

University Applications

At Stowe pupils have access to a wide range of advice and help on the decisions they have to make when considering options after school. This is coordinated by a small team of dedicated advisors and this letter will explain the team's role, what we can do to help Stoics and where we expect them to be at this stage of their school career

The Stowe Team

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The team is on hand to ensure whether a pupil wants to go to university or straight into employment, they have access to the expert, experienced and impartial advice they need. Our only agenda is to help Stoics reach a decision that will enable them to go on to achieve their ambitions and aspirations.

What are the options?

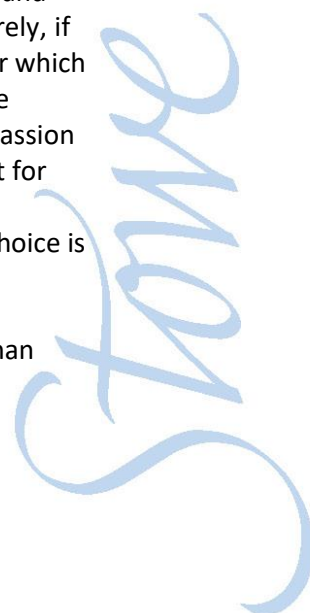
The first choice to be made is whether to enter higher education or to go directly into employment. The overwhelming majority of Stoics go into higher education. A good degree has obvious intrinsic and extrinsic benefits and is an expected for most professions and careers. However, changes in the funding of tertiary education and tightening in the employment market have brought the costs and benefits of taking a degree into sharper focus. University courses are highly academic and a degree no longer guarantees automatic transition into the sort of jobs it may once have done. It is more important than ever that pupils think hard and evaluate what a degree will ask of them against what it will offer them.

For those who decide to go into work, Dr West has tremendous experience in the field of careers and apprenticeships so is ideally placed to help and advise with that process. His contribution has been explained in detail in other communication and the remainder of this letter will focus on the route to university.

Going to university: subject

The first decision to make is what to study. Subject choice is a function of intrinsic enjoyment and extrinsic employability but it is important to make clear from the outset that employability rarely, if ever, should be the only determinant when it comes to choosing a course. Taking a subject for which a pupil is unsuited or to which they are averse has profound consequences: thoughts of future employment tend to be less effective motivating factors than a fundamental and energising passion for a subject. It is rare for this to change over the duration of a course and so picking a subject for any reason other than verifiable academic commitment is not likely to end happily. This is certainly the way that university admissions teams see things and integrity of subject choice is the first thing they will look for in any qualifying application.

In most instances undergraduate qualifications are used to exhibit general capability rather than specific skill sets. Furthermore, many professions will either accept or expect specialist profession training after graduation, accountancy and law being two examples here. Consequently, there are not many future careers that demand a particular subject at university. Medicine (human, veterinarian and dental), architecture and engineering and a



handful of others do, on the other hand, and tutors are on hand to advise and help in this area. While some degrees are better suited to some careers than others, in the overwhelming majority of instances, quality of outcome is going to be more significant than any specific subject knowledge or skills acquired.

Going to university: destination

Destination should follow subject choice and for those going onto higher education the choice is literally global. Most Stoics go on to UK universities but every year more pupils are choosing to head overseas: the US has long been a preferred destination, universities in Europe are becoming ever more popular and some go further still to Asia and Oceania. For those choosing to remain in the UK, some may find art, music and fashion colleges better suited to their hopes and ambitions better than traditional universities.

Going to university: finance

Questions of finance can be deferred to later in the year but for those going to a UK university, whether the applicant has home or international status will determine fees charged and eligibility for student finance. Status is determined by residence in the UK (a minimum of three years' residency, not including any time spent at boarding school) and anyone in doubt about their likely status should give the issue careful attention. UK Student Finance is not available for those going to American universities, but American universities do have scholarship funds available for the right candidates.

Going to university: timing

The last thing to decide is when to go to university. While some pupils prefer a seamless transition into further education, others can benefit tremendously from a carefully chosen and equally carefully planned Gap Year. We advise those who are planning to take a Gap Year to make an application for a deferred place with the rest of their year group. The alternative is to wait and to make a post results application during their Gap Year.

What progress should my son or daughter have made by now?

Stoics should by now have a good idea of the general direction of their further education, both in terms of subject area and where they would like to study.

The Easter break is when Stoics should start looking closely at university Open Days and Taster Courses. We recommend that pupils make use of Open Days (up to two during term time, the rest in the holidays) to get a feel for the universities in which they are interested: we certainly advise a visit before finally accepting a place. Taster Courses offer an excellent introduction to university teaching: they may help a pupil to decide whether a particular subject is right for them or not, and someone who can use attendance at a Taster Course to say why the subject is right for him or her has a good competitive edge. Places on these courses are limited, but we recommend them strongly.

Over the Summer Term these ideas should develop to the point where a final subject has been determined and a shortlist of universities has been drawn up. In the Michaelmas Term, Stoics applying to UK universities can apply for to up for five courses at five UK universities: we strongly recommend that the summer holiday is used to reduce any shortlist to that final five.

At the same time, if an application is being made to an institution outside the UK, preparation for that should be well underway by the time term restarts. Applications to institutions outside the UK are handled entirely separately: each education system employs its own particular method and applications to one system have no impact on applications elsewhere.

Applications to Oxford or Cambridge or for Medicine, Dentistry, Law or Veterinary Science need to be submitted before the middle of October and so pupils intending to go down that route need to be properly organised well in advance. Equally, applicants to American universities need to be well advanced in preparing for SATs and should already have booked themselves in to sit them.



All pupils need to establish, in discussion with their Tutors, a firm grasp of what their likely A Level grades are and to focus on courses for which they stand a realistic chance of qualifying. In addition, pupils have been directed to produce a written statement explaining why they want to pursue their chosen course and why they think they would be good at it. This is the first draft of the Personal Statement required by the university application form; while the Stoics will continue to refine and redraft their Personal Statement throughout the summer holiday and Michaelmas Term, it is essential for them to have completed a good first draft by the end of their Lower Sixth Summer Term.

What help is available?

Here your son or daughter's Tutor or subject teachers are the first port of call and they themselves are ably supported by a team of practitioners with enormous experience of the alternatives on offer. University applications are overseen by Paul Floyd with Jonathan Murnane taking responsibility for Oxbridge and Medical Applications and Fitzpatrick Smith managing applications to institutions outside the UK. Gordon West has a wealth of experience when it comes to Careers and Apprenticeship advice and Michael Righton similarly has a vast knowledge of Gap Year opportunities. While the Tutor is closest to the pupil and has a detailed knowledge of the applicant and their aspirations, all members of the team are on hand to give specialist and detailed advice should it be required.

There is a great deal of help available both on the School website and more widely on the internet.

<https://stowe.fireflycloud.net/universities-and-colleges>. The VLE is first port of call and here you will find details of the help the School can offer pupils as well as links to other useful websites.

<https://stowe.fireflycloud.net/careers/fast-tomato-careers-app> Fast Tomato is an incredibly powerful one-stop site for careers and university guidance. Pupils should already have an account open.

www.ucas.com is the principal site for UK university entrance and has a number of useful features, including a facility to search through the courses on offer.

www.arts.ac.uk covers the London Art Colleges.

www.opendays.com lists university Open Days with their dates and allows online booking.

<https://www.unitasterdays.com> gives details of some of the Taster Courses available.

www.unistats.com provides useful statistics about university courses, including employment prospects and student approval ratings.

Individual university websites are also well worth a visit. For any particular course the university's own website is always the most up to date and the most authoritative.

www.fulbright.co.uk/study-in-the-us/undergraduate-study is a good introduction to American universities.

Stowe also has a well-stocked Careers Library, with up to date copies of university prospectuses and more general guides to choosing a higher education course.

Candidates for Oxbridge, Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry or Law

The competition for places at Oxford and Cambridge or in these subjects is fierce and is getting fiercer. The majority of successful applicants will be predicted to obtain As and A*s at A Level (any offer made will almost certainly be a combination of As and A*s); GCSE grades ideally need to be straight A and A*, with the majority at starred level. While Oxford and Cambridge



deliberately do not mandate a minimum number of A* at GCSE, experience and feedback suggest that a minimum of 8 is a useful benchmark. Nationally there are a great many students fitting these criteria, and admissions tutors need a compelling reason to consider an application from any student who has fallen short.

The Oxford and Cambridge application process is explored in more detail in the Oxbridge section on Stowenet and any pupil thinking of applying is urged to give those pages their careful attention.

There are subtle differences in each university's selection process which will shape any application but in general and in addition to exceptional academic results, Oxford and Cambridge are looking for flair, special academic promise and tangible evidence of intellectual curiosity.

The process is testing and applicants need motivation and genuine academic ambition. At Stowe, we encourage applications from those who meet the admission criteria and support them as they assemble their application. Typically we identify suitable candidates early in the Lower Sixth and suggest that they up the academic ante, offering various strategies in support including supra-curricular reading and writing, extension classes and interview preparation. Would-be candidates are continually assessed for Oxbridge potential and it is very common for many of them to withdraw from contention throughout their Lower Sixth year. Following the end-of-year exams in June, staff make a final assessment of each pupil on the basis of individual academic attitude, performance and potential before suitable candidates embark upon the main stages of the application throughout the summer holidays and into the Michaelmas Term of the Upper Sixth.

Our Aim

We hope that all Stoics will find the right future for them: the possibilities are virtually countless and we want our pupils to find the course and university that best fits their interests and ambitions. Our team is ideally equipped to help your son or daughter reflect on their journey so far, identify their abilities, interests and ambitions and then find the course that is going to help them to fulfil their potential. The universities are trying to do the same thing: to identify the applicants for whom their course is just right. We want Stoics to get this right, and to find the next few years rewarding and enjoyable.

The word "Stowe" is written in a light blue, elegant cursive script, positioned in the bottom right corner of the page.