



## **UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS: POLICY ON GUIDANCE TO STUDENTS**

Last reviewed:	September 2024
Next review due:	September 2026
Reviewed by:	Head of Careers and Higher Education

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

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

We believe that applying to university is a natural part of A level study that complements students' academic work and gives students additional incentive to perform to the best of their ability throughout their courses.

Candidates for Oxford and Cambridge or courses in medicine, dentistry and veterinary practice are expected to be of exceptional academic aptitude. As such, they are expected to be capable of completing a demanding application process without it causing interference with their ordinary A level work.

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

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

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

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

Increasingly universities are using admissions tests to discriminate between the very best candidates. The nature of these tests is that they are intended to ascertain the extent to which the student is able to think creatively and independently about their subject. Preparation is therefore essential, but the skills needed are not those that can be taught in the classroom. Therefore, our role is to guide and support students with their independent preparation; there will be some classes to explain core principles, but the onus is on the students to develop their own critical thinking skills to be able to demonstrate their independence of thought in the tests and at any potential interview.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- teachers may give general advice on content, style, and expression; but it is not appropriate for students to expect teachers to write any part of the personal statement.
- it is inappropriate for a student to seek advice from a plurality of teachers simultaneously. Such a practice wastes teachers' time through needless reduplication of effort, and is contrary to the spirit of the principle that the statement should be the applicant's own.

### **5. Conditional offers and predicted grades**

Offers for university in the UK are made through UCAS. Through UCAS, universities give students 'conditional offers'. Usually, the conditions include certain grades at A level or a culmination of UCAS points.

Students should bear in mind at an early stage in their A level courses that references, and predicted grades will be determined largely by their attitude and academic performance as manifested in the first three or four terms of Sixth Form study. This is especially important in the case of applications to

Oxford and Cambridge, and courses in medicine, dentistry and veterinary practice for which there is an early (mid-October) application deadline.

Deciding predicted grades for a university application is ultimately a matter for the applicant's Director of Studies, who will normally reach a decision after consultation with subject teachers. It is an abuse of the integrity of the process for a student or their parent(s) to put pressure on Directors of Studies or subject teachers to inflate their predictions. All predicted grades are a fair reflection of a student's potential for the end of the two-year course and are based on data, formatives and classwork.

## **6. Special requirements regarding submitted work**

Some universities (Oxford and Cambridge are notable examples) require submission of samples of students marked written work in support of applications for some university courses. This may be tailored for the application, or a sample may be requested.

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

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

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

## **7. Oxbridge Admissions Tests**

We will support students with their preparation for these tests, although the nature of Oxbridge admissions tests is such that success cannot be 'taught', rather it depends to a large extent on the skills which applicants have built up over a number of years.

The role of the HoD in this has two main elements in terms of Oxbridge and any other admissions tests:

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

\*