



The Ultimate Guide to Studying in the UK



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Overview

Oxford. Cambridge. UCL. Durham. Edinburgh. These are just some of the prestigious names that might spring to mind when contemplating a degree at a UK university.

The UK is one of the most popular destinations for international students, and with good reason. The UK's global reputation for higher education continues to be outstanding and this is reflected in its university rankings. For example, the UK currently has 3 universities in the global top 10, as well as over 30 universities in the top 200.

A degree from a UK university is recognised by employers globally, and is one of the reasons why it continues to be a highly sought after destination for international students. The UK also boasts a diverse range of universities, offering both quiet campuses and bustling cities.

In addition, the majority of UK universities report student satisfaction rates of 80% and higher in annual surveys.

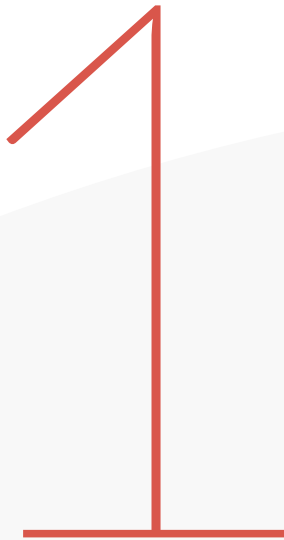
Researching the UK university system can be a daunting process however. For such a small country, the United Kingdom has a remarkably diverse range of university options, and choosing the right one isn't an easy task. Also, as we've already discussed, these institutions are renowned globally, so it's understandable for some students to feel intimidated.

So how should they begin the process of researching, and applying to, a UK university?

In this BridgeU guide we'll:

- Discuss what career options & pathways a UK degree could unlock.
- Explore the different types of university campus.
- Help you to understand university entry requirements
- Bust some of the myths surrounding university league tables.
- Give you the lowdown on student finance options for UK and international applicants.





UK university degrees: what are the possible career paths?

Teachers, students and parents will understandably be thinking about which undergraduate courses are the most likely to strengthen employability after graduation, whilst also providing a valuable and memorable university experience.

When researching potential UK universities, it's natural to ask the following questions:

- Will this degree be relevant to the world of work?
- Is this a degree which looks good on a CV?
- Is this degree likely to provide a good starting salary as a graduate?
- Will this career equip students for new and emerging job markets?

We've broken down UK university degree paths into four groups, in terms of the courses they offer, and the general career paths a student can expect.

Training Degrees

What are they?

These are arguably the degrees that could make a UK university graduate the most job-ready. UK training degrees include courses such as Medicine, Law, Engineering and Education.

Employment prospects

Training-based degree graduates report the highest overall rate of employment. This makes sense when you consider that they are designed to prepare a student for everything they will need to qualify in a particular career path (e.g. solicitor, doctor, teacher)

Before applying

An applicant to a UK training degree would need to think about whether this career path is right for them, as many UK training degrees are rigorous, and often last longer than other courses (e.g. Architecture and Medicine courses will last anywhere between six and eight years).

Science Degrees

What are they?

Science-based degrees can cover a whole range of science and engineering courses, and there are over 10,000 to choose from in the UK system. Some UK science degrees offer students a Masters qualification, pending the completion of a four year degree course.

Employment prospects

The specialised skills and competencies which students gain from a science-based degree are in high demand from employers, and a science degree from an institution such as Imperial College London or the University of Manchester will look very impressive on a CV.

Before applying

A UK-based science degree can be a good grounding for a range of different post-university career paths, so it's okay if an applicant to a UK science course doesn't know exactly what they want to do after they've graduated.

However, those who do have an idea of what they want to do after university should think about which science degree might be a good pathway into their desired career.

For example, a physics degree can lead to any number of career paths, in business, finance, IT or teaching, for those students still considering their options. However, if a student decides they want to be a sound engineer, then a physics degree would be a smart choice.

Humanities, Social Science & Arts Degrees

What are they?

UK humanities and arts based degrees cover subjects such as English Literature, History, Politics, Psychology, Philosophy. Humanities and Arts based degrees at a UK university are often more research-focused and tend to offer fewer contact hours than science-based subjects.

Employment prospects

When choosing an arts or humanities based degree in the UK, it's important to consider the transferable skills a degree could offer future employers.

Whilst humanities and arts degrees don't automatically lead to a set career path, they help to foster valuable skills and competencies such as research, critical thinking, debating, writing and copyediting. Arts and humanities degrees can lead to careers in law, marketing, business, politics and media, to name a few.

Before applying

Students applying to a humanities or social science based degree in the UK are more likely to do so because they have a personal passion for that subject - and that's the most important reason to apply to any university degree!

However, an applicant to a humanities/arts degree may want to think about any relevant work experience or internships between semesters which could boost their employability after university.

Vocational degrees

What are they?

Vocational degrees can be similar to training degrees, in that they are a useful means of preparing for a certain type of work - however, they don't constitute the only route into that career. UK vocational degrees can include Business Studies, Graphic Design and Law.

Employment prospects

Employment prospects for vocational courses can vary depending on the course, subject area and university. However, since vocational courses are highly relevant to a particular career pathway, they are often a valuable route into a job after graduation.

For example, a vocational graphic design course could prepare a student for a career in this area. However, other art and design based degrees are an equally valid pathway for someone wanting to be a graphic designer.

Before applying

Students need to think about whether their chosen vocational course is the best route into their preferred career path. It's also worth bearing in mind that there are several different types of vocational degree on offer in the UK, so in-depth research is a must!

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The different types of UK degree explained

The UK offers several different types of university degree, and it's important that students know what they are, and the types of career path they can typically lead to. There are three types of UK degree.

Honours degrees

This is the type of academic degree offered by most major universities in the academic system. Students will be awarded a bachelor's degree with Honours, upon the completion of a three or four year course (although this will differ depending on the subject studied). Some common examples of Honours degree include a BA (Bachelor of Arts), a BSc (Bachelor of Science), a BEng (Bachelor of Engineering), and a LLB (Bachelor of Law).

UK honours degrees can take a number of forms. These include the following:

Single Honours

Courses wherein students study the same subject within the same faculty for the entirety of their course. Course lengths will vary, from two years anywhere up to six years for professional training degrees such as Architecture or Medicine.

Joint Honours

A joint honours degree will allow a student to study two subjects, similar to the major/minor degree system at a US university. A joint honours degree would be something like "French with Business", and a student may study both subjects 50/50, or place more emphasis on one subject over another.

Foundation degrees

These degrees are typically training degrees of a less academic nature. They will often be a stepping stone to preparing for an honours degree.

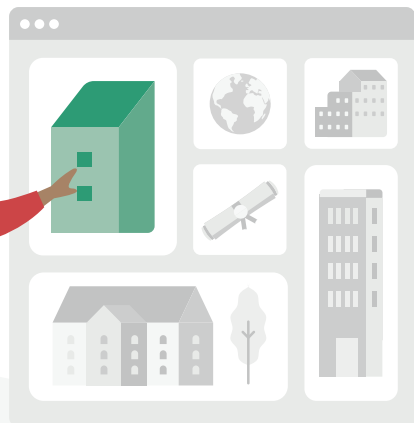
Diplomas

Again, these are courses are at a lower level than honours degrees, but their successful completion will often lead to acceptance on a subsequent degree course.

How is the Scottish university system different?

If applying to a Scottish university (e.g. The University of Edinburgh, The University of Glasgow, The University of St Andrews), it's important for students to remember that the Scottish system is slightly different to the rest of the UK.

Scottish university degrees are four years in length, and offer undergraduates the chance to study a broader range of subjects before eventually specialising. The breadth of subject knowledge offered by Scottish universities is often highly prized by employers.



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Exploring the different types of university campus

University institutions in the UK differ widely in terms of their age, size and structure. For example, older collegiate universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Durham are as much as 800 years old; meanwhile newer, former polytechnic universities were founded as recently as the mid-20th century.

Ancient/Collegiate Universities



The collegiate universities in the UK include Oxford, Cambridge and Durham. They are in the prestigious Russell Group of universities, and have strong academic reputations across all faculties and departments. They are mainly situated in towns and smaller cities, and the universities are often an intrinsic part of city/town life.

The term 'collegiate' refers to the fact that these universities are broken up into smaller colleges, in which students live and socialise. Different colleges have their own traditions and reputations, as well as their own distinct extra-curricular activities.

Note: Students applying to Oxford or Cambridge can also expect to submit applications to, and be interviewed by, individual colleges.

Red Brick Universities



The term 'red brick' refers to a family of historic universities that are typically located in the major cities of the UK. These include Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds, Manchester and Southampton. Again, these universities are mostly in the Russell Group, which means that they have a prestigious reputation across all faculties and courses.

For students applying to Red Brick universities, it's worth deciding if city life is a good fit.

Plate Glass/Campus Universities



These are more modern universities such as York, Warwick and Sussex. Many were only granted university status as recently as the 1960s, but several are now highly ranked within the Russell Group of universities. The term 'plate-glass' was given to these universities due to their more modern architectural design.

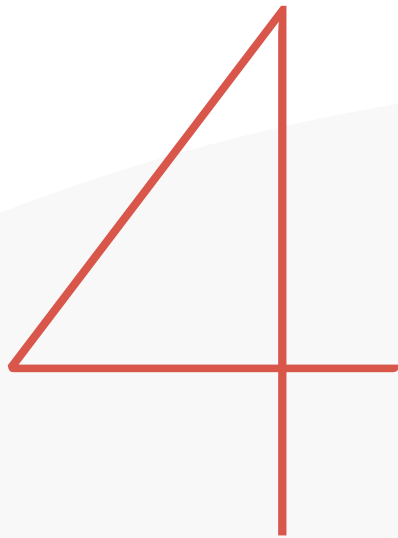
Many of these universities are located on self-contained campuses outside of major towns and cities. This remote setting may be ideal for some students - however it could be isolating for those craving a busy, bustling city environment.

New Universities



New universities are typically institutions which were once classed as polytechnics (institutions focused mainly on vocational study). They are often located in the same city as older, more established universities (for example, Manchester Metropolitan neighbours the University of Manchester; Oxford Brookes neighbours Oxford University).

These universities can be attractive destinations for students looking to really specialise in a particular degree discipline, and can be strong options to consider for vocational study.



Understanding UK university rankings

It's natural to look at a university's ranking as a measure of its suitability, and its overall quality of education. UK universities are ranked according to a number of different criteria, including:

- Quality of teaching.
- Research rating.
- Degree classification - the percentage of 1st and 2:1s as a percentage of all degrees awarded.
- Student satisfaction
- The percentage of graduates entering full time employment.
- Drop out rates

League table rankings are not limited to these factors. However, these are arguably the most significant criteria that most students will look at when beginning the university application process.

Some universities, especially those within the prestigious Russell Group, offer an excellent quality of education all across the board. League tables are a useful way of identifying and researching these universities

But remember - league tables aren't everything. It's tempting to measure the quality of a university solely by its league table ranking.

But in an increasingly diverse and international higher education market, a student's suitability for a particular course or university is much more complex, and choosing the right UK university destination is about so much more than league tables. Here are a few reasons why league tables should be treated with caution.

Different league tables measure different criteria

Depending on the league table you choose to look at, emphasis is placed on different criteria. For example, [Shanghai Ranking](#) chooses to emphasise a university's research score, whilst the Times Higher Education league table tends to place high value on quality of teaching.

League tables do not guarantee specific outcomes

University league tables are signposts, not road-maps. A university's ranking is no guarantee of a positive university experience overall, or a lucrative career after graduation.

Remember - a person's suitability for a university is ultimately a question of what they want to achieve from their chosen course, if it can help them reach their career aspirations, and if they enjoy the university's campus and culture.



5

UK university entry requirements

Most UK university courses will specify minimum entry requirements - i.e. the grades an applicant would have to achieve to gain entry to the course. Many UK students will apply to university with their predicted grades, which are a major influence on their chance of being accepted.

However, minimum entry requirements aren't the whole story. Students assessing their suitability for a UK university degree course should also bear the following in mind:

- The popularity of the course - this will influence the level of competition for places.
- What grades yours will be compared to - i.e. the overall academic ability of other applicants.
- How flexible the university will be if you don't achieve/possess the required grades.

Understanding the different qualifications

A-levels

University offers for A-level students are normally expressed as three or four grades, and these are usually the minimum requirements. Some universities will ask that students achieve a particular grade in certain subjects - for example, "AAB with an A in Physics."

UCAS Points

UCAS points are another common means which UK universities use when making offers to applicants. The UCAS points system can be used to convert A-level grades into an overall mark - for example, two A grades and a B grade add up to 136 UCAS points in the current system.

The International Baccalaureate

For IB students, universities will generally ask for an overall IB score, but they might also have specific requirements for certain subjects taken at Higher Level, or the grades a student has achieved at Higher Level.

So a UK university might express IB entry requirements as something like "665 at Higher Level, with at least a 6 in English" or "Must have Maths and Physics at Higher Level"

BTECs

For students applying with BTECs, eligibility will depend on which diploma they are applying with (e.g. 90 Credit Diploma, Subsidiary Diploma, National Diploma or Extended Diploma). Some universities allow students to combine A-levels with BTECs, or may allow the two qualifications to be used interchangeably.

Universities will normally ask for BTEC qualifications at a certain level - e.g. DDD = Distinction, Distinction, Distinction; DDM = Distinction, Distinction, Merit.

Students should check an individual university's BTEC requirements if applying with this qualification.

Cambridge Pre-U

Again, universities might ask for a set of scores e.g. D1, D2, or may require a student to have attained a certain grade in a certain subject (e.g. D2 in French). Once again, it's worth checking specific course entry requirements.

Entry requirements vs offer rates

Remember that universities with the same entry requirements may have very different offer rates, and a student's grades aren't the only guarantee of acceptance. Offer rates can depend on the competitiveness of the course and how highly ranked it is.

For example, Law at Oxford asks students for 3As at A-level, but has a 9% offer rate, whilst Economics and Geography at Leeds also asks for 3As, but reports a 94% offer rate.



Financing a UK university degree

Financing a degree is often the biggest concern for most students as they begin to consider university applications. But help is at hand in the form of a range of student loans, grants and bursaries.

Applicants to the UK should be aware that universities also charge different tuition fee rates for international students, compared to students coming from the UK.

UK student finance

Tuition fees and student finance for UK students have undergone several changes in the past ten years. Most notably, UK universities have been allowed to increase average tuition fees to a maximum of £9,250. Different universities may charge different amounts, so it's important to research the tuition fees for a specific institution.

UK students are eligible for a number of different bursaries, grants and loans.

Tuition fee loans

These are loans which students can use to cover the cost of their tuition fees. These loans are paid directly to a student's chosen university. Students will only repay this money when they start earning over £25,000 after graduating.

Maintenance loans

Maintenance loans are designed to help students with any living costs while studying at university. A student's maintenance loan entitlement will depend on their household income. Loan amounts are also higher for students choosing to apply to a university in London.

But wait... student finance is a bit different outside of England

Those students who wish to study in England can only claim the maintenance loan. But for those applying in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, student finance works slightly differently.

Scotland

Students can apply for a combination of a bursary (which doesn't have to be paid back) and a maintenance loan.

Wales

Students receive either a maintenance grant or a loan, depending on their family income.

Northern Ireland

As well as the standard loan, students applying to university in Northern Ireland are entitled to a maintenance grant. Northern Irish applicants can also apply for a Special Support grant, which is offered to students who are single parents, or who may have a disability or learning difficulty.

Changes to UK Tuition Fees for EU/EEA/Swiss students from August 2021

Currently, students coming to the UK from the EU, EEA or Switzerland are able to pay the same tuition fees as domestic students, and be eligible for UK student loans.

However, for students starting a UK degree from 1 August 2021 these benefits will no longer be applicable. Instead, EU/EEA/Swiss students will be classified as international students, and will face higher fees.

Find more information on how to fund a UK degree as an international student on the next page.

International student finance

International students from outside the UK will be required to pay higher tuition fees. Fees for international students will depend greatly on the chosen course or university, but broadly break down as follows:

- Last year, undergraduate courses started at £10,000 for a lecture-based degree.
- Training based degrees such as dentistry, medicine and veterinary medicine charged up to £42,000.

Whilst international students don't have access to the same sources of funding as UK applicants, there are still a number of different options for financing a UK degree course.

International student loans

There are a number of loans on offer for international students. For example, US students looking to study on a degree abroad can employ for a Foreign Enrolled Loan. Individual countries will have their own loan schemes for their international students, so research is essential.

Scholarships/bursaries

There are a number of scholarship schemes on offer for UK university study. These fall into one of three categories:

University specific scholarships

Individual universities will offer financial aid to international students for certain courses.

Country-specific scholarships

International students from certain countries are eligible for select undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships.

Global scholarships

International student scholarships which are not tied to any particular origin country or university destination. These are often very competitive.

Private funding

Many international students finance university study with the help of family members, and this is a conversation worth having before embarking on a university application.

Useful Scholarship and Funding Resources

For international students looking for more information about financial aid for studying in the UK, it's worth doing further research through the following websites and organisations.

- [The British Council](#)
- [Scholarship Portal](#)
- [UK Council for International Student Affairs](#)



Next Steps: Creating a UCAS profile

Students beginning the UK university application process will need to set up a UCAS account, through which the majority of UK university applications are processed. A UCAS profile requires the following:

- Personal information and relevant contact details.
- Academic qualifications
- Work history
- The Personal Statement – this is integral to a UK university application, as it's a student's chance to explain why they want to do a specific course, and their aspirations for their future.
- Teachers and guidance counselors will also have an integral role in the UCAS process, whether it's helping students to craft a compelling personal narrative for their Personal Statement, or writing that crucial school reference for university admissions departments.

Applying to a UK university isn't an easy process. Researching and shortlisting the diverse range of courses, campuses and degree pathways is a complex and time-consuming task. Here are some final tips to share with your students as they begin the UK university application process.

- Research degree courses and degree types carefully – what skill sets and subject interests do you want to explore further in a university setting?
- Treat league tables with caution – they're not always a guarantee of a university's compatibility with your professional goals or personal strengths.
- Be honest and realistic about eligibility and chance of acceptance.
- Don't be intimidated by the cost of university – there are many forms of financial aid to help students cover the cost of undergraduate study.
- Think carefully about what you want from studying in the UK, and why it's the right path for you.

UK University Application Lesson Plans



Lesson 1: What's the most important factor in choosing a UK degree?

OBJECTIVES:

To encourage students to think about why a UK degree is right for them.

Instructions:

In small groups, ask students to rank what they believe to be the most important factors in choosing a UK university
It's important to stress that there's no single right/wrong answer.

The factors are as follows:

- The type of job it can offer me.
- The chance to study at a prestigious university
- UK degrees are globally recognized.
- Studying a subject I'm good at.
- It's my school/family's preferred destination for me.
- A busy social life/chance to make new friends.

Points for discussion

- What are the most important reasons to study for a degree?
- What should we prioritize when researching universities?
- Is our future career always the most important factor in choosing a degree?

Exercise: What should I look for in a UK degree?

In small groups, rank the following reasons for studying for a degree in order of importance from top to bottom, with 1 being the Most Important and 6 being the Least Important.

The type of job it can offer me.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Studying a subject I'm good at.

1 2 3 4 5 6

The chance to study at a prestigious university

1 2 3 4 5 6

It's my school/family's preferred destination for me

1 2 3 4 5 6

UK degrees are globally recognized.

1 2 3 4 5 6

A busy social life/chance to make new friends.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Lesson 2: University Rankings & League Tables

OBJECTIVES:

To encourage students to critically assess the usefulness of league tables in their university research.

Exercise A

Instructions:

- In small groups, ask students to write down as many UK universities they can think of.
- In the same groups, ask students to order their list of universities by how highly ranked they think they are in UK league tables, in descending order.
- Now research a ranking system online – did you get the order correct?

Exercise B

Instructions:

In the same groups as Exercise 1, ask students to answer the following questions.

- What ranking system did you use to research the top UK universities?
- How does this particular league table rate a UK university? What factors affect a university's place in the league table? (For example, research rating, student satisfaction, dropout rate?)
- Can you think of some reasons why this league table might not be the most reliable way of choosing a university in the UK?

Lesson 3: Introduction to The Russell Group

OBJECTIVES:

To familiarize students with UK university terminology and to give students an overview of potential Russell Group destinations.

Instructions:

- Without using any other resources, ask each group to sort the universities into two categories: Russell Group and non-Russell Group.
- Ask students to report back: how many of the universities do they think are in the Russell Group?
- In the same groups, ask students to research which UK universities are in the Russell Group.
- Report back: what is a Russell Group university? Why are Russell group universities so highly rated? Are Russell Group universities always at the top of university rankings?

Points for Discussion

- How important is a Russell Group education if you're studying in the UK?
- What are the chances of acceptance into a Russell Group university?
- Are Russell Group universities the right choice for all degree subjects? Why? Why not?

Lesson 4: Exploring the different types of university

OBJECTIVE:

To encourage students to discover more about the different types of UK university (e.g. collegiate, red brick, new universities).

Instructions:

Split students into four groups. Assign each group one of the following university types.

- Collegiate university
- Red Brick university
- Plate glass/campus university
- New/former polytechnic university

In their four groups, ask students to research, and complete the following tasks.

- List some of the universities in your assigned group
- Explain what each university category means, and where each category gets its name from (e.g. why are campus universities also called 'plate glass' universities?)
- Write a short description of typical campus life at a university in your assigned category. Are there any pros and cons to studying at one type of university over another?

Points for Discussion

- What do different types of campus have to offer (e.g. nightlife, extra-curricular activities, proximity to a major city/town)
- What makes a 'good' university? What is more important for university life, the quality of the degree, or the all-round university experience?

Lesson 5:

What are the different UK degree paths?

OBJECTIVE:

To give students an understanding of the different types of UK university degree and to increase their confidence when researching them.

Instructions:

Split students into four groups. Assign each group one of the following four UK degree families

- Training degrees
- Scientific degrees
- Arts, Humanities and Social Science Degrees
- Vocational Degrees

Exercise A: Understanding UK degree Families

In their four groups, ask students to discuss, and make notes on the following:

- What are some of the possible UK university degrees that fall within their family?
- Are there any particular jobs which their chosen family of degree is likely to lead to?

Points for discussion

- Does studying for a particular degree make you more likely to enter a certain career path?
- Does one particular degree path guarantee a higher salary/better job prospects?
- Revisit some of the themes of Lesson 4: how important are salary/outcome considerations versus passion for a subject?

Exercise B: Understanding course content and structure

In the same groups, ask students to choose one subject from their category.

Ask each group to make notes on the following:

Note: encourage students to use websites such as UCAS

to look at how the same course differs at multiple UK universities.

- What is the average length of this degree?
- What type of classes could an undergraduate expect from this degree, e.g. lectures, seminars, one-one-tutorials?
- What is the average teaching time, e.g. will students required to attend a lot of lectures, or is there a lot of independent study time?
- How is the degree assessed (e.g. coursework vs exams?)
- Does this degree offer any opportunities for studying abroad, or taking a year in industry?
- Are there any other specialist qualifications you would need to gain entry to this course?

Points for discussion

In this section of the lesson, encourage students to reflect on the following:

- Are all UK degrees designed to prepare you for the world of work?
- What are some good resources for researching a university? (Discuss the UCAS website and different university websites).
- How important are factors such as teaching time, and workload when deciding on a university degree?

Lesson 6: Understanding entry requirements

OBJECTIVE:

To encourage students to think about individual course requirements, and to critically assess factors such as chance of acceptance.

Exercise A:

Busting some myths about entry requirements

Instructions:

In groups of four or five, encourage students to discuss if they agree or disagree with the following statements

- If you get high grades, you are guaranteed acceptance into a UK university.
- If I don't get the required grades, I can't get into my chosen university.
- Courses at highly ranked universities are always hard to get into.

Ask students to report back. In this next part of the lesson, ask students to discuss the following:

- Are UK universities only interested in grades? What other factors might affect your chance of acceptance?
- What might affect how many offers a university makes to potential students?
- Are university courses always hard to get into if they are highly ranked?

Tip: revisit themes/ideas from lessons 1 & 2. Why aren't league table or rankings the most reliable guide to how easy/hard a degree might be?

Exercise B:

Understanding different university entry requirements

Note: For this exercise, students will need access to the UCAS website.

Instructions:

Assign each group one of the following degree subjects:

- English Literature.
- Law.
- Physics.
- Business Management
- Geography

Each group should choose three universities offering their assigned degree course. For each university, ask students to answer the following questions on the course entry requirements.

- What subjects do applicants need to have studied?
- University course entry requirements (including different qualifications e.g. A-level, IB, BTec)
- Additional entry requirements (e.g. extra exams, interviews)

Points for Discussion

- Why is it important to research individual course requirements?
- How do multiple universities' entry requirements differ for the same course?
- What are the different types of qualification that UK universities accept?
- What preparation might be necessary for extra exams, interviews?

Lesson 7: Planning a Personal Statement

OBJECTIVE:

To familiarize students with the UCAS personal statement, and to begin the process of encouraging them to write a response.

Exercise A:

Busting some myths about entry requirements

Instructions:

In small groups, ask students to find out everything they can the UCAS Personal Statement. Ask each group to consider the answer to the following questions.

- What do universities look for in a Personal Statement?
- Are there any key deadlines/word count limits for the Personal Statement
- Why is the Personal Statement such an important component of the UK university application?
- What does a successful Personal Statement need to include?

Points for Discussion

Class discussion for this lesson should focus on the following.

- What makes a great Personal Statement? Discuss factors UK universities look for such a formative passion for a subject, displaying the necessary skills to excel in their chosen course, extracurricular activities.
- Why is it important to be genuine in a Personal Statement?

For further information on Personal Statement writing, check out the following resources:

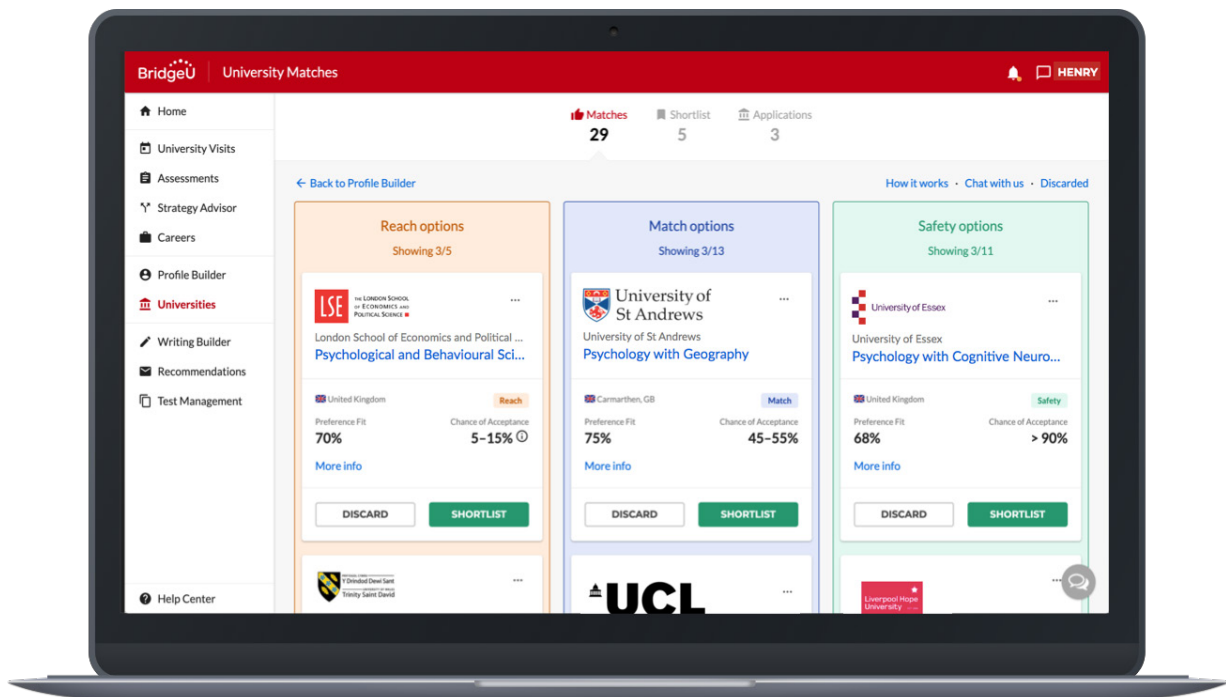
- [How to write a personal statement](#)
- [Personal statement FAQs](#)

About BridgeU

BridgeU provides world-class university and careers guidance for global secondary schools, to empower your students, inform your guidance strategy and improve outcomes.

Founded in 2014, BridgeU is the market leader in university and careers guidance for global secondary schools. We partner with schools in over 100 countries and we match students with over 28,000 universities and higher education institutions.

Our platform provides schools with a comprehensive end-to-end solution for advisers, teachers and students.



To learn more about how BridgeU can help your students manage and structure their university research, schedule a free demo today by visiting

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