

WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2024 [TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION]

- 1 University of Oxford
- 2 Stanford University
- 3 Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- 4 Harvard University
- 5 University of Cambridge
- 6 Princeton University
- 7 California Institute of Technology
- 8 Imperial College London
- 9 University of California, Berkeley
- 10 Yale University

GOING TO UNIVERSITY IN THE UK

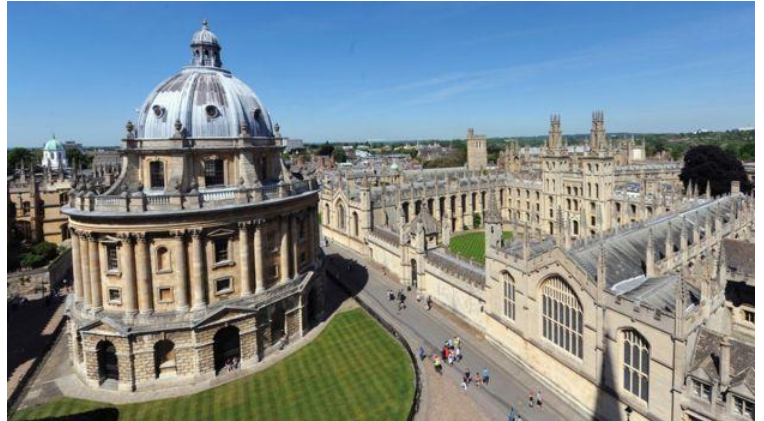
An increasing number of foreign students are going to university in the UK. Of course, choosing the right college is difficult. In Italy, most students will go to the nearest one and continue living at home. In Britain and the USA, on the other hand, students will leave home and study in a different part of the country. This is seen as part of the growing up process.

THE ANCIENT UNIVERSITIES

The oldest universities in Europe are Bologna, founded in 1088, and Paris. Bologna prepared young men for careers in the Church, the Law and Medicine. Here, they could study Canon Law, Civil Law and Roman Law before taking up positions in the increasingly complex worlds of Church and State administration. The study of Roman Law required a syllabus, i.e. certain texts that every lawyer needed to be familiar with. In line with the Greek-Roman liberal arts tradition, students were also expected to study 'expression' (writing, speaking and disputation, i.e. making a case and winning an argument) as well as arithmetic, geometry (as described by Euclid), astronomy and music. Undergraduates were a cosmopolitan, international community which came from all over Europe. Lectures were in Latin.

Bologna University arose from mutual aid societies of foreign students called 'nations' (as they grouped themselves by nationality) for protection against city laws which imposed collective punishment on foreigners for the crimes and debts of their countrymen. These students then hired scholars from the city to teach them. In time, the various 'nations' decided to form a larger association, the 'universitas scholarium', and Bologna University came into being.

The University of Paris was already well-established before it received a specific foundation act from the Church in 1200. It developed in the latter part of the twelfth century around Notre Dame Cathedral. The University had four faculties: Arts, Medicine, Law and Theology. The students were divided into four 'nations', according to their language or region of origin: France, Normandy, Picardy or England. They were often very young, between 12 and 25 years old, and were subject to Canon Law, not the laws of the State or its courts.



In 1167, King Henry II banned English students from attending the University of Paris to prevent an outbreak of the plague from crossing the Channel and Oxford University was established. Cambridge University followed in 1231. Both catered for the sons of gentlemen and the aristocracy and excluded both minority religious groups and women.

With the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, and the establishment of the Church of England, Oxford and Cambridge ceased teaching Canon Law and specialized, instead, in Mathematics, Classics and the Bible. England's two ancient universities, often referred to as 'Oxbridge', enjoy equal status and regularly feature in the world's top five Higher Education institutions.

Scotland, meanwhile, established four ancient universities of its own: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and St Andrews. In the 18th century, these institutions contributed greatly to the European Enlightenment and continue to be highly prestigious institutions.

WEBQUEST: Use the Internet to discover when women were first awarded degrees at (a) Oxford University and (b) Cambridge University.

WEBQUEST: How were the first female undergraduates treated by their fellow students and staff?

RED BRICK UNIVERSITIES AND THE RUSSELL GROUP

In the first half of the 19th century, German universities, such as Heidelberg, developed the modern approach to Higher Education, offering a broad range of disciplines, specialized departments, well-organized research and Ph.D. programmes. This model was then adopted and expanded by the newly-constructed 'Red Brick' universities in major English industrial cities, such as London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Newcastle, Bristol, Nottingham, Reading and Leeds. American universities, such as Harvard, followed suit and the German model rapidly became the paradigm for Higher Education institutions all over the world.

Britain's top 24 universities are now known as 'The Russell Group'.

WEBQUEST: Look at the website below. Which universities belong to the Russell Group and what is so special about them?

<https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/our-universities>

PLATEGLASS UNIVERSITIES AND POLYTECHNICS

In the 1960's, the demand for Higher Education in the UK increased steadily and the government responded by building 'Plateglass' universities all over the country in provincial areas like East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, Lancaster, York and Warwick. Access to their courses was conditional upon candidates meeting stringent entry requirements. Those whose grades were considered inferior or who wanted a more practical, less academic, qualification, known as an HND, could apply to Polytechnics, which often existed alongside established universities in towns and cities like Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham and Brighton.

For many years, there was a 'Binary Divide' in Higher Education between universities, with their more theoretical, academic approach to learning, and Polytechnics, which tended to specialize in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and endeavoured to meet the practical needs of industry.

In 1992, the Conservative government, under John Major, decided that university education should be extended to a far higher proportion of the population and converted the existing Polytechnics into universities, so Birmingham Polytechnic became Birmingham City University, London Polytechnic became the University of Westminster and so on. Many critics argued that the sudden transformation of the Polytechnics' status was not accompanied by a commensurate rise in academic standards, and felt that undergraduates at the former Polytechnics were receiving substandard tuition. Employers, too, discriminated against graduates from what they considered non-universities.

WEBQUEST: Are there Polytechnics in your country? How would you describe their role and their status?

DISCUSSION: Is there a hierarchy of Higher Education establishments in your country? If so, which ones are at the top and which are at the bottom?

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

<http://www.openuniversity.edu/welcome/>

The Open University, or OU, was established in 1969 for people who could not attend university full-time. When the first students enrolled in 1971, there were no formal entry requirements and lectures were broadcast on television. Now, there are many Open Universities all over the world and most established Higher Education institutions also provide online and/or distance-learning modules for part-time students. In fact, the Covid-19 Coronavirus epidemic has suddenly made this option increasingly attractive and Higher Education in general is now moving in this direction. Cambridge University, for example, moved all its lectures and tutorials online when the epidemic struck in 2020.

WEBQUEST: Is there an online option for working students in your country? If so, describe how it works and how much it costs.

DISCUSSION: Which subjects are particularly suitable for this kind of learning?

GRANTS

In the late 20th century, academic standards in most British universities were high and each institution operated a rigorous entry procedure with a strictly limited number of undergraduates on each course. Getting to university in Britain was considered an achievement for a young person and, if you managed to win a place, then the government would pay all your tuition fees and even give you a maintenance grant to help you with your living expenses.

With the huge increase in the number of students entering Higher Education following the wholesale conversion of Polytechnics into universities in the 1990's, the cost of Higher Education rose dramatically. Tony Blair's Labour government first introduced tuition fees in 1999, which started at about £1,000 a year but soon rose to £3,000, then £9,000 a year under David Cameron's Conservative administration and currently average £9,250, leaving graduates £40,000-£50,000 in debt at the end of their course.

Student Loans are provided to cover undergraduates' needs for the duration of their studies but have to be repaid, in installments, over the course of your working life. In a time of declining career prospects, falling wages and rising structural unemployment, the cost of Higher Education remains a controversial issue.

HOW TO APPLY

The university application process is explained by Tommy Worden on the next page. The UCAS system enables you to apply for five universities. They will either offer you a place or reject you and, out of the ones that make you an offer, you must choose two. The offer is conditional, i.e. you will have to pass a certain number of subjects at stipulated levels or grades. Your application is assessed on the basis of a report given by your teachers at school and your Personal Statement.

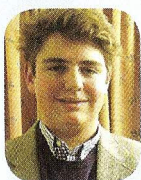
A Personal Statement is an essay in which you summarize your talents, achievements and motivations, explaining why you want to study that particular subject at university level and why they should offer you a place.

The Personal Statement is not only useful for applying to UK universities. It is an opportunity for you to identify and summarize your strengths and achievements so far and to define your ambitions for

the future. You never know when you may have to promote yourself succinctly, whether at a job interview or, informally, when you meet a prospective employer in a social situation, so gathering your thoughts together well in advance is always a good idea.

I WANT TO GO TO A BRITISH UNIVERSITY

Tommy Worden, aged 18, is half-Italian and half-British. Although he was born in Italy and grew up there, he's decided to apply to university – or “uni” – in the UK. Many Italians seem to be doing that these days. We asked him why:



TOMMY WORDEN

(STANDARD BRITISH)

In terms of studying in Britain, well, arguably¹ you could say it's one of the best educations

in Europe, in terms of university, just because it's so recognized worldwide. I also think that obviously the ongoing economic situation plays quite a big part in it, and finally the huge Italian community that's ever-growing in the United Kingdom, I think, is also a reason for that because there's just so many Italian people. If you just walk round the streets of London you, basically, every 200 yards or so, you'll overhear an Italian conversation going on. I think it's also because Italians tend to follow the trend, and British universities, as opposed to other universities, are more accepting of the Italian *maturità*.

UCAS

In order to apply to university in the UK Tommy, like everyone else, has to use a system called UCAS. We asked him to explain how it works:

TOMMY WORDEN

Well, UCAS is the new system sort of for applying to universities and it's all done online. And through that you get all this information and there's all there's all these other websites which give you information about universities and kind of try and match you to your university, and so overall you pick your top five, and you can pick the course and the course module you want to do. So, for example, I want to read history². I could pick straight history, or some universities offer history with a year abroad, just modern history, ancient history, medieval history, all the different types of history you can think of. And people I know in UCAS, they don't just apply for one course, like for someone doing engineering or medicine, for example, they can apply for veterinary science and medicine at the same time, but the problem with that is that your personal statement, you can only really write about one subject you want to study. I know, for example, a friend of mine who applied to read international management, but he'd written his personal statement on economics, and for this reason they didn't give him the place, so that's maybe one of the drawbacks³ of UCAS.

REFERENCES

And there's also quite a bit of form-filling⁴:

TOMMY WORDEN

So what you have to do, basically, for UCAS is fill out all this information about yourself, pretty basic stuff⁵, and your background, where you live, if you have any emergency contacts, but compared to the Common App, which is the one you have to do for the United States, they ask a lot less about you, and as opposed to the Common App, you just have to write one personal statement, which gets read by all the unis and, in addition, your tutor, or UCAS referee, writes a reference for you, in which they basically talk about how you fit in at school. And most of the times they write positive things about you! I haven't heard of anyone writing negative things about you because obviously it reflects the image of the school. And then you have to send off all these applications to these five universities, or less, by the 15th of January, although there's a deadline⁶ at the end of October for Oxbridge and medical students – that's their deadline, so they apply earlier. And if you only apply to three or four colleges, you can add colleges before the deadline on the 15th of January, but obviously you can't change your personal statement.

Watch Tommy Worden talk about university in the UK on our website www.speakup.it > video

The world of academia is full of closed doors...



So, you'd better have an interesting knock.



PERSONAL STATEMENT

From a young age, I travelled abroad to visit family in Italy, where I would hear my aunt speaking Italian. Her fluency in her mother tongue, as well as French, English, Spanish, German, Russian and Arabic captivated me and inspired me to learn languages.

My first job, at the age of nine, was at a recording studio in Italy, where I provided the voices for a series of English teaching books which were then used in Italian schools. That was why I chose to pursue a GCSE Italian in addition to my 4 GCE A-Level choices: Spanish, French, English Language & Literature and Sociology.

Now, I would like to study Modern Languages at University to explore the Mediterranean world, its culture, history, literature and film. I have been interested in linguistics ever since I visited the Basque country, where local words seemed to collide with Castilian Spanish. One person would say, '*Ezkerra*', meaning 'left' in Basque, and another would say '*izquierda*', in Castilian. These linguistic contrasts were reflected in the juxtaposition of traditional and modern culture that I saw all around me. One moment I was watching a traditional Jai-alai match and the next I was admiring the groundbreaking architecture of Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum.

Now that I am older, I really enjoy European film, particularly French cinema. In '*A Bout de Souffle*', '*L'Arnacoeur*', '*LOL*' and '*Au Revoir Les Enfants*', I like the way the directors incorporate themes, moods and emotions in a way which moves the viewer, and then makes him/her smile with an amusing incident. This approach seems to be characteristic of French culture. Recently, I watched '*Intouchables*', the story of an unlikely friendship between an ex-convict and a wealthy quadriplegic, which includes numerous comic touches. At the same time, it also analyses French society by showing class differences, poverty, discrimination and gang culture amongst ethnic minorities, themes that are also explored in '*La Haine*', which was shot in 1995 but is still relevant now. In a similar way, Guy de Maupassant's 1884 short story '*La Parure*' raised questions about class, money and social aspirations that have returned to haunt us in the present economic crisis, and made them memorable with a stark, ironic conclusion.

Spanish cinema, by contrast, illuminates the dark side of life with bitter humour. At the moment, I am studying a shocking film, Pedro Almodóvar's '*Volver*'. Here, the director integrates elements of Lorca's writing with '*La Movida*', the liberation of society and cinema after the abolition of '*La Censura*' following Franco's death. I have also seen Almodóvar's '*Todo Sobre Mi Madre*' and '*La Ley Del Deseo*' which, like '*Volver*', take a non-conformist approach to taboo subjects such as homosexuality and rape. Other Spanish films I have enjoyed include '*El Orfanato*' and '*El Laberinto Del Fauno*', whose atmosphere of psychological horror I find disturbing.

As a Languages prefect, I encourage younger students to participate in events such as Languages Week and liaise with staff, parents and fellow pupils at Sixth Form Open Evenings. This year, I was chosen as a campaigner for Activista, a global youth network, for my dedication to the charity ActionAid, and I hope to work with similar European networks like Activista France.

I obtained a work experience placement at the Head Office of White Stuff Clothing Ltd where I was surprised to see European brands such as Stradivarius influencing British fashion. Clearly, European markets are becoming more integrated, now, and by studying for a Modern Languages degree I hope to gain practical skills to prepare myself for the world of work as well as a cultural understanding of France and Spain.

PREPARING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

UCAS



1. PREPARATION

- > You can only write one personal statement, so don't mention a uni or college by name.
- > Check uni and college websites to see what skills and qualities they'd like you to have.
- > Make a list of things you want to include.
- > Start drafting early.



2. WHAT TO INCLUDE

- > Why you're interested in the subject.
- > Your enthusiasm for the subject.
- > How your previous studies relate to the course(s).
- > Relevant aspects of jobs, placements, work experience or volunteering.
- > Activities or hobbies that show your interest in the subject.
- > Any training or achievements that show your skills.
- > Demonstrate you're a great candidate and you have skills and qualities they're looking for.



3. HOW TO WRITE IT

- > Introduction – start with an opening sentence that encourages the reader to read on.
- > Structure what you want to include in an order that's most relevant to what the unis and colleges are looking for.
- > Conclusion – reinforce your commitment, enthusiasm and skills suited to uni / college life.
- > Check your grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- > Leave time to get feedback and redraft.



4. TECHNICAL DETAILS

- > Length – up to 4,000 characters or 47 lines of text (including spaces and blank lines).
- > Make sure you don't copy – our software detects any similarities and this could jeopardise your application.

PERSONAL STATEMENT WORKSHEET



This worksheet is designed to help you think about information you could include in your personal statement. We've included space for you to write down any thoughts you have as you go along. More detailed advice and guidance about writing your personal statement, including our 'How-to' video, is available at wwwucas.com/personalstatement.

Writing about the course

Why are you applying for your chosen course(s)?

Why does this subject interest you? Include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course, e.g. if applying for psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is.

Why do you think you're suitable for the course(s)? Do you have any particular skills and experience that will help you to succeed on the course(s)?

Do your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen? If so, how?

Have you taken part in any other activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)?

Skills and achievements

Universities like to know the skills you have that will help you on the course, or generally with life at university, such as any accredited or non-accredited achievements. Write these down here.

Also think about any other achievements you're proud of, positions of responsibility that you hold or have held both in and out of school, and attributes that make you interesting, special or unique.