

Macclesfield College



HOW TO GUIDE:

UCAS APPLY AND
PERSONAL STATEMENTS



THINKING ABOUT UNIVERSITY?

It can be a minefield trying to navigate all of the amazing variety of options available to you - this handbook aims to help you start your journey and guide you through the process to leave you feeling confident in your choices!

There are lots of reasons why you may choose university or alternative higher education after completing your Level 3 / Access course.

It is crucial that you **spend time doing research** on your chosen subject/career pathway to make sure that you know all of the options available to you, and what you can expect when you start your studies.

It is really important that you seek guidance from your teachers, peers and parents/carers to make an informed decision and ensure you are suitably prepared for the next step -there are many positives about university but it does need your full commitment to get the best out of it.



DID YOU KNOW?

1 in 3 university applicants reported first thinking about Higher Education (HE) as early as primary school, and 83% of students will decide on their degree subject before their place of study.

WHAT WILL YOU GAIN FROM A DEGREE?

- **Increase your knowledge** - study what you enjoy and be taught by experts within your chosen field.
- **Get your first true taste of independence and freedom** - build self-confidence, experience all aspects of student life, broaden your horizons and meet new people.
- **Gain a qualification that's internationally recognised** - UK higher education qualifications are accepted and respected by employers and academics worldwide.
- **Develop the essential skills you'll need in your career and working life** - such as communication, organisation, time management, team work, leadership and problem-solving.
- **Increase your earning potential** - the average salary for graduates is 30% higher than for non-graduates aged 25-30, with the median starting salary set at £32,000 in 2025, and a rise in graduate vacancies.
- **Experience student life** - working hard is important but university is also fun! Whatever your interests, there are a huge range of clubs, societies and a diverse social life on offer.



WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

From apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships and HNC/HND - University is no longer the only option for HE and may even work better for your career goals and way of learning.

HNC/HND

The Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) is an alternative way of studying at degree level.

The HNC is equivalent to a Level 4, and the HND equivalent to a Level 5. There is then the option to 'top-up-your-degree' at a university to complete your Level 6. The benefits include:

- **Tailored approach** - most often, HNC and HND courses are taught in smaller groups, allowing for more support and direction than a larger university/course.
- **Familiarity**- if you studied your HNC/HND at your current college, it is most likely you have worked with your tutor and the facilities already. This can really help the transition to a higher level and build confidence.
- **Flexibility** - face-to-face teaching tends to be a maximum of two days meaning you can work around your degree in employment or with personal commitments, and because each year is separate, you can jump off at any time.
- **Costs** - the HNC/HND is significantly cheaper than university tuition fees, and as it is local can cut down on travel and accommodation costs.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships are an alternative way of practically gaining skills, experience and qualifications building on your subject knowledge.

An apprenticeship is a real job - you get paid, have a contract and holiday leave. During your apprenticeship you will spend **20% in education**, and will complete assessments across this time. Once the apprenticeship is completed, you can progress to higher levels of apprenticeship, or work and progress with the employer.

Apprenticeships are available for a wide range of subjects.
Apprenticeships start at level 2 (Intermediate) and go up to ...

DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

- Degree apprenticeships are **full time jobs with study**.
- Have to be at least 12 months in duration.
- **No student fees** and **apprenticeship pay**.
- Programmes are co-designed, co-delivered, co-assessed and co evaluated **with** employers.
- Delivery models designed to suit specific employer and sector needs.
- Varied models from day release to **block and blend**. Seasonal patterns defined with different sectors, e.g. Retail, Health
- Around 80% of degree apprentices stay with the same company they study with and see **promotion** after and even during their studies.
- Degree apprenticeships are advertised by the employer all year round and do not go through the same application process as a degree.

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HOW TO GET STARTED ON YOUR RESEARCH

Once you've decided to look into University, there are some key things to consider:

WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU?

- **A course you enjoy** - you will be investing your time and money into the course, and although the subject titles can be similar, every university will take a slightly different approach.
- **The right progression** - make sure that the course you are doing will open the doors you need for your future career. Speak with employers, professional organisations and graduates within your field of study.
- **Location** - where do you see yourself living or travelling to for a minimum of three years? If you like the buzz of the city, you won't want to focus your search on rural areas - but be mindful of the cost of living as a result.
- **Style of study** - look into the modules and year-by-year breakdown when researching a course, and how you will be assessed. You can expect a mix of assessment styles such as group presentation, practical, coursework and dissertation.
- **Extra-curricular, societies and support** - if you have interests outside of your studies, see what your university can offer! There are also student support mechanisms at each university that will be accessed in a different way to your college studies - see how they can help you.

HOW TO GET STARTED ON YOUR RESEARCH

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

- **Go on a tour/open day** - spend some time speaking to student ambassadors, and tutors, seeing the facilities and visiting the surrounding area to get a real feel of the place. Some universities will even offer to refund your travel!
- **Check their online resources** - if you've got a lot of options lined up, take advantage of virtual tours and talks - it would even be good to do this for a university you may have initially written off or for a contrast to your expected choice.
- **Take the UCAS Careers quiz** - know what subject interests you but not sure where it can lead? Use the UCAS careers quiz to inspire you and help guide you in the right direction.
- **Sign up to UCAS Apply** - UCAS is the one-stop shop for all things university and HE/Apprenticeship-related. Sign up to UCAS to make the most of the hub where you can watch talks, favourite courses and start drafting your personal statement.
- **Going above and beyond** - One thing that will support your application is your personal statement. This is your opportunity to showcase your strengths and detail how you are suitable. Students who can show they have industry knowledge, work experience or volunteer will benefit from life experience in preparation for higher education.

CHOOSING YOUR COURSE

It is imperative that you **check the entry requirements** before you apply for a course. Unfortunately, some courses may have very specific entry requirements that you do not meet (e.g. A Levels, GCSE grades, specific courses). Make sure you check all of this before using up one of your places.

UCAS ADMIN FEE

It does cost to apply - up to five choices is £34.50.

TARIFF POINTS

When looking at entry requirements, you may notice that some courses mention **UCAS Tariff points**. These are gained through your studies - you can use the handy guide on the next page or go to www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator

GUIDANCE

We strongly recommend choosing at least three courses - you have a maximum of five. You will pick a **firm** and **insurance** choice once you have received all of your offers unless you get an **unconditional offer** - then you only pick a firm offer.

If you don't quite meet the entry requirements, it would be worth **getting in contact with the university directly** and finding out whether your experience and knowledge would be taken into consideration. Alternatively, you could consider a **foundation year** - this is a university course to prime you ready for study.

BTEC L3 EXT DIP	
D*D*D*	168
D*D*D	160
D*DD	152
DDM	128
MMM	96
MMP	80
MPP	64
PPP	48

NFCE CACHE L3 Ext Dip	
A*	168
A	144
B	120
C	96
D	72

UCAS L3 EXT DIP	
D	168
M	120
P	72

T LEVELS	
Dist*	168
Dist	144
Merit	120
Pass (C or above on core)	96
Pass (D or E on core)	72

GETTING STARTED ON YOUR APPLICATION

SIGNING UP TO UCAS APPLY

- **Register for September intake** - head to ucas.com, click the 'sign in' icon on the top right of the page and register your details. We recommend using a personal email address for this as you will need to access your account right up until the October in which you start your course.
- **Start adding your details** - once you've done your initial sign up and entered your verification, the portal will take you through a series of questions to help start your application and tailor your hub. You will be applying as an Undergraduate.
- **Add the 'buzzword'**- this links you to the College and allows your adviser to check that all of your details are correct before submission, and add your tutor reference and predicted grades. The buzzword is macclesfield, followed by the last two digits of the year you will be applying for e.g. for September 2026 start the buzzword is **Macclesfield26**.
- **Save your favourite courses** - Once signed up, you can start adding courses to your favourites, so you can compare criteria and distance etc. This will also notify you of any useful events.
- **Start your personal statement** - this is by far the thing that most worries students, so you want to get started early and expect to re-draft a few times!

GETTING STARTED ON YOUR APPLICATION

COMMON MISTAKES

- **Not adding your previous education**- you should add all of your previous GCSEs held under your high school. If you have or are completing any of your GCSE Maths or English qualifications at College, they should go under the Macclesfield College section as well.
- **Putting a grade for your current course** - if you are completing a course at the College e.g Level 3 Extended Diploma, GCSE Maths, you do not need to put a final or predicted grade. This will be given by your tutor and added by the adviser.
- **Not adding your ULN/BTEC number** - this helps the universities access your results when you complete and support gaining your offer. Your teacher can provide you with your BTEC number if you are doing a BTEC course, and you can find your ULN in ProPortal under your details.
- **Incorrectly inputting your course title**- it's really important you get this right, if it is sent off incorrectly you may gain or lose out on offers that won't be suitable for you. Check with your tutor that your course title is correct.
- **Not proofreading your personal statement** - this is a huge part of your application and demonstrates your ability to communicate, write academically and highlight your suitability. It's really important you spend time checking it is right.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

WHY ARE 4,000 CHARACTERS (INCLUDING SPACES) IMPORTANT?

Your personal statement is an opportunity to showcase your knowledge, skills, experience and ambitions. With a limit of 4,000 characters (including spaces and punctuation), this equates to approximately one side of A4 paper.

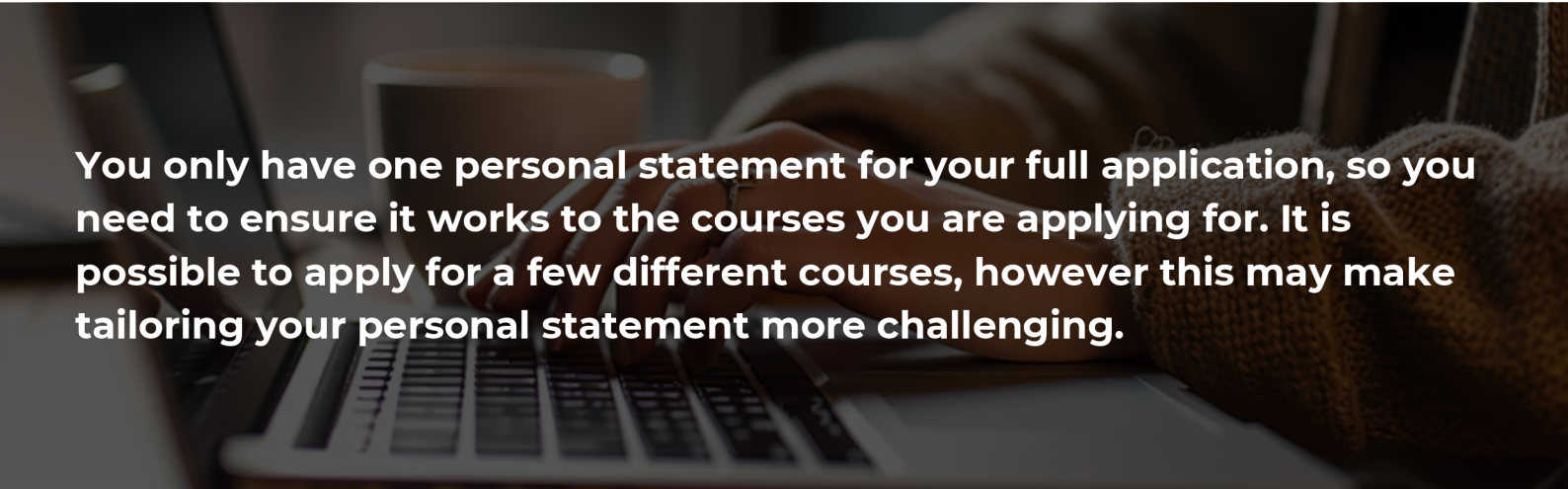
The statement should focus on why you are interested in the course and how your academic and extracurricular experiences have prepared you for it. The 4,000-character limit requires careful selection of the most relevant details, allowing you to demonstrate your strengths and potential while maintaining clarity and coherence.

Question 1: Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Question 2: How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Question 3: What else have you done to prepare outside of education and why are these experiences useful?

Focus on giving examples depth and context in relation to your chosen courses. Try the PEEL Method - Point, Evidence, Explain, Link.



You only have one personal statement for your full application, so you need to ensure it works to the courses you are applying for. It is possible to apply for a few different courses, however this may make tailoring your personal statement more challenging.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Do: your research** - when you are reading through each course breakdown, make a note of some of the key phrases used and any requirements outlined for what makes a suitable candidate.
- **Don't: waffle, or swallow a thesaurus** - you are very limited in your word count so make sure you are clear and to the point. You should also make the statement authentic to you, so don't use elaborate language you wouldn't naturally use.
- **Do: be positive and enthusiastic**- don't leave the reader in any doubt that you are passionate and ideal for your studies. One common mistake students make is using 'I think I am good at...'; instead, try 'I excel at...' Have confidence!
- **Don't: plagiarise or lie** - UCAS uses similarity detection software -don't borrow or use someone else's work. Similarly, don't make up things you have done/can do- you maybe asked about it at the interview when you start.
- **Do: back up your points** - give examples as much as possible e.g. how are you a team player at work? What subject knowledge do you have?
- **Do: get someone to check it** - you will re-read and re-draft your statement multiple times. Make sure you get someone else to take a look to make sure you aren't missing any errors -they may even be able to provide some positive attributes about you that you hadn't thought of before! We recommend that you don't have too many different people helping you as they may have conflicting opinions.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

PLANNING



YOUR MOTIVATION



ACADEMIC ABILITY



RELEVANT EXPERIENCE



PERSONAL

PERSONAL STATEMENT

GUIDANCE ON WHAT TO INCLUDE

There is no official guidance on exactly how a personal statement should be structured as it is exactly that - personal. However, using the dos and don'ts in these pages and the headers across the page can help you get started and ensure you add important details.

- **Your motivation** - what do you want to get out of the course? What interests you about it? What qualities do you possess that would make you suitable? What do you hope to do with your degree?
- **Academic ability** - share your academic strengths and any challenges you have successfully overcome. Show off your subject-specific knowledge and any wider reading you have done.
- **Relevant experience** - if you have had work experience, trips or visits, employment that can showcase your strengths and attributes be sure to add them with examples.
- **Personal** - what social activities, extracurricular or hobbies do you have that you may want to pursue whilst at university? This could include volunteering, local charity work or even a talent skill that is completely outside of your subject!

SENTENCE STARTERS:

- 'I have a keen interest in...'
- 'Something I am particularly proud of is...'
- '[course / work experience] has enhanced my experience / knowledge of...'
- 'Taking part in ... has really helped me to ...'

FINANCE AND ACCOMMODATION

The vast majority will opt for a loan to pay their tuition and maintenance fees, and most will use this opportunity to move away from home for the first time.

- **Tuition fees** - this is cost of studying your course (tuition) which is often around £9,790 per year. A student should be eligible for all support if they haven't previously started a degree. You will need to be a UK citizen or have 'settled' status, and have been living in the UK for three years before the start of the course. If you are unsure if you qualify, get in contact with Student Finance directly.
- **Maintenance loan** - this is a loan that covers your daily costs of study such as accommodation, bills, travel, food shop, materials etc. The amount is based on your annual household income and will also vary dependent on location (studying in or out of London) and moving out or staying at home.
- **How to apply** - For both loans, you will need to make an application to Student Finance England. This tends to open up in March of the year of study, and provides a deadline of the end of May. Your loan can be applied for up to 9 months after starting your course, but the deadlines placed to ensure your application is actioned ready for the start of your course.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	LIVING AT HOME	LIVING AWAY FROM HOME AND STUDYING IN LONDON	AWAY FROM HOME LONDON
£25,000	£9,118	£14,135	£10,830

PERSONAL STATEMENT

- **Bursaries and Grants**- depending on a number of factors, you may be eligible for further support in the form of a bursary or grant. These vary from university to university so do some research on what is available and how you can apply. Some may be awarded for talent or ability, ethnicity, financial background or exceptional grades.
- **Other support** - you may also be entitled to the disability support allowance, childcare and dependents grant and other support mechanisms. These will be identified through your Student Finance England application, but also during your UCAS application.
- **Accommodation** - there are lots of different types of accommodation, and you'll need to apply for this in your own time. Each university will open up applications at different times of the year, so be sure to keep your eye out for this.

Dependent on whether you are living in a city or town, on campus or out, private or university-ran, en-suite or not will make huge differences to the price - make sure you fully consider what is accessible to you before making your choice.



GLOSSARY

- **Adviser** - someone who provides you with information, advice, and support with your application. This could be a teacher, tutor, counsellor, or agent.
- **Buzzword** - It's a word you add to your application when you register to make a UCAS Undergraduate application (unless you're applying independently).
- **Changed course offer** - in your application, you might get one of these if you haven't met your conditions, or if the university or college has made changes to the courses they run. It might involve a different start date or point of entry, or a different course altogether.
- **Clearing** - in a UCAS Undergraduate application, Clearing is another service you can use to look for alternative courses. If you didn't get a place on a course - whether you didn't receive offers, declined your offers, or didn't get the grades you needed - Clearing allows you to apply for courses that still have vacancies.
- **Conditional offer** - in your application, an offer of a place on a course subject to conditions. To be accepted on the course, you'll need to meet the conditions - usually related to your exam results. This is a common type of offer for students applying directly from further education.
- **Conservatoire** - a provider of performance-based music, dance, screen, and drama courses.
- **Deferral** - in your application, this is what you do if you'd like to carry an offer over to start it in the following academic year.
- **Entry requirements** - this is what the course provider recommends you need to do/have to get on the course - from qualifications and specific subjects or grades, to interviews, admissions tests, and medical requirements. You aren't guaranteed an offer if you meet or already have these.
- **Extra** - in a UCAS Undergraduate application, Extra is a service you can use to apply for alternative places if you do not hold an offer from your first five choices.

GLOSSARY

- **Firm choice** - in your application, an offer you accept as your first choice.
- **Higher education (HE)** - the level of education we can help you apply to - from undergraduate courses when you've finished further education, to postgraduate courses you can move on to after graduating from an undergraduate degree.
- **Insurance choice** - in your application, an offer you accept as your second choice - just in case you don't meet the conditions of your firm offer.
- **Personal ID or UCAS ID** - the ten-digit number you get when you begin an application - displayed in 123-456-7890 format on every email we send you.
- **Point of entry** - in your application, which year of the course you start at - for example '2' means you'd start in the second year of the course.
- **Predicted grades** - the grades a teacher, tutor, or other adviser qualified to remark on a student's academic suitability believes they will achieve when they complete their secondary qualification.
- **Referee** - in your application, someone who provides a reference for you. Reference is a recommendation on an applicant's application from a teacher
- **Sandwich course** - a course with an additional year where you work in the profession you're studying for.
- **Tariff** - the UCAS Tariff is the system for allocating points to the different qualifications you can use to get into undergraduate higher education. It is for use in admissions only and is not transferable to the job market.
- **Unconditional offer** - in your application, an offer of a place on a course with no conditions -the place is yours if you want it.
- **Undergraduate** - the first level of study in higher education. If you graduate from an undergraduate degree, you can move on to postgraduate study.



GOT ANY QUESTIONS?

Send your queries to

student.services@macclesfield.ac.uk

