

THE UCAS YEAR

The last three years have seen an increasing focus on the support we offer our Sixth Form students for the vexing – and often stressful – UCAS application. The large scale programme we offer all our students has been helped along by the intense Oxbridge and Medic preparations the Sixth Form team began with in 2011. The successes achieved with this small group have now informed the revised schemes now implemented for all Year 13 students applying for university, and the outcome of this support network is demonstrated by the growing number of successful Russell Group candidates (see below). In 2014, Mr Warren (Year 13 Senior Tutor) has more exciting plans to develop the programme and encourage students even further to take action early and become the most competitive, ambitious candidates they can be!

Mr Warren takes you through a typical year of UCAS preparations:

SPRING / EARLY SUMMER

This is when we start the ball rolling with Year 12 students. We identify likely Oxbridge and Medic students and invite them to meet with us on a weekly basis to engage in useful activities that will hone the right sorts of skills: debating; creative thinking; speaking articulately on your subject (harder than one would think!); wider reading. Oxbridge students attend the annual conference at Epsom racecourse and the medics start practising for the tricky UKCAT/BMAT exam.

More generally, biweekly sixth form tutorials focus on UCAS topics at this time of year: statement advice; the online process itself; updating the action plan all year 12 students begin in September to build their 'UCAS portfolio' with visits, reading, lectures, research, relevant clubs and societies. This is something we have already started to develop this year with additional assemblies dedicated entirely to Year 12 and working closely with the CSPA to organise new, supportive events.

Last year we held an evening dedicated to Higher Level Apprenticeships and a parental evening on building the ideal UCAS application.

SUMMER TERM

When Year 12 students return after their AS examinations, we stride ahead in earnest. Students will now be taken off timetable for a few days during this term and work with the Sixth Form team and tutors to receive advice on, plan and draft their personal statements. The expectation is that students will develop and re-draft their work over the summer holidays. During this period, Mr Warren and Mr Ferguson also deliver sixth form assemblies to guide students through the online application procedure and to ensure they are aware of, and comfortable with, the different aspects involved in the whole venture. The Oxbridge and Medic group will, by this point, be receiving more specialist advice (such as how to choose the right college; ensuring relevant and sufficient work experience) and turning to the demands and stresses of interviews.

At this point in the year, we also offer additional support to those who show interest in non-university options: apprentices, gap years, internships, work etc. Mr Warren and Mr Ferguson continue to research and devise new ways of assisting this group of students. Most recently, the school has made use of a work experience initiative, What People Do. This year, a number of our students received detailed, professional advice about how to gain relevant and exclusive work experiences, and make useful business connections.



AUTUMN TERM

The UCAS application process is really underway now and staff are inundated with drafts of statements from all students. Tutors and subject teachers are involved in this process too, so that each student receives advice and feedback from the relevant people. We advise pupils that it is very advantageous to deal with all this earlier, rather than later. There is serious competition for places at top universities, and you're not helping yourself by leaving everything till Christmas time: get your application in and start receiving offers early! Oxbridge and medic students must apply by October 15; the deadline for all other students is 6pm on January 15th. Throughout this term, tutors and the Sixth Form team are tirelessly reviewing statements, writing references and signing off applications to send to UCAS. This Autumn, with the additional support we are providing in the summer, we will be altering our internal deadlines and will expect all applications to be completed by the end of October.

Oxbridge, medic and some Russell Group applicants will be receiving advice during their extension study periods on interview techniques by now. This process begins with group debate and dialogues which are slowly pared down to one-to-one discussions which become more formal as the weeks go by. By the time December arrives, each student has conducted at least one generalised interview with Mr Warren or Mr Ferguson, and a specialist one with a panel (consisting of the Sixth Form teacher and a subject specialist). This latter interview is designed to simulate the real thing as much as possible and many students do exit the room near tears or thoroughly deflated! Cruel to be kind though – it is crucial our students recognise the intense questioning they will be subjected to and the preparation they need to put in before facing the admissions tutors. Each year we interview students who perform appallingly in the initial meeting, but who go away and really do something with the advice given to them, then return and smash their follow up interview and go on to successfully secure a coveted place. It can be done – hard work at this stage genuinely pays off!



WINTER TERM

Most of the hard work is over by the time we return from the Christmas holidays. Inevitably, there are some students still yet to complete their applications though, and the first week or so of this term are spent hastily chasing up those who still intend to make that 15th January deadline. It is worth noting that the later students leave it, the less detailed assistance they will receive, and this, of course, has an impact on the offers they will receive.

Having said that, we are always keen for our students to work through the process for experience and practice, and whilst Russell Group places are far from guaranteed by this time, it is still very possible to pick up offers from universities if you are willing to be flexible about where you apply.

RESULTS DAY – 14TH AUGUST 2014

In the summer term before the holidays, the process has already entered another cycle for the new Year 13 students, but for those at the end, this is the culmination of everything.

A-Level results day is exciting, but fraught and emotional. For most, this is a day of elation and pride, but there are difficult decisions to be made by some who have received unexpected or disappointing results.

The Sixth Form team, and many teachers, will be in school from the very early hours (we open at 6:30am) to share in the students' successes, but also to offer immediate advice to those who don't quite make the grade or choose to make alternative plans, and help students in contacting UCAS or universities.

This is where the careful advice offered by us during the application process becomes important for some: having that realistic insurance choice may prove a very reassuring blessing at this point. Others, having received better results than expected, may decide to pull out this year and reapply in the autumn to more prestige universities.

We are here to deal with all of this and will always support leavers many years into the future.

Robbie Ferguson

Assistant Headteacher, Sixth Form



Recent University Statistics

Average % Offered Russell Group Places	70%
Average % Achieving Russell Group Places	50%
Average % Achieving Sutton Trust 13 Places	30%
Average Number Achieving Oxbridge Places in Recent Years	7

Recent A Level Results

