

## 1. UCAS conditional offers

Many Tonbridge applicants have already received decisions from most or all of their chosen universities (via UCAS). Some are of course still in the pipeline, or may be dependent upon interview. This is often particularly the case with applications to Durham, Edinburgh, Warwick, and to medical schools. Normally you will have received notification of decisions by the end of the Lent term, but in a few cases this may be delayed as late as the end of May. When all your decisions are in you will automatically be sent a statement of decisions and reply slip. Any candidate who has

- A. Yet to receive acknowledgement of his application to UCAS;
- B. Yet to receive any decisions;
- C. Already been rejected by every university

should come to the Universities and Careers Centre without delay.

Please note that all unsuccessful candidates automatically enter the UCAS 'Extra' system whereby they can make further individual applications to universities; failing this, they will enter Clearing in June, or withdraw from UCAS and reapply in the next cycle.

If you received your final decision by 31<sup>st</sup> March you will have been required to have informed UCAS by 5<sup>th</sup> May of your decisions as to your final choice(s) of university. If you received your final decision after 31<sup>st</sup> March and before 8<sup>th</sup> May you will have had until 5<sup>th</sup> June. Sometimes UCAS asks you to respond more quickly – read what it says on their correspondence, as a failure to reply by a given date results in the loss of all offers.

In normal circumstances, Tonbridge candidates will have firmly accepted one offer (which may not be subsequently declined) and provisionally accepted a second offer (which is retained but becomes irrelevant in August wherever a candidate has received confirmation of his place at his first choice university). These offers are termed the **firm** offer and the **insurance** offer (in case the conditions of the firm offer are not satisfied). All boys must consult their housemaster (and, where necessary, AR) for advice on which two offers they should accept before informing UCAS of their decision. Decisions made now have consequences in August; our aim is to maximise your chance of securing admission to an appropriate university.

## 2. Applying for your tuition fees

Details on university finance, financial support for higher education students, issued by the department of education and employment, is available on the DfES website at [www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport). Since September 2006 no UK full time undergraduate pays tuition fees before they start, or while they are studying. Instead you will effectively be taking out a loan which will be paid direct to the university or college. You will repay this loan once you have left university and are earning £15,000 or over. The onus is on you to fill in the forms from your Local Education Authority, and you need to do this in the first half of 2008; it is not in any sense a matter for the school. Details of tuition fees and the student loan scheme, (a source of finance for your maintenance expenses), are published in the Higher Education Guide on the school's website.

### 3. 'A' level results and confirmation

'A' level results (including AEA and STEP examinations) and AS results will be published on Thursday 14 August 2008. Please do not contact the school before this date. You may ring the school or come in to collect your results. Do not ring or come to the school before 10.30 am; the results arrive here at about 9.00am, and it takes at least an hour to process them. Have your candidate entry number ready. If you have left an addressed envelope with the school, your results will be posted to you. The procedure will have been explained to you by the end of the summer term. **Remember you can also use 'Track' on the UCAS website on results day and you will see online whether or not you have been accepted to your chosen university, but it will not give you the actual examination results.**

Universities receive details of results directly from the examination boards a week earlier, and will normally have completed their consideration of the results by the time you receive them. They then communicate their decisions to candidates via UCAS.

Candidates will receive one decision via UCAS within about a week - i.e.

- a Confirmation of your firm offer  
or
- b Confirmation of your insurance offer  
or
- c A letter advising you that you have been unsuccessful and enclosing a Clearing Passport (AS10) with instructions.

### 4. If you are holding conditional offers, and your A levels meet the conditions

- a You might be able to confirm your place on Track, but also UCAS will write with a version of letter AS12 to confirm your place (firm or insurance offer) at university. This should occur by 21<sup>st</sup> August. The university in question is required to hold a place until such time as a candidate fails to satisfy the conditions of the offer, or chooses to decline the offer. There are **three types of AS12** and you will need to work out what to do by **reading the letter very carefully**. If you receive a plain **AS12** it means the institution will send you instructions directly as to what to do to reply. If you receive an **AS12b** you will need to use the reply slip on the letter, and if you receive an **AS12n** the institution assumes you will accept the offer and no action is required (although to be safe, you should make contact with the university to let them know you're going to accept). **So you see - some need a response, some do not, so do take care to follow the instructions precisely.**

The above procedure applies in exactly the same way if you are holding an offer for deferred entry in 2009.

- b Your acceptance now of a conditional offer represents a binding commitment. You may only escape from this commitment by withdrawing from UCAS altogether and then submitting a new application in or after September, 2008. This might be the case if your A level grades exceed your expectations and are higher than those stipulated in your main offer. This gives you the opportunity to try for entry to a different university in 2009. If this is the case, then you must send the

reply slip to UCAS as soon as possible to confirm your total withdrawal from the UCAS scheme for the current year. You then send in another UCAS form in the next round of applications. Please note that you are not free to decline a confirmed offer in August and then approach other universities for a place in October 2008; neither may you enter Clearing. Your withdrawal slip should be sent to UCAS by September 1 if you do not intend to take up your place: this enables universities to offer your place to other candidates.

Please note that if you wish to re-apply for 2009 entry (or apply for the first time), you should contact the Universities and Careers Department in early September. You will be given the new 'buzzword' so that you can complete your application online through the UCAS website.

You must also contact your former Housemaster and ask him to write you a new reference.

- c Candidates whose A level results are better than expected (i.e. AAA or better) might wish to consider a post-A level application to Oxford or Cambridge. Such candidates must also withdraw completely from UCAS and submit a new form in September 2008. Applications for Oxbridge must be made between 1 September and 15 October 2008. Oxbridge interviews are held in December, with a decision shortly before or after Christmas 2008. You may be required to take extra entrance tests. It must be emphasised that it is not possible to secure admission to either university for October 2008, so no purpose whatever is served by ringing individual colleges. Please note that it is common practice for Oxbridge colleges to request specimens of A level work from post A level candidates. Do not, therefore, throw away your A level files. Please also note that other universities are under no obligation whatever to 'reserve' your previously offered place while you apply to Oxford or Cambridge. You will lose any offers you are holding for 2008/9 entry as you will need to reapply through UCAS and you cannot run two applications concurrently. In any event, if you do choose to apply post A level to Oxbridge, you will also have to re-apply to the other universities via UCAS if you wish to be considered for a place for 2009.
- d If you are a successful candidate for admission to a university in October 2008, and decide in August that you now want to defer your entry for a year, it is up to you to negotiate with the university concerned. The universities are not obliged to comply with your revised wishes, and it is unlikely that they will if your A level grades are only just sufficient to meet your offer. You must also contact the university faculty directly if you would like to change your degree course; again, it is fairly rare for such requests to be granted.

## **5. If you are holding conditional offers and your A levels nearly meet the conditions**

You might still be accepted by the university that offered you the conditional place: this will depend on how many candidates have succeeded in meeting the conditions and how many of the places on the course in question have been filled. Your prospects of entry are, of course, significantly reduced in the most competitive subjects and at the most popular universities, and especially if you are a candidate for deferred entry. In a few cases, applicants who have narrowly failed to meet the conditions may be made a changed course or year offer; you are, of course, not obliged to accept this.

Don't forget you will be able to see on 'Track' on the UCAS website what decision the university has made on your 'near miss'. Also, if there appears to be no decision, the advice from UCAS is that you should telephone the relevant university department. State your case and find out the admissions tutor's reaction. Such reactions are likely to vary considerably, and attempts to place pressure on admissions tutors to hurry or alter their decision are invariably counter-productive. Candidates do tend to telephone universities on the morning that A level results are published. This strategy is quite sensible, but do expect lines to be jammed, often for hours on end; it is not uncommon for a university to receive 7,000 calls on a single day. It is essential that you make the calls personally; no purpose is served by getting your parents to ring – the universities will expect to speak to you in person, and will be put off by someone else making the call for you. Arm yourself with all the relevant information – UCAS application number, correspondence address, course applied for (and course code), details of the conditional offer and A level results. Sound confident and ask the switchboard to put you through to the relevant subject department; try, if possible, to get hold of the name of the admissions tutor. Remember that you are engaging in an exercise in salesmanship, and sound enthusiastic at all times.

Do not expect instant results. Some university departments might give you an immediately favourable decision, while others might tell you to ring back at a later date. If you have already been rejected, you will be informed as much; this decision cannot be altered. It is quite possible that you will have to ring back day after day before you receive a decision, and it is important to note that nothing can be done to speed up this frustrating process. There are perfectly good reasons for such delays. University departments are in no position to commit themselves until the full picture is clear, and this will not be the case until they have processed all the examination results, which often takes several days. They must also wait for candidates who have met the terms of their conditional offers to confirm that they are taking up their places (some may choose to withdraw from UCAS to re-apply to other universities in the following annual round; others might now request deferred entry). A common cause of delay is where a candidate has met the terms of his conditional offer at his insurance university, but has narrowly missed the grades required by his first choice university; the former must wait (often for some days) while the latter makes its decision; in the meantime, it is unable to give a definite decision to those candidates who have narrowly missed their grades.

It follows from the above that persistent, daily telephoning will often be necessary. In most subjects, it is unlikely (but nonetheless possible) that you will be accepted if your A level results are more than one grade below the offer. You should also note the universities are not required to accept "points equivalents" (unless they have previously said they will), so a candidate whose offer is BBB might well be rejected on ABC – or even on AAC. This will almost certainly be the case for popular subjects at popular universities. It is of course vital to secure the grade specified in the subject that you plan to study at university.

In the case of a candidate who meets the requirements of his insurance offer but not those of his firm offer, it is worthwhile looking on 'Track' or telephoning the firm offer university to establish whether you have prospects of entry: nothing is lost by doing so, and you do have the security of the insurance offer to fall back on. If neither of your chosen universities is willing to offer you a place (or where the final decision seems likely to be delayed), it might be worthwhile contacting any other universities to which you originally applied, whose offers **you** previously rejected. This is unlikely to produce

instant results, but it is the starting point for your negotiations in the Clearing system, details of which are outlined below.

## 6. If neither of your chosen universities is willing to give you a place

The following options are now available to you.

### a Continuing your efforts to get into a university through the 'Clearing' procedure

Clearing is the process by which UCAS places candidates with suitable qualifications in universities with vacancies. It operates from mid August until 30 September, and is intended only for candidates who received no offers, who previously declined all offers, or who held conditional offers that have not been confirmed following the publication of A level results. Details of Clearing, together with the Clearing 'Passport' (form AS10) are sent to you automatically by UCAS at the same time as you receive your formal notification of rejection. Only candidates rejected by both firm and insurance offer universities may enter Clearing. UCAS cannot issue the Passport until it has processed the rejection decisions from both main and insurance offer universities; UCAS states that it hopes that this will coincide with the publication of the first set of Clearing vacancy information in the national press.

Clearing works like this: The applicant retains control of his Passport and deals directly with universities. If, as a result of a telephone call from you, a university admissions officer asks for your Clearing number (which will be printed on your passport) it means that they are interested and will, using the number, be able to view your application on line. If they then want to make you an offer based upon your application, they will contact you directly. At that point, if you wish to accept the offer, you will send your passport to that department and they will confirm the offer with UCAS. If they do not decide to make you an offer, you will need to approach another university or department over the telephone and repeat the process.

If you have chosen to accept the offer, UCAS will in turn send you official confirmation. This commits you to taking up the place, and you are then unable to seek admission elsewhere. While it may be tempting to ring several universities to ask them to consider you, don't do it, as if a university finds they are competing for you they will not look favourably upon your Clearing application. It is best to go for the one you really want, hope to get it, but if not, then approach another.

Most of your work in Clearing will be done over the telephone. Assemble as much information as possible in advance - your UCAS application number, course in which you are interested, course code, and examination results. Speak confidently and ask to be put through to the admissions officer in the relevant department. The aim is to sell yourself, so you must sound enthusiastic and persuasive. Do not be deterred by engaged lines; keep ringing. Ring every day if you cannot get a definite answer. In this way, you can contact a large number of suitable institutions, with a view to assessing the market situation. Patience is essential and you should not expect immediate results; You can also ring other

universities while the outcome of your firm and insurance offers is being decided, but remember that they cannot act until they know that you are in Clearing.

Decisive action is essential. UCAS states that the Clearing process is 'best suited to candidates with good qualifications who can sell themselves over the telephone'. Clearing places (especially in the more popular subjects) tend to be filled quite quickly, and there is no guarantee that a university advertising vacancies on a course in the national press or on its website will be able to accept you, even if you have the required number of A level points. Likewise, a course which is initially full may subsequently have a limited number of vacancies at a later date, so keep watching the vacancy situation until you have secured something you want to accept. Not all universities have vacancies in Clearing for all courses, and there may be very few places in some of the more popular subjects, such as Law, English, Business Studies, History and Drama. It is almost unheard of for there to be places for Medicine and in Veterinary Medicine. Many admissions officers tend to take applicants holding conditional offers who narrowly missed the grades rather than advertise vacancies in Clearing. Nevertheless, 66,741 degree places were allocated in Clearing in 2007, so the prospects of finding a suitable course somewhere are quite encouraging. The greatest difficulties are experienced by candidates for deferred entry, since most universities will confine their interest in Clearing to applicants who are candidates for admission in 2008. You might have to abandon your gap year plans, or else submit a new UCAS application for 2009 entry in the round that begins in September 2008. It is expected that Clearing vacancies in 2008 will be first advertised from the middle of August, both in the national press and on individual university websites; increasingly, websites have Clearing vacancy information posted before A level results are published. Your A level grades dictate your range of options and, if they are particularly disappointing, you cannot afford to disregard potential openings at lower status universities.

It follows that you must be on hand throughout the period of the Clearing procedure. University entrance is a vital decision, and your prospects of entry are reduced significantly if you foolishly choose to be abroad during the critical period following publication of the results.

b Application for a place at a college of higher education

This can be done in addition to trying to secure a place at university or instead of it; it extends your options. As little as two or three moderate A level grades might get you into some courses offered by colleges of higher education. Most handle applications individually: you may therefore be asked to complete an application form. All these institutions offer full degree courses and diploma courses, details of which can be found in the prospectuses available in the careers centre. Often, at this stage, personal visits to such institutions might pay dividends. You might well consider applying for a course other than that you originally intended at a university: it may be more suited to your interests and to your academic ability. For example, the top music colleges now have an application similar to UCAS called CUKAS, more details of which are on the Higher Education Guide on the school's website.

c Deciding to retake one or more A levels and reapplying next year

This option is a sensible one for any candidate who is genuinely and justifiably disappointed by the outcome at A level, and whose desire to be accepted on a

specific university course involves grade improvement in one subject, or conceivably two. You may either re-take modules at another centre, which is likely to happen if you go to a ‘crammer’ or tutorial college in London (for example) or **you may take them at Tonbridge School**. You will, however, be charged for administration and for the invigilation of the exam. For more details on the intricacies of re-takes, read the separate information given to you by the Director of Studies.

Remember when reapplying, it is common practice for universities to demand higher grades of those who are re-taking. (N.B it is extremely rare for medical schools and law schools to make offers to re-take candidates). Information about application to tutorial colleges can be obtained from housemasters or from the Universities and Careers Centre; you will also need a reference from the school.

#### d Results challenges

In recent years, the practice of challenging A level results (i.e. asking for a ‘re-mark’) has become alarmingly widespread. It is entirely understandable that candidates should feel disappointed when confronted with results below their expectations, but it should be stressed that such challenges seldom constitute the most appropriate reaction to these results. The cost is about £40 per module, and the awarding bodies no longer issue reports on a candidate's performance. The documentation is complex, and varies from awarding body to awarding body. The awarding bodies insist that the challenge has the authorisation of schools (in practice, the head of the subject department concerned) and, while the proportion of grades changed as a result of the challenge has risen in recent years, it is still below 5% of all the requests for re-marks received. You are strongly advised to use the fast track procedure, designed to provide an answer within about a fortnight. If you choose to use this, you must (a) inform the Director of Studies by email ([jcp@tonbridge-school.org](mailto:jcp@tonbridge-school.org)) by Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August at the latest; and (b) inform your firm (or, where appropriate, insurance) choice university that you are challenging a result under the fast track procedure. The procedure is designed only for those who have missed their university offer by a single grade; the examination board will simply confirm or adjust your grade. If you are determined to challenge one or more results, remember you must email the Director of Studies, who will outline the various options and complete the necessary documentation. You should also contact the head of the subject department concerned, who will have details of your marks on each paper. The School will inform you of the charge which will be made and you will be asked to provide a cheque payable to the School; no results challenges will be processed until appropriate payment has been made. If the challenge is successful, the charge will be reimbursed. You may also request a photocopy of your examination script(s), though this cannot be used as a basis for a result challenge under the fast track procedure. Again, the awarding bodies make a charge for this service.

#### e Opting out of all higher education and seeking employment instead

It might be that you have had enough of formal education or that you have reached the conclusion that entry into higher education is probably beyond your capabilities. If this is so, you should certainly contact AR, as she might be able to give you some ideas and steer you in the right direction. Otherwise, you should

follow up personal contacts, study advertisements and make a decisive move at the earliest opportunity.

## 7. Sources of assistance for disappointed candidates

- a It is entirely understandable that, at a time of disappointment over results, you will feel the need for help and reassurance about what to do next. It is important that you should not panic or insist upon what might turn out to be unrealistic aspirations. A systematic approach is essential, and one involving an understanding of complex procedures, together with some fine judgements. Many sources of information are available, and you should make the best possible use of them: it follows that you must be available for discussion and personal contact with universities for three weeks (and possibly even more) following the publication of results. Absence on holiday will seriously jeopardise your prospects of being offered a place. UCAS advises that 'you will need to be available to deal with your application personally, particularly if you wish or need to enter Clearing. You should understand that it is very unlikely that you will be able to obtain a place in Clearing while on holiday abroad.' Even applicants with an early confirmation of a place need to be on hand to deal with the final arrangements for fees and accommodation. Quick action and initiative may sometimes secure fairly speedy rewards, but it must be stressed that patience is invariably needed in waiting for universities to make decisions.
- b In the first instance, you should contact your Housemaster and AR, as soon as possible after the publication of A level results. They may well seek the advice of heads of department. If your Housemaster is not resident in Tonbridge when A level results are published, you should contact AR in the first instance.
- c You should use all the information about courses and careers to be found in the Universities and Careers Centre, open between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> August, and then again on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> August. You may also ring AR on 01892 722856 or 07810 437089 for advice and help on securing a place.
- d Details of Clearing vacancies are published from mid August. UCAS has their own section of their website which can be found at <http://www.ucas.com/clearing>. Daily updates are also published normally in The Times and Independent Newspapers and on their websites. Information can be accessed via the websites of individual universities; freephone vacancy helplines include Radio 1 and the Guardian/Observer student service. Should you need it, the UCAS applicant telephone number is 0870 1122211. You must have your UCAS number at hand. E-mail enquiries should be directed to [enquiries@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@ucas.ac.uk).
- e **Best advice is: Try to get the grades you require!**

*Please inform Tonbridge School of any changes of address or telephone numbers so that we can post your certificates to the correct address and contact you should the need arise.*