

Teachers' HE Factsheet Series

won.ac.uk

UCAS Personal Statements

This factsheet gives teachers tips on how to guide and support students towards producing their best possible UCAS personal statement for UK undergraduate degree level study.





At a glance

Start reflection early

Don't wait until year 12 to prepare your students to write their personal statements. Students should start logging all the activities which help strengthen their skills, experience and self-awareness as early as possible.

Keep up-to date with degree content

Use degree course descriptions to check which skills, experience and qualities your students should be including.

Standing out against other applicants

Make sure your students' statements evidence:

- self-awareness demonstrating how their experience and achievements make them ideal for the course
- how particular modules, course and faculty features interest them (rather than generic degree references)
- how they have 'gone the extra-mile' academically, in extra-curricular activities, through on-line courses/blogs and through work experience
- what else makes them interesting and unique, compared with other applicants
- passion, passion and more passion for the subject
- a clear, concise writing style organised into paragraphs or under logical headings
- no plagiarism, jokes, lengthy quotations, typos, spelling mistakes or grammatical errors.

Build a whole school strategy

Build a career and HE insight programme targeting the development of your students towards the degree subjects and careers in which they are interested. Include resources for parents in this strategy.

p03

Work closely with universities

Let their advice guide your students and staff.

p05

Mastering their ABCs!

Check students refer to their 'ABC's' throughout their statements:

A = activities (what they have undertaken both intellectually and extra-curricular)

B = benefits (what skills, experience and attributes this has developed in them)

C = course (how this all relates to the course)

Preparation Timeline

Take a longer-term, strategic approach to preparing your students for their UCAS personal statement. By getting students to log their achievements and reflect upon them as they progress through the school, they will find it easier to identify and write about their suitability for university life and study. It will also give you the chance to identify, before they reach year 13, any developmental requirements to boost their chances of success.

Year

7-10

Implement a recording mechanism for students to log then reflect upon their extra-curricular activities and positions of responsibility both inside and outside of school.

11

Collect students' degree and career ambitions. Cross check these against their extra-curricular activities and study achievements log. This will identify gaps and form the basis of an HE focused personal development plan with targets for intellectual development, work insight activities, extra-curricular engagement and positions of responsibility.

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Offer a career and HE insight programme both inside and outside of school, targeting the degree subjects and careers which the year 11 students indicated they were most interested in.

Develop a UCAS process guide, timeline and progression events for students and parents.

Get students to produce a first draft personal statement in the summer term. Invite experts in to guide these sessions.

Evaluate these statements and give each student a personalised knowledge, skills and experience 'to-do' list over the summer, in addition to comments about what they have written.

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Use the UCAS timeline to plan your personal statement checking support and deadlines.

Arrange additional support early e.g. career guidance appointment or masterclass for those students who are struggling with their personal statement or post-18 planning.

Checklist



Devise a check-list to guide students writing their personal statements and to use yourself when checking them.

☐ 1. Have your students used no more than 4000 characters and 47 lines (approximately 600 words)?

☐ 2. Is at least two thirds directly related to the course?

3. Have they included:

(Academic suitability)

- ☐ Why they are applying for their chosen degree?
- ☐ Why the subject interests them?
- ☐ In what ways they are suitable for the course?
- ☐ How their previous and current studies relate to the selected degree course?
- ☐ Academic achievements, insight and subject passion?
- ☐ Understanding of what is required to succeed on the course?
- ☐ Subject specific activities and experience (e.g. tasters, open days, summer schools, public lectures, mini-courses, extra reading/research, competitions, student membership of professional bodies/societies etc.)?

(Appropriate experience, skills and attributes)

- ☐ Relevant part-time or holiday work?
- ☐ Pertinent volunteering?
- ☐ Career insight activity?
- ☐ Leisure activities which demonstrate their achievements and skills?
- ☐ Positions of responsibility?
- ☐ Certified skills development or challenges (e.g. Young Enterprise, Duke of Edinburgh, National Citizenship Service etc.)
- ☐ Evidence of how those experiences, skills and attributes are transferable to the course?
- ☐ Degree specific skills and qualities? (Check course profiles)
- ☐ Evidence of useful generic HE skills: independent learning, research, essay-writing, motivation, commitment, time-management, multi-tasking, communication, numeracy, literacy and IT capable?

(Future development)

- ☐ How the course will facilitate their career plans?
- ☐ Whether or not the course is a stepping stone to higher level study (e.g. Masters level study, Research or a vocation they are passionate about)?

Addressing complicated issues

Encourage your students to honestly address in their statement anything which is at all unusual such as an intended gap year or how their GCSE/post-16 performance might have been hindered by adverse personal circumstances, or by a health issue or a disability. (You should also address these situations in the UCAS reference. Please see the appendix for additional advice on supporting applications from students with circumstances requiring careful admissions consideration.).

Good practice – measure your school

Here are some examples of personal statement support activities that south-west schools are using. Use these examples to help benchmark the level of support you are offering.



Already
doing

Want
to do

Ask the experts

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|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Book your students into university and UCAS personal statement workshops, both generic events and vocational events such as teaching personal statements. Check events on www.won.ac.uk |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Ask universities to provide examples of 'strong' and 'weak' paragraphs. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Advertise to students specialist national personal statement workshops (e.g. Medicine) which can be run by a combination of university staff, current professionals and students plus the industry's professional body. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Advise your students to ask tutors and professionals for personal statement tips when they visit faculties and subject/career specific events. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Pay a HE careers adviser to check personal statements. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Ask universities and colleges to run a personal statement workshop at your school |

Already
doing

Want
to do

Create a student-teacher checklist

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|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Heads of Subject and your school Careers Adviser could analyse course descriptions to compile a list of skills, experience and qualities required for each of the most popular degree choices. You could present this research as a content check-list for both students and staff. |
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Already
doing

Want
to do

Personal statement bank

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|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Develop a subject-searchable suite of strong (anonymised) personal statements from your past students. (Remind students that UCAS uses similarity detection software: www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/similarity-detection-applicant-guide.pdf) |
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Already
doing

Want
to do

Invest in CPD

- | | | |
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| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Keep your staff up-dated. Book CPD activities on UCAS personal statements/references through the Western Outreach Network www.won.ac.uk . This will up-date and empower colleagues to effectively support their students. |
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Useful Resources

University Degree Course Offers – The essential guide to winning a place at university

by Brian Heap

This guide is up-dated annually and contains lists of what to include in your personal statement for each of the UK's main degree courses.

Personal Statements: How to Write a UCAS Personal Statement

by Paul Tefler

Paul is widely considered to be the UCAS personal statement guru.

www.ucas.com

Your students could try for example, the on-line personal statement tool, timeline and blog.

www.university.which.co.uk

For subject-by-subject personal statement advice.

www.thestudentroom.co.uk and **www.studential.com**

For personal statement discussion forums and sample statements.

www.perfectstatements.co.uk

Paul Tefler has designed an app which uses clear, step-by-step guidance to help students develop strong, individual personal statements.

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OUTREACH
NETWORK

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www.won.ac.uk

The Western Outreach Network is a government funded partnership comprising of the University of Bath, Bristol, Bath Spa, UWE Bristol and six Further Education Colleges. The WON provides schools with free activities and resources to engage, inspire and inform young people about higher education and their future choices.

Schools and colleges can benefit from:

- a single point of contact for all institutions
- a website providing information about events and activities hosted by local universities and colleges
- free resources and training to support the use of careerpilot.org.uk
- access to a broad range of teaching resources to support the delivery of careers education and guidance
- free continued professional development opportunities for educational practitioners
- bespoke school visits to include talks, workshops and student ambassador visits
- campus visits
- subject specific workshops.

To subscribe to the network and register your interest in these opportunities visit our website or contact us at won@bath.ac.uk.

