline with regards to US applications, and lots of other useful advice, please visit the website of the Fulbright Commission: <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/study-in-the-usa/undergraduate-study/getting-started/application-timeline/august-september-admissions>

Given that Brexit has now happened, applicants will need to look carefully at sources of funding, entry requirements and any possible visa requirements.

# Applying for Art Foundation courses

(Art/Textiles/Photography)

For those wishing to apply for Art Foundation Courses, this is done directly through the university or college website and can be made in addition to UCAS application for other courses. Students may apply for as many Foundation Courses as they like, but we usually recommend Kingston, Farnham, Falmouth and Central Saint Martins.

The foundation course is free for those students who are aged 19 at the end of the course.

Initially, students should apply around the end of October. The sooner the application is in, the better. For all Foundation applications, a portfolio of work is needed. More detail on this can be found in the Art Departments i-book on 'University Portfolio Guidance'. The portfolio should be started at the beginning of the U6 year and the Art Department hosts a regular clinic for all students wishing to apply to Art College. The Art Department will advise on which pieces of work to put into the portfolio and how best to present the work to the student's advantage. Some colleges prefer a physical portfolio, while other require an online version. The Art Department will help students prepare both of these.

Once a portfolio has been put together, the Art Department will run mock interviews with candidates before each college interview to help prepare students for the day. After each portfolio presentation, students will receive a debrief where they discuss what was asked and how the day ran. This helps the Art Department to prepare and advise future students with the interview process.

For those students wishing to apply to Art College, it is recommended that they complete work outside and addition to the A Level course. Example include attending workshops over Easter or Summer holidays, attending life drawing classes or just creating their own projects which show the depth and passion they have for the subject. It is important to show a range of skills and students from Fine Art, should consider including some Photography in a project to show their breadth of talents.

For more information please see Mr Perry-Adlam in the Art Department or download the Art Department i-book 'University Portfolio Guidance'.

# Applying to Drama School

## Why?

Pursuing a degree in performance will not only sharpen your acting skills and cement your love of theatre but will place you in a firmly established drama community where you will be able to take your first steps towards a career as a professional actor.

Drama school will give you incredible creative stimulation; collaborating with professionals and fellow students alike. Honing a wide range of skills such as playwriting, playing an instrument, singing, dancing, as well as acting will give you a strong foundation for a flourishing career.

## How?

Applying to Drama School can be done through UCAS or to the institution directly. Each of the 21 Drama Schools run very different courses, have a distinct reputation and have different application procedures, so research is key to finding a place that's right for you. The information on each school can be found here:

<http://www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk/>

As it is not possible for you to apply to every Drama school, you should first research those that institutions which specialise in your areas of interest (Classical Acting, Acting for Film, Devised Drama, Musical Theatre etc.) and then select approximately 5-8 to which you will apply.

<b>UCAS</b>	<b>Apply direct</b>
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama	RADA
LIPA (also has a separate form)	LAMDA
Guildford School of Acting	ArtsEd
Drama Centre	Bristol Old Vic
East 15	Cygnets Actor Training
Birmingham School of Acting	Guildhall
Manchester Metropolitan School of Theatre	Mountview
Italia Conti	Oxford School of Drama
Rose Bruford	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (apply through CUCAS)
	Royal Welsh Academy (apply through CUCAS)

## When?

### June-March

1. Check dates for the open days of the above colleges and ensure you book as they fill up quickly. Check audition requirements for each school you intend to apply for and make an action plan with timings for each audition.
2. Start sourcing monologues. The Drama department can help you with this. To cover all bases, you should prepare at least 2 classical and 2 contemporary pieces as well as a song or a dance.
3. Fill out relevant application forms available on each school's website.

4. If applying through UCAS, create a drama focused personal statement – again the Drama department and tutor can assist with this.

5. Early applications can be beneficial. Aim for well before the UCAS deadline.

6. Auditions take place as early as October and as late as March. If successful, you will be asked to attend as many as 4 recall auditions. (There is a cost involved in the audition process – usually £45-65).

7. Check emails regularly for audition information.

**Remember!**

Very few students are successful when applying straight from 6<sup>th</sup> form. On average schools offer one place to every 50 applicants so you must have a back-up plan!

There are many very highly regarded University Drama degree courses which may offer you more scope for career development and exploration of the subject as a whole.

# Applying to Conservatoire and Music College Applications

As well as studying Music at University, you may choose to study performance at Music College or Conservatoire. Here, the focus is on developing performance alongside other skills, including academic, that are necessary to equip young artists with the means to flourish in a competitive industry. The UK conservatoires enjoy a high international reputation. In a conservatoire environment you will be immersed in a large group of fellow musicians who share the same passions, ambitions and talents unique to the sector and it is a place where professional relationships are created.

Entries are judged on clear evidence of performing ability during a practical audition (a portfolio submission will be taken if your chosen course is composition). This may follow the format of a free-choice programme of 10-15 minutes with one work being an original composition for the instrument. You should expect to be asked to play scales, arpeggios, etc to ABRSM Grade 8 standard and you may be given sight reading or quick study tests. You will also be interviewed, as the panel wants to form a full picture of you as a musician.

Conservatoires for undergraduate Music courses include:

- Royal Birmingham Conservatoire
- Leeds College of Music
- Royal Academy of Music
- Royal College of Music
- Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
- Royal Northern College of Music
- Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
- Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

Each offer a range of different courses, depending on your preferred musical focus.

## **University or Conservatoire: how to decide**

Deciding between university and conservatoire can often feel impossible! The choice entirely depends on the individual and there is no hard and fast rule that says that one type should go to university, and another should go to music college. Both institutions can lead to a Bachelor's degree.

A good rule of thumb to follow is that if your interests are entirely focused on performance and you are passionate about pursuing your development on your instrument, then conservatoire is most likely to be your best option. If your main interest is more academic (history, analysis, criticism, harmony and counterpoint, philosophy and psychology of performing arts) then a university course may suit you better. All of these disciplines are also taught at conservatoire, but the focus is on practical and vocational performance with academic study providing an important underpinning. If you cannot make your mind up, a university course is likely to suit you better as you can choose to specialise in performance at university and study at a conservatoire at Masters level.

# Applying for Choral and Organ Scholarships

## Choral Scholarships

Choral scholarships are awarded to talented singers who wish to develop their choral singing whilst at University. Traditionally, the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge award choral scholarships, although other universities offer awards as well.

If you are a choral scholar, you will traditionally sing in the chapel choir of your college. This includes singing for services and concerts, as well as undertaking tours and making CD recordings. The commitments vary from college to college, some choirs being more active than others. Some sing a service every day, other chapel choirs three or four times a week, whilst others only sing one service a week. Many choirs are professionally directed, and others are led by the college organ scholars. Each institution has its own expectation of its choral scholars, so it is important to do your research beforehand!

Scholarships carry an annual financial reward, the amount varying from college to college. In addition, many choral scholars receive funding for singing lessons.

You do not have to be studying Music to apply for a choral scholarship. However, it is worth noting that if you are applying for a scholarship at Oxford or Cambridge, you do have to be in the college of your chosen chapel choir. Therefore, before you apply for an audition, you must check that the college offers places to read your chosen subject. Also, you cannot apply for a choral scholarship at both Oxford and Cambridge.

There is often an open day for those considering a choral scholarship around late April/early May which provides an opportunity to meet the Directors of Music and to hear different choirs sing.

Different universities have different application processes. For Oxford choral scholarships, you must submit an online application form and a reference by 1st September in the same year that you are submitting your academic application. Academic applicants to Cambridge who receive an offer will be asked if they wish to apply for a choral award. Those interested must submit their application in February and the auditions will be in March. For those of you interested in Choral Awards at Cambridge, there are Vocal Assessment days in late September/early October where you can sing to different Directors of Music who will give you advice as to which choir you should apply to based on your voice.

## Organ Scholarships

Organists who wish to develop their skills throughout their tenure at University should consider an organ scholarship. As an organ scholar, you will be appointed by a college to play the organ for chapel services and to direct or assist in the work of the choir. For some choirs, you will effectively be the director of chapel music; in others you will be the assistant to a professional director of music.

The position is unique for those wanting to engage in music-making at the highest level. It offers invaluable training and experience for musicians. A chapel experience is extremely rich and diverse:

as well as regular services, the role offers the chance for external activities such as tours and CD recordings.

It is expected that candidates applying for any organ scholarship will have reached a standard roughly equivalent to Grade 8. (However, there are some colleges that expect a higher standard of approaching a diploma.)

Your duties will vary from college to college. As well playing for services, most positions will also expect you to work with the choir. Some will also involve a modest level of administrative work and some colleges you will be expected to act a general organiser of musical activities. Each college will stipulate what it expects from its organ scholar, so do your research!

The monetary value varies from college to college. There is a possibility to augment this by playing for additional services such as weddings, memorial services, etc. A lot of colleges provide funding for organ lessons and/or conducting lessons.

Organ scholars can read any course offered at the University. However, you must take care to check that your chosen college offers to read your chosen subject; some colleges place restrictions on which courses their organ scholars can read (often owing to time and teaching constraints) so it is worth checking this carefully.

Organ scholarships applicants may apply to both Oxford and Cambridge (except if you are applying for Medicine; joint applicants for Engineering, Law or Modern Languages may not put Oxford as first choice). The deadline for both Oxford and Cambridge applications is 1st September, so let us know in good time so that we can provide your references. You will have needed to have registered with UCAS and have your UCAS Personal ID number, and you will be expected to submit a draft version of your UCAS Personal Statement as part of your application. Once the outcome of your application has been announced, you will be required to complete a UCAS application.

Information on what the audition will involve can be found on the relevant websites.

# Money Matters

The two main costs associated with full-time higher education are the tuition fees and the living expenses. Tuition Fee costs are covered for most students in the form of a loan, and the maintenance loan will contribute to living expenses; both loans will be liable for repayment when earnings exceed a minimum level (currently £25,000).

UCAS currently charge approximately £25 for processing applications; you have the option to pay this yourself when you submit your UCAS form (please note that it does not actually get sent at this time, it goes to staff for checking and references) or it can be added to your termly bill.

The decision of what to do after leaving school is likely, for many students, to set the pattern for a number of years to come. The challenge of making the right choices falls largely on their shoulders and the key to success is being well informed. This is particularly true for financial arrangements.

More information on student finance can be found on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website. [The Student Loans Company](#) also offer loans and grants to students studying living and studying in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

## Working Whilst Studying

Many students supplement their income by working part-time around their studies. [StudentJob](#) act as an online agent to bring students into direct contact with employers of interesting companies looking for temporary staff, part or full-time - whichever suits you.

University Student Support departments and Student Unions also regularly post job advertisements on behalf of local employers looking for temporary, casual workers.

# Degree and Higher Apprenticeships

Degree and Higher Apprenticeships are relatively new pathways and the number of options are increasing. Amongst employers they are highly regarded and offer good Career progression possibilities.

A Degree Apprenticeship enables you to gain a degree whilst working for an organisation. The organisation will be partnered with a university, usually local. EG Goldman Sachs offer a Computer Science degree apprenticeship in partnership with Queen Mary University of London and BMW Mini at Oxford provide an engineering degree apprenticeship in partnership with Oxford Brooks University. Higher Apprenticeships offer post A level training and a qualification equivalent to a Foundation Degree and often enable individuals to work towards Professional qualifications.

The duration of a degree apprenticeship will typically be 4 or 5 years. Students gain valuable work experience, earn a salary, and graduate debt free.

The majority of degree and higher apprenticeships are in disciplines with skill shortages such as Computer Science, and Engineering however the numbers in areas such as Accountancy and other business disciplines is growing.

Contact Mrs Weighell if you wish to explore this option further.

## **Examples:**

PWC Flying Start School Leavers : <https://www.pwc.co.uk/careers/school-jobs/jobs.html>

EY: <http://ukcareers.ey.com/schools/our-programmes/the-ey-business-apprenticeship>

Unilever: <https://www.unilever.co.uk/careers/apprenticeships/>

Goldman Sachs: <http://www.goldmansachs.com/careers/students/programs/emea/technology-apprentices.html>

IBM: [https://www-05.ibm.com/employment/uk-en/school\\_leaver.html](https://www-05.ibm.com/employment/uk-en/school_leaver.html)

Useful websites:

<https://www.ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk/>

<https://www.allaboutschoolleavers.co.uk/school-leaver-options>

# GAP Year

Gap years provide the opportunity to travel and explore parts of the country or indeed the world before Higher Education study. They can also enhance your CV, help you to learn new skills, and much more. Many organisations can help you tailor your Gap year to what you want to achieve. Year Out Group provide a complete reference and resource for all you need to make the most of your time out from school, university or work. Below is a small selection of the organisations Year Out Group work with to provide Gap year placements.

The school offers a number of financial awards to support gap year travels via the Association (contact details below).



<http://www.yearoutgroup.org/>

## St Catherine's Association

With an extensive network of over 6,000 members worldwide, the St Catherine's Association team can put you in touch with other members to share and discuss information about universities and careers, work experience and placements. Some members provide invaluable guidance at key career stages. The Association team are committed to helping St Catherine's alumnae in their career development and every year support many of them by making connections to other alumnae and parents working across a plethora of professions. For further information, please contact [association@stcatherine's.info](mailto:association@stcatherine's.info).



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Why do we take some AS exams when many schools do not?**

In our experience, AS grades are a good predictor of outcomes at A Level and this is one of the reasons why we have continued to offer this examination. For some subjects, in particular, for Biology and English, examined by CAIE, the AS results still “count” as 50% of the final A Level result and it is a big advantage to “bank” a good result in L6th. Other subjects are new at 6<sup>th</sup> form and those Heads of Departments believe that taking the AS examination gives an important opportunity to practise a new type of examination.

The AS results are certificated i.e. they are standalone exams which give you something meaningful to show for your year of study in L6th.

Many of our students receive their UCAS offers within days of submitting their UCAS applications. Most universities no longer consider AS grades, so you are not disadvantaged if your AS grade/s is/are a little lower than you had hoped.

## **Why are we offered 4 subjects in Lower Sixth when universities ask for 3 A Levels only?**

As a School, we believe in stretching our students but there are opportunities to drop the 4<sup>th</sup> subject during the course of L6th year if you become overwhelmed.

In addition, many of you find it hard to pin down 4 subjects let alone 3. We want to give you space so that if you make the wrong decision about a subject it is not a disaster.

## **Why can't we take EPQ instead of fourth AS?**

We continue to review our Sixth Form curriculum and whilst there are many strengths to EPQ it does not necessarily allow the breadth or depth to the curriculum that we wish to offer.

## **How does the School decide on my UCAS grades?**

Your internal examination results and any AS result/s will form the basis of UCAS grades. The Director of Studies asks the Heads of Departments to consult with the members of their departments who know you well, and have taught you, to give UCAS grades “downhill in a tailwind” i.e. hoping that all goes well throughout the next year and that you maintain consistently good efforts throughout the year.

## **What if I was ill during L6th, or did not take all of my AS exams?**

For the very small number of girls who may not have taken all of their AS exams, we will base our UCAS grades on internal examinations and apply the same “downhill in a tailwind” approach. Girls who were unable to take some or indeed any AS examinations have not been disadvantaged in any way and have received excellent university offers along with their peers.

### **What is written on the School's reference?**

Your subject teachers comment on your ability, efforts and performance in their subject and make their points relevant to your chosen course. We write only positive things about you!

### **How can the School help with my application if I have been ill or underperformed?**

Our references are always positive. If you have been ill we allude to this in the reference and explain how your illness might have affected your performance and we are clear about what we would have expected had you been in good health.

If you have underperformed, then we will look at the reasons why this might have been the case. We always try to work with you to ensure a successful application.

In some cases, it would be sensible to make a Post Qualification Application i.e. to take a gap year and apply to university when your grades are known.

### **Why are the grade requirements for so many courses so high?**

In 2015/16 the "cap" on university offers was lifted and this meant that the universities could offer as many places as they liked. So, there is no risk to the university in making high offers as realistically they will still need to limit their numbers in order to fit the students into Lecture Theatres, find them accommodation and so on. The reality is that many students across the nation with high offers will not make their grades, however, we know from many previous years of experience, that if your UCAS grades match the entry requirements for a particular course/university then you are quite likely to receive an offer. Please note that this *not* the case for very competitive courses such as Medicine, Veterinary Medicine or for applications to universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, LSE and UCL.

We are also aware that should a girl just "miss" her grade offer in her A Level exams by one (or even on rare occasions, two grades) there is still a good chance that she will be accepted onto her course.

### **I am unhappy with my UCAS grades what do I do?**

We will give you time to demonstrate that you are capable of working at a higher level and may be willing, after sustained improvements and additional assessments, to raise your UCAS grade/s. But we will also decline to submit your UCAS form unless you have also included a realistic insurance offer, as you could be left without a place to go in the following autumn if you cannot raise your performance to meet the grade requirements.

We would also discuss the possibility of applying PQA (Post Qualification Application) which means that you will need to take a gap year and apply once you have the outcomes of your A Levels.

Alternatively, you may be able to get onto a course that you like via Clearing but this is riskier as you cannot guarantee that certain courses will be available.

### **Are my I/GCSE results important?**

This is a good question! Some courses will demand certain minimum grades in Maths and English and you should look carefully at entry requirements for your chosen courses to ensure that you meet the threshold.

I/GCSE results are very important for Oxbridge, Medical/VetMed/Dentistry applications and for universities such as Durham where students can be rejected for over-subscribed courses on the basis of I/GCSE results. In the past successful Oxbridge applicants have had an absolute minimum of 6 A\* grades (for less competitive courses) and 8 or more A\* grades for very competitive courses. In the light of changes, we would anticipate that students applying for Oxbridge, Medicine etc. would have grades 7 and higher. In general, most universities consider that I/GCSE outcomes are more useful than UCAS grades for your A Levels.