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How to apply for university as a mature student (aged 21+): the process and entry requirements

So, you're thinking of applying to university and you're tempted because:

- You want to change direction in life or aim for a new achievement?
- You want to progress your career by gaining specific knowledge and skills?
- You want to learn more about a subject that you're passionate about?

Whatever the reason you're thinking of getting into adult education, we know you'll have a lot of questions about how to go about it and where to start. That's where we can help.

In this blog we'll take you through the process of applying to university (at 21 years old and above). We'll also answer some of the questions you might have around entry requirements for mature students who have been out of education for a while, or might not have any qualifications.

Ready to apply now? [Get in touch today](#) with any UCAS questions.

What does 'mature student' actually mean?

Let's start with an obvious question that crosses everyone's mind – what actually is a 'mature student'? Usually, you're classed as a 'mature student' if you begin studying at the age of 21 or over, after a period of time out of full-time education. Around a third of university students studying their first degree are mature students of all ages and backgrounds (source: UCAS). Over half of mature students are aged between 21 and 24 and approximately 40% of mature students are over 30 years old.

How to apply to university as a mature student

Generally, for full-time courses, you'll follow the same application process as younger students, applying through the UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions service) website. You'll create a UCAS profile and write a personal statement all about your experience, suitability and passion for the subject you are applying for. You will then select up to five courses to apply to.

You need to submit your UCAS application in line with the same application deadlines as other students (see below for the application timeline).

For flexible or part-time courses, you usually apply directly to the universities or colleges that you're interested in. They will have full details on how to do this on their course web pages.

When do you need to choose your course and apply by?

The main application deadline for most full-time courses is in **January**.

There are a few steps you will need to take before this though, to help you get prepared.

1. Research courses

First you need to start researching which courses interest you the most and which universities or colleges offer them. It's best to start this the year before, over the summer months. This gives you the time to book on to specific university Open Day events or webinars, to help you decide which one is right for you.

2. Attend Open Days or Virtual Events

Once you've narrowed down which courses and universities you're most interested in, you can attend Open Day events, which will give you the chance to hear from the tutors that will be teaching the course, as well as chat to students currently on the course. This means you'll be able to ask any specific questions you might have about studying there, or about your suitability to the course.

TOP TIP: If you aren't able to attend any Open Days in person, most universities offer virtual events too - you can join them easily online.

3. Complete your UCAS application and upload your personal statement

We would advise you to register with UCAS and start filling-in your online application during the early autumn, to give you plenty of time to complete it and to write your personal statement. Please feel free to [contact us](#) for any help with completing your UCAS application or personal statement. It's what we're here for and we have plenty of experience in advising mature students. The UCAS website also has a [useful guide](#) to walk you through completing your application.

TOP TIP: Starting your application in the early autumn, will give you the chance to build up any extra skills or relevant experience in your spare time that could help to strengthen your personal statement.

What about the entry requirements for mature students? Are these different?

When you're researching the degree courses that interest you the most, you will see that each university advertises the entry requirements (qualifications or experience) needed to gain a place, on the course web page. These are also shown on the course search in UCAS.

You might find that you already meet the advertised entry requirements, however if you don't, don't immediately write yourself off, as there are still alternative ways you could gain a place, even if you left school without the relevant qualifications.

It could be that your past experience (in work or other areas of your life) has given you the skills, knowledge and potential to make you suitable to study the course. You can contact universities directly to ask them if they would consider relevant past experience instead of qualifications, as many do.

TOP TIP: You should use your personal statement to really showcase this relevant work or life experience and describe the skills and knowledge you've gained that would be valuable to you when studying the course.

Other ways to meet entry requirements

There are also other ways you can meet the entry requirements of your chosen course, including studying one of the below (which we can advise about):

- An Access to Higher Education course (these can be flexible and are designed for adult learners and returners to education)
- A foundation course (these are designed as an introduction to the subject you intend to study to help prepare you to study it at degree level)

So what happens after you submit your UCAS application?

Once you've completed your application, you will begin to receive communication from the universities you have applied to, which could include the offer of a place to study, or an invite to go in for an interview so that they can get to know you beyond your application.

You should hear back from each university by April/May and the deadline for you to accept or decline your offers is usually in May.

If you don't receive any offers by this point, you can apply again in July through **Clearing** - this is something we assist students of all ages with, so don't hesitate to get in touch.

Still have questions about applying to university as a mature student?

We know that applying to university as a mature student can create mixed emotions, from excitement and anticipation, to nervousness and self-doubt. It might also seem like there's a lot of information to get your head around. That's why we encourage you to contact us with any question you have, no matter how big or small and no matter what stage of the process you are at. We work closely with mature students all of the time and chances are, we're already helping others that have the same question you do.

[Get in touch](#) today and let us help you find the best path into adult education. It's what we're here for!