

Applying to

UCAS

2026 entry

Name: _____

Form: _____

If you are to succeed in higher education, you will need to find the right course for you, offered by an institution at which you would be happy to study.

This guide will give you advice and information on how to find the right course for you and how to complete your UCAS application to the best of your ability.

If you have any questions about UCAS, please speak to the relevant member of staff listed below.

Name	Area of UCAS Responsibility	Where
Mr Noble	Overall responsibility for UCAS	Sixth Form Study Centre
Mrs Ribeiro	Year Manager	Sixth Form Study Centre
Mrs Knight	UCAS Advisor & Careers Leader	Sixth Form Study Centre
Mrs Wilkin	Oxbridge/Early Entry applications	Email / Library
Form Tutor	Editing your School reference (i.e. from your various subjects) and supporting with early drafts of your Personal statement	Email / Relevant Form Room
Subject Staff	Subject reference and Predicted Grade. Also... excellent people to help edit and improve your Personal statement (i.e. identify the relevant staff that are knowledgeable in the field you are applying for post-18)	Email / Relevant classroom / Faculty Office

Timelines

Student who submit their UCAS application in a timely manner are **more likely** to receive offers from their desired institutions. It really is a case of...



Follow the below timeline to help ensure an effective and efficient application process:

Task	Who	Deadline	Completed?
UCAS Hub Registration	All students	25 th March 2025 (@ UCAS Fair at Excel arena... using personal email address!)	Yes
First draft of Personal Statement (completed via Unifrog)	All students	Wednesday 16 th July 2025	
Personal Statement completed	Early Entry students	Tuesday 30 th September 2025	
All UCAS sections completed DEADLINE for UCAS submission	Early Entry students	18:00 on Wednesday 15 th October 2025	
Personal Statement completed	All other students (75% of year group)	Friday 7 th November 2025	
All UCAS sections completed	Applying for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Russell Group/Top 20 universities - Most competitive courses: Law, Economics, Accounting, Finance, Engineering, Pharmacy, Dental Hygiene and Therapy. - Any other student that wishes to benefit from an early application!! 		
Personal Statement completed	All remaining students (i.e. remaining 25% of students)	Friday 12 th December 2025	
All UCAS sections completed	All other students	18:00 on Wednesday 14 th January 2026	
Equal consideration deadline	All students	March 2026	
Student Finance opens	All students		

How to Register

You will apply online and must register yourself and create an account.

You will then link this with the St Mary's school profile.

You can apply via your UCAS Hub <https://www.ucas.com/dashboard#/>

1. Select **Start Application**.
2. Select **Undergraduate** and start **2026 application**.
3. Are you applying from a school, college, or centre? **'YES'**
4. **Link** to a St Mary's school using **Buzzword**:

Buzzword: **SMCS2026**

5. **Save the Buzzword** and continue.

If St Mary's Catholic School, Bishop's Stortford appears, this is correct. Click **'YES'**.

If this does not appear, please check you have entered the Buzzword correctly.

Select Group: this relates to your Form Group.

Please **select** your **Form Group** and then click **'SAVE'**.

You will then be taken to a dashboard showing Application Status.

The sections that you will need to complete are shown below. Once you have answered all the questions in a given section, please tick the box to indicate that this section is complete.

Profile

1. Personal details
2. Contact & residency details
3. Nationality details
4. Supporting information
5. English language skills
6. Finance & funding

Experience

1. Education
2. Employment

Do not worry about completing **'Your Choices'** at this stage. When you do return to this section, read the information contained in this booklet about **"Choosing the right course"** and **"Choosing the right university"**.

Follow the below guidance to avoid common mistakes:

Personal Details

- Use capital letters for the first letters of each of your names.
- **All names should be entered as they appear on all official documents** such as your birth certificate and passport.
- Middle names must be added in the First name box after your first name.

Contact & Residency Details

- Ensure that you enter the address that matches the address the school holds for you. If you need to update the school on a change of home address, please ask a parent or carer to do so urgently by email: D.Reilly@stmarys.net
- **Do not enter your school email address; you must record an email address that you have ongoing access to.** Universities will need to be able to contact you way beyond your time at St Mary's and you will no longer have access to your school email address after August 2026.
- Nominated Access – **Click 'YES' to nominated access.** If for any reason you are unable to speak for yourself on A Level results day, someone needs to be able to do so on your behalf. This is usually a parent or carer. *Please enter titles formally for example: Mother rather than Mum or Grandmother rather than Nan.*

Nationality Details

- This **relates to funding and therefore you need to be accurate.**
- If you hold dual nationality, enter one nationality first, followed by the second. There is no specific requirement for which should go first, so you can choose the order that best fits your preference or circumstances. Your nationality can affect your tuition fee status (home or international).
- If you have dual nationality and one of them gives you eligibility for home fee status (e.g., EU/UK nationality), ensure this is clear in your application.

Supporting Information

English Language Skills

Finance & Funding

- If you are going to apply for Student Finance – as the vast majority of students do - you must select the second option in the drop down menu: **'UK, ChI, IoM or EU student finance services'**.
- In the second drop down menu, please **select the county you live in.**
- If you are going to pay your fees privately, please select the first option in the drop down menu **'Private finance'**.

The following sections will appear once you have completed the above sections.

Diversity & Inclusion

- You must answer the questions under the heading Care support information.
- Please also answer the questions about parental education and occupational background..

More About You

- We encourage you to be as open and honest with your answers in this section. None of this information can be used negatively in terms of your application; by providing this information, universities will be able to provide the additional support you need once you join them.

Education

- Add two places of education if you went to a different secondary school before joining St Mary's Sixth Form. If you have always attended St Mary's, you only need to add one.
- 'Start date' is: September and the year you joined that school.
- 'End date' is: July 2026 for St Mary's or 2024 for your secondary school (i.e. the year you completed your GCSEs).
- Make sure you scroll down to the end of the section '**add place of education**' and answer all the questions.
- Once you have added your place/s of education, you will need to '**add qualification**' for each school recorded. This includes both GCSEs and A Levels – even though you haven't sat your A Level examinations yet.
- **The Sixth Form Team are responsible for adding your Predicted Grades to your UCAS when you have completed your application.**
- Also add vocational qualifications such as music, LAMDA, Sports Leadership. If you do add any of these, please give copies of your certificates to Mrs Knight so they can be verified.
- The majority of qualifications you will need to add have been pre-populated on the Qualifications shortlist. If a qualification is not there, please speak with Mrs Knight.
- If you took 'combined science' at GCSE in which you achieved a double award (ie 7-7), you need to add this under the GCSE Double Award heading.
- Do not guess the Awarding Organisation. These are the examining boards and will appear on your GCSE certificates.
- For qualifications taken in the Sixth Form at St Mary's, the boards are listed in this guide.
- Where appropriate, do not forget to add EPQ or Core Maths. EPQ comes under the heading "Extended Project".
- Health & Social care will need to be added twice because you take two exams in these subjects, one of which you have already achieved a grade for.
- You will need to provide your Unique Learner Number (ULN), please see your Year Manager or Mrs Knight.
- You must enter 'below honours degree level qualifications' in the drop down menu about your highest level of qualification.

Employment

- Only complete this section if you have or have had part time employment.

Extra Activities

- This section relates to any summer schools or presentations etc. that you have attended in support of your chosen field of study. Therefore, not everyone will have anything to record in this section.
- Refer to Unifrog because during Year 12, we have been recording 'interactions' on your behalf (e.g. when you attended the UCAS Careers Fair). These may be relevant to record here.
- You could also mention extra-curricular activities and initiatives you are involved in, e.g. Duke of Edinburgh, Scouts, Sport, etc.
- This is also an opportunity to talk about worthwhile work experience you may have recently gained.

Personal Statement

Your Personal Statement is a really vital part of your UCAS application.... It's effectively a 'sales pitch' where you must articulate and evidence both the 'hard' and 'soft' skills that make you an applicant to whom they want to say 'YES' to...!!

For this 2025-26 UCAS cycle, there have been significant changes to the format of the Personal Statement, changes designed to support the student/applicant to articulate their **motivations, relevant skills, and experiences**.

Applicants will respond to three structured questions:

1. **Why do you want to study this course or subject?**
2. **How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?**
3. **What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?**

Each question requires a **minimum response of 350 characters**.

Total **maximum length of 4,000 characters** across all three sections.

To ensure this is high quality you will need to have the proactivity, organisation and initiative to ensure it goes through a **rigorous quality assurance process**:

- ✓ **Version 1** needs to be edited by your **Form Tutor**
- ✓ **Version 2** need to go to a **relevant Subject teacher** who can provide specific advice in relation to the course/post-18 pathway you are applying
- ✓ **Version 3** will go to Mrs Knight, where you will sit down and go through your application, choices and personal statement together.

NOTE: You will need to ensure that your application is ready to send at this point, that you meet the entry criteria for all your chosen university courses (i.e. GCSE grades, predicted grades and relevant subjects), that you have uploaded your choices to your Unifrog account, and you have paid and sent your application to the school for its final stages. This meeting can take up to 45 minutes and should take place during a Study Period or after school.

- ✓ Only when these earlier stages have been completed is it to come to Mr Noble for final approval and submission onto UCAS.

*Of course, you may also have people outside school – e.g. family members - that you may feel could be really useful in developing your Personal Statement.

For example, if you are applying for Medicine and have a family member of family friend who is a Doctor.

Check your emails every day!

This is how you will receive updates when your application needs further action, etc. If you want to progress your UCAS application, ensure you help yourself by knowing what action areas you need to promptly complete.



You will be using Unifrog to help you complete this part of the UCAS process.

In the first instance, complete the 'Competencies' section in as much detail as possible as this will help you to sell/promote yourself.

<https://www.unifrog.org/>

Next, go to the 'Personal Statement' tool and click "start". You will be shown a list of six examples of what you should aim to include in your Personal Statement as well as some Dos and Don'ts. Read each section and then use the space provided below to start drafting your Personal Statement.

Remember that the focus needs to be on your academic studies and interests.

Examples of how you can demonstrate your super-curricular interests: MOOCs, TED talks, wider reading, masterclasses, etc. Throughout Year 12, Interactions have been recorded on Unifrog on your behalf showing which talks/presentations/assemblies you have attended. This information may also be of use to you.

NB - You must complete a Personal Statement whether you intend to go to university or not. It is a useful document to have prepared for when you inevitably apply for other positions in the future.

Aim High, but keep it real...

While searching for University Courses via Unifrog, you will be able to see what universities are 'Aspirational' 'Solid' and 'Safe' choices. You will need to complete this on Unifrog before your application is submitted to UCAS. We encourage you to have at least one Aspirational university choice, along with several Safe and 1 Solid to ensure you receive as many offers as possible.

Choosing the right course

Follow the instructions below to search which courses are available to apply for via UCAS

- <https://digital.ucas.com/search>
- Choose 'undergraduate' study level
- Choose '2026 – 2027' entry year
- Enter the name of the course you are interested in applying for
- Click 'Go'

You will then be presented with a number of courses from a number of providers. You are able to filter the results (top right hand corner) to narrow down your results.

The results will be listed alphabetically by course name and will give you headline details of the course including duration, start date, UCAS Tariff points, and level of study. For more detailed information, click on the course itself.

Information which you might find useful to look out for during your research:

- Whether interviews are likely to be held
- Dates of Open Days
- Campus location/s
- Duration of course
- Entry requirements
- Total number of students on this course
- Number of undergraduates (students studying for first degrees, like you)
- Number of students studying different subjects
- Average weekly cost of accommodation
- Course entry requirements
- Whether bursaries or any other form of financial support are available

Using this information is a useful way to compare different courses and institutions

Pay attention to course fees; they may vary from one institution to another as well as for individual courses. The maximum is £9,535 per year. Fees will normally be paid for as part of your student loan.

<https://www.unifrog.org/> is also a fantastic resource to help decide which course and institution might be best for you.

Choosing the right university

You will be studying for your degree for three or four years....sometimes more. You need to be comfortable and happy in your surroundings, especially if you intend to live away from home.

Here are some points you may wish to consider:

- Do you want a campus environment, or would you prefer to be based in a large city or town
- Where does the university stand in the various league tables
- The size of the university may be of importance to you
- The percentage of students like you (i.e. undergraduates)
- The ratio of students identifying as male to those identifying as female
- The different types of accommodation available
- Whether or not all first year students are guaranteed a place in university accommodation
- Whether the university can offer you a second/subsequent years in university accommodation
- Whether the accommodation is self-catering, and the average weekly cost
- If you need to buy your own food, where are the nearest shops
- Whether Wi-Fi is included in the price of the student accommodation
- What the distance is likely to be between where you will be housed and where you will study
- The location of the library or libraries you will use
- The cost of travel to and from university each term, as well as likely weekly travel costs
- Accessibility to the family home
- Whether there are any secure student car parks available and the cost
- The number and range of different student societies, clubs and other social activities
- General cost of living – this can vary hugely in different parts of the country

Deciding on your final x5 Institutions and Courses

A balanced strategy is key. By diversifying your options across aspirational, solid, and reserve choices, you give yourself a well-rounded chance of success regardless of how your final grades turn out.

Here's a breakdown of how to allocate your choices wisely:

1. x2 Aspirational Choices:

- **What Are They?:** These are courses at universities with high entry requirements or highly competitive programs that might be a stretch based on your predicted grades or UCAT score.
- **Why Choose Them?:** These give you the opportunity to aim high, especially if you're motivated to apply to prestigious institutions or challenging courses.
- **Example:** If your predicted grades are ABB, you could apply to a university asking for AAA.

2. x2 Solid Choices:

- **What Are They?:** These are courses and universities where your predicted grades or qualifications match the typical offers made to applicants.
- **Why Choose Them?:** These are your realistic options, where you have a good chance of receiving an offer. These should be universities you genuinely want to attend.
- **Example:** If your predicted grades are ABB, choose universities with typical entry requirements of ABB or AAB.

3. x1 Reserve Choice:

- **What Is It?:** This is a course with lower entry requirements than your predicted grades, providing a safety net in case you don't meet your expected results.
- **Why Choose It?:** This ensures that even if things don't go as planned, you still have a strong chance of securing a place at a university you're happy with.
- **Example:** If your predicted grades are ABB, a reserve option might be a course requiring BBC or lower.

Tips for Making the Best Choices:

- **Research Each Course Thoroughly:** Look into the course structure, teaching methods, assessment, and campus facilities. Make sure you're happy with each option.
- **Consider Entry Requirements:** Match your predicted grades, qualifications (e.g., UCAT for medicine), and personal achievements to the universities' requirements.
- **Location and Environment:** Consider the city or town, living costs, campus facilities, and whether you prefer a city or campus university.
- **Use UCAS Tools:** The UCAS website offers tools and advice to help you make informed decisions.
- **Have a Backup Plan:** Ensure your reserve choice is somewhere you would actually want to attend, not just a last resort.

Applying for an apprenticeship

You can apply for as many apprenticeships as you like, on top of your university applications. This process is more like applying for a job – positions can start any time of year, in many various locations and application deadlines differ between employers.

Be aware that deadlines may be published for individual apprenticeships but employers reserve the right to close an apprenticeships once enough applications have been received. Therefore it is better to apply as soon as possible.

You can search for apprenticeships online via many platforms, such as UCAS, Government website, Amazing Apprenticeships and Unifrog.

Tip: You can apply for apprenticeships at a lower level. If you do well and the employer is happy, it is very likely you will progress on to higher / degree level apprenticeships.



Examination Boards (for Level 3 study) at St Mary's

Level	Subject	Board
GCE A Level	Art	OCR
GCE A Level	Biology	AQA
GCE A Level	Business	Edexcel
Level 3 BTEC	Cambridge Technical in Business	OCR
GCE A Level	Chemistry	OCR
GCE A Level	Computer Science	OCR
Level 3 BTEC	Creative Media Design	Edexcel
GCE A Level	Design & Technology	WJEC Eduqas
GCE A Level	Economics	Edexcel
GCE A Level	English Language	AQA
GCE A Level	English Literature	AQA Spec B
GCE A Level	Film Studies	OCR
GCE A Level	French	Edexcel
GCE A Level	Geography	OCR
Level 3 BTEC	Health And Social Care	Edexcel
GCE A Level	History	OCR
GCE A Level	Italian	Edexcel
Level 3	Core Mathematics	AQA
GCE A Level	Maths	Edexcel
GCE A Level	Further Maths	Edexcel
Level 3	Media Studies	Edexcel
GCE A Level	Physical Education	OCR
AQA	Physics	AQA
GCE A Level	Psychology	AQA
GCE A Level	Politics	Edexcel
GCE A-Level	Religious Studies	AQA
GCE A-Level	Sociology	OCR
GCE A-Level	Spanish	Edexcel

The School Reference

Please ensure you have informed your Form Tutor and Sixth Form team of the preferred field of study / proposed course. This will help them and subject staff to personalise your reference.

Subject staff will meet together in teaching teams or pairs to compose the contents of your subject reference. They will agree on your Predicted Grade; naturally this will take into account your performance so far (e.g. formal exams, participation in class, etc.), but also the fact that A Levels become more challenging as you progress.

Predicted Grades are not open to negotiation

Teaching staff will not predict you an unrealistic grade simply to secure you an offer from a particular university. They will use their professional judgement to make a final decision that is grounded in evidence.

Before your application is submitted to UCAS, Mrs Knight or Mrs Wilkin (Early Entry) will be checking with you that your course entry grade requirements match your Predicted Grades. Your application will not be submitted if your Predicted Grades are unlikely to secure you an offer; this would not be in your best interests and could result in you not receiving any offers.

Once your Form Tutor has received all the electronic subject references, they will combine and add to them, to produce a first draft of the complete school reference. This will then be passed to Mr Noble for final checking and to be entered onto your UCAS application.

UCAS Application Fee

It will cost you £28.95 to make an application via UCAS to up to five universities. This will also give you access to Clearing and Extra. UCAS Extra is a free service for applicants who have used all five of their initial UCAS choices and have not received or declined any offers. It allows you to add another choice to your application for one course at a time, without incurring an additional fee.

If you have received UK Government funded free school meals at any point during your secondary education, you will be eligible to have the application fee waived. There is a tick box option for this on the page where you pay, for additional information, please speak with Mrs Knight.

You will be required to make this payment by credit or debit card when you have completed your application. This is called "Pay & Send".

You will only actually pay once although you will need to "Pay & Send" every time you submit your application to The Sixth Form Team for checking. Do not be confused by this!

What Happens Next?

Your application will be checked and The Sixth Form Team will read your Personal Statement one final time. If there are any errors, your application will be returned to you. You will be contacted by school email asking you to come and see a particular member of staff about the issues that need addressing.

Once you have amended any errors, simply "Pay & Send" again. This does not require you to actually pay again, it just means your application is returned to The Sixth Form Team for checking.

Your reference (see section on The School Reference) will be added once it has been finalised by the Sixth Form Team. You will then be asked to come and see the Sixth Form Team to check your reference and confirm that your Predicted Grades are as you expected, and that they meet the criteria for your university choices. Your application is then submitted to UCAS.

Once your application has been submitted, UCAS will maintain contact with you as an individual, and not via school. You will be able to track the progress of your application online via Track, and will receive information about this directly from UCAS.

You need to allow the school **at one week** to complete the work on your application after you have finished your part of the process. You therefore need to be organised and plan your timings accordingly.

Don't delay, get started today...!

Although the equal consideration deadline is 18:00 on Wednesday 14th January 2026, places will start to be offered as soon as applications start to arrive at universities. That is why it is so important you follow the timelines outlined at the beginning of this booklet.

Early Entry candidates beware! The deadline you are working to is much tighter... please see the timelines outlined at the beginning of this booklet.

Good luck!!

.... and remember:

