**UCAS Application tips for studying Music at Royal Holloway**

Welcome to Royal Holloway’s departmental guidance page on submitting an UCAS application form for a course in Music. Here you will find information on how to put together a successful application, and obtain tips on what we are looking for in potential students.

**Do your homework**

Before embarking on any formal application procedures, make sure you have all the information on hand in helping you make the big decision about how you will spend the next three years of your life.

Find out more about the universities and courses that have grabbed your attention. Explore their websites; scroll through their [course modules](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/music/prospectivestudents/home.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); examine [staff expertise](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/music/staffdirectory/home.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); read through or watch alumni and student [testimonials](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9r3eZc1038" \t "_blank). Attend [Open Days](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/studyhere/opendays/ucasvisitdays.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and [Taster Days](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/music/events/eventsarticles/a-levelstudentstasterdayandmusicteachersconference.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); find out about [scholarships](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/studyhere/undergraduate/feesandfunding/bursariesandscholarships/allstudents/instrumentalscholarships.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); talk to your teachers and advisors about how different university environments and programmes could complement your needs. Talk to friends who have studied at colleges that interest you; look up online guides and league tables (our department, for example, was ranked No. 1 in the UK at the last Research Assessment Exercise and is one of the top 10 institutions on the 2013 League Tables compiled by the Complete University Guide.

**Online registration - some mechanics**

UCAS registration is free, although a fee is involved in processing your application. Sign up for a username at [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank),and don’t forget your password! Fill in your personal details plus additional information on finance arrangements, and any special needs or disabilities. You will also need to obtain your school’s buzzword, which the site will prompt you for in the course of application. We may occasionally get in touch with you directly for additional exchanges or updates on our Open Days and Taster Days, so it is helpful to include both your home and mobile telephone numbers in addition to your email address.

List the institutions you would like to apply to alphabetically, and don’t forget to supply both the institution code (R72) and [course codes](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/coursecatalogue/home.aspx?keywords=music). You may choose up to five courses on the same form. None of the institutions you have applied to (and this includes us) will receive information about which other courses and institutions you have applied for. While you may apply for up to five different subjects, we do not advise this as your corresponding personal statement explaining your decision to pursue disparate interests may send mixed signals to admissions tutors. There are of course exceptions to the above, particularly if you are applying for Joint Honours. Here, it is important that you make clear to us (and to yourself!) reasons for your choice to pursue parallel interests.

**Grades and Qualifications**

Our department usually makes two kinds of offers – an Unconditional Offer and a Conditional Offer. Our standard requirement is an AAB-ABB, including an A in Music or equivalent. This means that while achieving an AAB grade will guarantee a place on our course, we may make a lower offer to students whose application points to considerable potential. Applicants will normally be expected to be of a standard equivalent to Grade 7 or above (ABRSM, Trinity, Guildhall, Rock School, etc.), but exceptions may be made for those with particular strengths in other areas. However, acceptance on performance courses is dependent on achieving at least Grade 7 or equivalent, or demonstrating this standard in an audition in the first week of term. For more information on A level equivalents, visit our [entry requirements page](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/music/coursefinder/bmusmusic.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). Overseas students can consult our [international pages](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/international/home.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) for guidance on English language proficiency and other requirements.

It is important to be realistic about your grades. In general, admissions tutors will expect your predicted results to fall in line with your previous educational progress. However, we do respect that individuals develop their potential in different ways and at different paces. Hence, while we are interested in what you have already achieved, we also want to know how you can be nurtured as a scholar and a musician over the next few years, even as we expect you to contribute actively to our rich and culturally diverse learning environment. In your application, showing evidence of your potential will help us gauge how well you will take to life at our department. This can be demonstrated in your supplementary qualifications, as well as in your personal statement and reference.

**References**

It is a good idea to build a good relationship with your referee prior to asking for a reference. Don’t forget to consult with her or him on how best to contextualise your grades, especially if they do not fall within our standard offer range. For example, if there is an apparent inconsistency (e.g. you have achieved Cs and Ds at GCSE at AS level but are predicted to obtain straight As now), we tend to look for supplementary support in your reference for evidence of developmental progress. If there are valid reasons for a less than desirable performance at examinations (e.g. illness, lack of teaching resources/ facilities), make sure that we are alerted. If your predicted grades fall short of our expectations but you still feel that you have much to offer our department, make this known to us. A helpful reference will also provide a sense of your position within your cohort or in relation to other years. Finally, additional skills and relevant interests outside of academic results can also be mentioned.

**Personal statement**

The personal statement is one of the most important sections of your application. Here, we get to know you better as an individual, and you get to tell us about your unique qualities, on your own terms and in your own style.

Most statements will provide information on why you have chosen your course, plus evidence for this decision. The latter is usually demonstrated through mentioning your interests, skills, knowledge and – where applicable – related vocational or work experience. Most admissions tutors will also look for enthusiasm, motivation and evidence of commitment and discipline, not only in academic pursuits but also in life at large. In this respect, it is helpful to demonstrate that you can achieve personal independence with regards to making the transition to university life, and be clear about what you want out of the university experience. You should also have some idea of your career aspirations when you graduate. (Obviously, we don’t expect everyone to stick to their decisions by the end of the Year 3!)

At Royal Holloway, we especially welcome students who demonstrate curiosity, creativity and willingness to engage with new musical, scholarly and life experiences. We also value initiative and the ability to listen, share and exchange.

Often, we find that our best students have many interests beyond music, and constantly strive to understand their learning, achievements and emerging roles in society within a much larger and current context. The most outstanding applications we receive demonstrate all-roundedness, ambition and compassion, in addition to good grades and development potential.

This means that we are always happy to find out more about other socially meaningful aspects of your life. For example, if you have written music reviews for your school or local newsletter, or run a reading/ discussion group, tell us about it. If you are a budding composer, or manage your own music blog; pass on the URL addresses and SoundCloud sites. If you have set up a music society or band that has toured various schools and beyond, let us know about your specific projects and roles, and the kinds of repertoire you have performed. If you play multiple instruments or speak several languages, tell us what they are. If you are interested in cross-references between popular culture, film and classical music, or have developing interests in music and global politics, or textual analysis and changing cultural aesthetics, tell us what you like – or for that matter, what you do not like.

A note of warning: it is always easy to talk about hobbies and interests at length. Bear in mind that you only have 4000 characters for this exercise, and that not all of it should be spent on navel-gazing pursuits.

**Dos**

Do give yourself enough time to prepare the application.

Do write your personal statement on a separate document before copying and reformatting it onto the UCAS online form.

Do write in concise, standard English. We may not always be able to decipher text message or FaceBook shorthand.

Do list any additional awards, enterprise initiatives, volunteer projects, gap years taken and work experience.

Do save your work on the online form regularly.

Do keep a copy of your application.

Do get an extra pair of eyes to proofread your application before clicking on the final ‘Send’ button.

Do structure your personal statement appropriately: a 50-50 split between reasons for your choice of the course and information about yourself and your abilities is a good gauge.

**Don’t**

Don’t mention names of specific universities in your personal statement, given that the same document will be read by different admissions tutors in different institutions.

Don’t plagiarise: UCAS will run a text check on whether your writing is original.

Don’t write lists without explanation.

Don’t repeat things already on your UCAS form.

Don’t make jokes.

Don’t start every sentence with ‘I’.

Don’t go over the top.

Don’t lie: it is ok to sound enthusiastic and motivated, but always tell the truth.

**Final touches**

When you have finally completed the form, send it within the electronic system to your referee, who will then complete the form and forward it to UCAS on your behalf. UCAS will confirm receipt and provide you with an application number, which you will need for checking on updates.

Watch out for application deadlines, and remember to give your referee ample time to complete your form (we suggest at least 10 days). As this is a popular course, we recommend that applications be submitted **by early January** in the same year of your proposed commencement of studies. If you have qualifications that are already completed (A Levels, BTEC, Music Quals etc…), we will want to see these before we make any formal offers – letters from the school are ok! On a case-by-case basis, we will also consider late applications up until the **end of June.**

**Waiting it out**

Once all the universities you have applied to have confirmed their offers with UCAS, you will be able to accept or decline offers. You will have to make a **firm**acceptanceof one of your offers, plus a second **insurance**choice. If you have achieved grades that are in line with your firm choice, you will automatically be given a place on your chosen course. If you are rejected by your first choice but make the grade for your insurance choice, you will be automatically allocated a place for your second choice. At this point, universities can see all your choices.

Our department will respond to UCAS by the **end of March** on all standard applications, and you will have until the **beginning of** **May** to decide on your firm and insurance choices. On a case-by-case basis, late applicants will have until the end of August to make their choices, after information from colleges given to UCAS in mid-July. Once results come in we go through and update all offers. Any that don’t meet our offer will be looked at a second time with grades in hand. Those whose grades come in slightly earlier (BTEC, IB, Scottish Highers) but don’t meet our conditions will be reconsidered in Clearing, when we have A Level results.