

## Ask Aberdeen Episode 10 Transcript

**Georgie** [00:00:07] I'm Georgie.

**Michaela** [00:00:08] And I'm Michaela.

**Georgie** [00:00:09] And we're here to tell you about the University of Aberdeen.

**Michaela** [00:00:11] In each episode, we will discuss frequently asked questions about topics such as applications...

**Georgie** [00:00:15] Go abroad...

**Michaela** [00:00:17] Student life...

**Georgie** [00:00:18] Sports and Societies...

**Michaela** [00:00:19] Budgeting for Uni...

**Georgie** [00:00:20] And life in Aberdeen.

**Michaela** [00:00:22] We will be speaking to current Aberdeen students, those who really know what it's like to study and live here.

**Georgie** [00:00:27] And we'll be getting exclusive tips from members of our amazing staff.

**Michaela** [00:00:31] Join us for this episode of Ask Aberdeen.

**Georgie** [00:00:35] Hi, and welcome to this week's episode of Ask Aberdeen. My name is Georgie, and today we'll be talking about tips for preparing your application and your personal statement. So please be joined by Gerry, who's one of our admissions selectors.

**Gerry** [00:00:47] Hi, guys.

**Georgie** [00:00:48] And Anna works in Access and Articulation Team.

**Anna** [00:00:52] Hi, everyone.

**Georgie** [00:00:53] So I think I'm going to start with the very beginning for students who are looking to apply to university and something they've probably heard of is UCAS. So, Ana, can you tell us a little bit about what is UCAS and how does it work with students?

**Anna** [00:01:07] Sure. So UCAS is the university and colleges admission system and basically it's kind of a one stop shop, if you like, for applying to uni in the U.K. so you don't need to send off individual applications to each institution like standalone once you do one application and it all goes through the UCAS system. That's also where you receive any offers or any decisions from universities as well, and where you can reply to any offers you get. So if you want to accept them or decline them, it's all done through the UCAS system

**Georgie** [00:01:44] and that's very helpful. So for students who are doing it, generally they're at school. Right. So that's kind of doing it through their school. And there'll be lots of support from the school as well as we will talk about that as we go through and who you

can turn to for help. So UCAS, for students who are listening, if you're starting with us or starting any university in September 2022, so you're in your final year now or going into your final year of your studies. So maybe that's S6 or maybe that's your last year of your A-levels UCAS for you opened on the 7th of September in 2021. So it's almost a full year ahead of when you start and if you are applying for medicine or veterinary medicine or dentistry or things like that, Anna, can you just tell us how that's slightly different for the deadlines and how it closes?

**Anna** [00:02:33] Yeah. So for these subjects, you need to be aware that the deadline is the 15<sup>th</sup> of October. So you've kind of got a six week window in between when the UK system opens to when you actually have to submit. So for anyone for medicine, dentistry, vet, med, or if you're thinking about applying to Oxford, Cambridge or any of the conservatories, just keep that in mind. And it's worth telling whoever is in your school or college who deals with UCAS that you want to apply for one of those subjects just because it's a good few months before the main deadline.

**Georgie** [00:03:09] Yeah, definitely. They need to be more prepared. I think if you're applying for those degrees, you need to start your research a little bit earlier and have your application ready to go when it opens. And everyone else is anisette the deadline slightly later. So it's the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2022 will be the next UK deadline. So you have got a little bit longer, but many of your schools will encourage you to have done your applications before Christmas. And this is just so that they can support you when you're doing that and you're not on your own over the Christmas period trying to finish your UCAS application. So that's the kind of key dates. The other key thing just to explain to students is that most people will put in five applications. So that's the maximum that you can put in. You can just put in one or two. But it's best to kind of optimise all your options and you just charge a fee of £26.50 this year to do that. So it's not a huge amount, but it's just worth knowing that you do have to pay that to you. So I mentioned about the five applications and I'm going to come to you again just briefly about again for medicine again. How is that slightly different? The medicine students with their five choices?

**Anna** [00:04:12] Yeah, sure. So for students who are looking to apply for medicine, only four of those five choices can be a medical degree. So it's up to you what you want to do. If you want to put four for medicine and one backup, you can do that or you can just put four medicine choices if you really don't want to have a backup. But we do normally suggest having a backup option. And it's entirely up to you what that backup may be. But some popular options are things like biomedical sciences, life sciences, sometimes another health care profession as well. But just be aware if your back up is also a competitive course, that you might want to discuss that with the institution of your backup choice as well. But for all other degree subjects, you can put in five applications for the same degree subject if you want to.

**Georgie** [00:05:08] Yeah, very good advice, I think we speak to a lot of medicine students who want to put in five medicine applications to kind of maximise their choices, but really it's kind of helping you and saying medicine is very competitive and it's always worth just considering what your alternative option might be. Sometimes people might not get into medicine. It happens to the best of the applicants. And they would then look at doing say, you mentioned biomedical. How could they then go back to medicine? What's the kind of route then for them?

**Anna** [00:05:39] Yeah. So if you decide you want to take up your backup choice, then you could do, say, three or four years, however long that degree is, and apply to medicine in

your final year. So if you're in Scotland, usually your fourth year of studies would be looking for you to have an honours degree to then apply to medicine. As a graduate of some universities now have started doing specific graduate entry medicine programmes as well, and more and more new programmes are coming on board. So it's certainly a popular option. I would say about a quarter to a third of our medical students at Aberdeen are graduate. So they've done another degree before coming into the medicine programme. So it's certainly a popular option.

**Georgie** [00:06:24] Yeah, Gerry, did you want to add something.

**Gerry** [00:06:26] I was just going to say, there's a more sort of general point, which is along the same lines. So if you have five choices, then you should not just put down the five best places that you can find for whatever degree it is that you want to do. You should be a little bit mindful about having, you know, sort of first choices and backup choices and maybe, you know, be aware of what the entry requirements for each of the degrees is. So you won't be disappointed if you don't make one of your options. And hopefully some of your other options will still be life, not just for medicine, but for any degree you're applying to.

**Georgie** [00:06:56] Yeah, definitely. So what you mean that area, as well as having the higher grade requirements for maybe your first choice, but having a backup university that's got lower grade entry so that if you don't get what you wanted, you've still got a backup choice. Very good advice. So I'll come to you again, Gerry, about personal statements. So this is another aspect of the UCAS application. What is a personal statement?

**Gerry** [00:07:20] Yeah, so I guess it's the aspect of the of the of the application that students or applicants like the least because they don't really know what it is that they're supposed to put in. So what they've got is an option. I mean, the simple answer is that it's a part of the application form where you get a chance to tell the universities why it is you want to study that, what you're applying for and what it is that you bring to that degree and to the institution in terms of your character traits, your experiences, your skills, your past academic achievements and so on. So that's what it is. And generally, it's sort of like it allows you to tell us why you think you'd be a good fit for that degree programme or that area of study.

**Georgie** [00:08:01] And something else that always asked, which Gerry can vouch is true, is do we read personal statements, Gerry, or do we just ask them to write them?

**Gerry** [00:08:09] So I always think it's really interesting that people ask this question because there is a grain of truth in in the question. I mean, questions aren't true. But anyway, the basic I wonder if people are getting us when they ask that question is, well, look, if I can get in just by getting the grades, what does this extra bit, which is quite stressful to write because they don't really know what it is that you're asking me to say. What role does it play in the admissions process? And it is true that if you get really good grades, grades that are above the entry requirements, then you will get in. And then obviously, in a way, what's in the person's statement, unless it's awful, isn't going to, you know, adversely affect your application. But the person statement, the best thing to do is to think about when we do, we do read them all. And we never reject a candidate without having read the entire application, including the person's statement and the references. But it's a really important part of the application if you're applying for a competitive degree where there's more students that have the grades than there are places available. It's also

really useful if you want to sort of contextualise or explain any aspect of your academic performance and then you can use this, you can explain a little bit in your personal statement and maybe also ask your referee to address that issue. It also is very useful if when results day comes and it turns out that actually we have more places than we thought we would have. So we might actually go slightly below our entry requirements. But then we have to choose who do we let in? And again, if you have a lot of people around the same area academically, we'll look at the personal statement. So it plays a multitude of different roles. But I think the most important thing, and maybe you'll come on to ask me a bit more later on about like what people should put in it. But the most important thing is that it's not a CV. Right. And it's not you don't have to sort of present some idealised version of yourself. And I'll say a bit more later on about what I think it's for. And hopefully that'll help people to understand what it is they're supposed to put in it.

**Georgie** [00:10:05] Yeah, definitely. So, yeah, I think you're right. If people have already lost that as well, if I have the grades, will I get in? And kind of overall, pretty much if you have the good grades for certain degrees over the years, the more competitive ones you'll need more. And that is why your personal statement comes in. So I think both Anna and Gerry can both comment on this is what should they then put in a personal statement and what are the key points that they should cover and that you want to get some suggestions? And I'll come back to you, Gerry.

**Anna** [00:10:31] Yeah, sure. It can differ depending on what course you're applying for or so thinking about those particularly competitive subjects, at Aberdeen, things like medicine, primary education, law, we get lots and lots of applications for those subjects and really is about making you can stand out from the crowd. You know, we get lots of applicants, all with similar really, really good grades. But how do we possibly decide who we make an offer to? So I think in your personal statement, you really want to tailor it to you as an individual. So thinking about kind of the key skills and attributes that might be required to do that course and how you may possess those, I'd always recommend giving examples as well rather than just kind of making, you know, points that aren't backed up by any evidence. So, for instance, if you want to do medicine and you really want to work with people, could you give an example from maybe a part time job or your work experience where you've actually developed the skills? Also, in your personal statement, you might want to reflect on kind of your future career as well, although we totally understand that most people applying for university wouldn't exactly know where they're going to end up in ten, twenty years. But if you do have an inkling towards a particular career, then you might want to reflect on that as well and how that university degree might help you get to that career destination ultimately.

**Georgie** [00:12:09] Thanks, Anna. And Gerry, do you have any suggestions what student should include?

**Gerry** [00:12:13] Yeah, so it's first of all, it's quite reassuring that Anna and I are on the same page. So I think I would agree with everything that she just said. And also that not only is everything she just said true, it also sort of gets to the nub of the issue. So the person statement is about first of all, foremost is about you, not about the about us or about the degree. And because everybody's different, they're going to say slightly different things in the person's statement. So they don't have to stress about all this. A nice set of information I have to put in and I might make a mistake. When I think about a person's statement, I sort of think of it in terms of I'm looking for three things. So my overall question I'm asking myself as a selector is, will this person do well or flourish if they come here? And there's also different ways to do well. Right. So it's not. Are they the best

academically, it's just like are they a good fit? And to answer that question, I want to know why do they want to study the degree they're applying for? I want to know what they bring to the degree and to the university in terms of themselves, their character traits and their experiences. And I also want to know a little bit about what they expect to get out of us in terms of the and this backs up exactly what Anna said about using examples to evidence. So you're not listing all the things that you've done. It's not a CV and it's not an argument either. Trying to argue me and to say, yeah, OK, fine, you can come. Rather, it's you sort of thinking, well, look, given what I'm good at and what I like, you know, what about those things show that I'm going to do well. And if you're ever talking about things that you've done, they should demonstrate some of those characteristics that you have. So in terms of why you study, what you study, what I want to see is that you actually know what you'll be studying in the first year of your degree, demonstrated by showing me that, you know, well, I know we're going to study this in first year, and I'm really excited about that because blah, blah, blah. And in terms of what you bring, again, like I said, you've got to think about yourself and everybody's different. So you can talk about your character traits or experiences that think that you think will serve you well and then talk about examples that demonstrates those character traits and those and talk about those experiences and explain why those experiences are relevant for a selector to understand. And then last but not least, like Anna said, we're not expecting you to know where you're going to be in ten years time. But students and applicants are so focussed on getting in that they don't think about what happens when they actually arrive. But a good sign of somebody doing well is that they know why they're coming and they know what they want to get out of.

**Georgie** [00:14:49] Many thanks, Gerry. I think it's something we always advise the students, as your examples don't have to be something mind blowing and amazing. They can be something that you've just done in school or something you volunteer for. It really is telling us about you. We know nothing about you from just your name and your UCAS numbers. And we want to know more about you. And we want to know that you volunteer at a local church group or scouts or guides or that you are part of the hockey team and that's taught you teamwork. Things like that is sort of examples I think we're looking for. So I say it doesn't have to be kind of something unusual or something really impressive to show us that you have those skills.

**Anna** [00:15:26] Yeah, I totally agree with you. A big part of my job is supporting school pupils who are thinking about going into the professions and things like medicine. And I've had a few students ask me things like, oh, you know, I work part time in a chip shop, but I'm not going to put that on my personal statement because it's of no relevance to medicine. I would say that's absolute nonsense when you kind of break it down, working in a potentially stressful environment, in a customer facing role, especially, you know, if you're still at school and you're trying to balance your time as well between your schoolwork, homework and working part time, then that is absolutely relevant to going on and becoming a doctor, working in quite a high pressured environment, you know, potentially dealing with difficult situations, difficult patients, family. So you can try and kind of take a step back and think really about the skills that you've developed and how they'll be worthwhile for you while you're at university.

**Gerry** [00:16:34] So just to come in on that as well. So again, I completely agree with Anna, but sometimes I think that applicants, when they try and work out what's relevant and irrelevant, they don't they don't know because they don't already teach in the medical school or they're not an admissions selector. So to find out whether or not what you do is relevant or to get some help with that, I would really encourage people to read prospectuses, look at the university websites, go to open days, ask people and ask more

than one person. Don't just take one person's word for it and listen to a few different people that you trust, whether it's at open days, talking to university staff, admissions staff via email. You're more than welcome to contact us and ask us questions and we'll answer you directly and individually. If you want to look at UCAS resources and all the resources available online, talk to your guidance, teachers, etc., etc.. So listen to, you know, five or six different people tell you what they think you need to talk about in your personal statement and then make the decision yourself. And as Ana says, it's about you and your skills and your experiences. And it doesn't matter whether that was in some highfalutin internship or working in a part time job that you need to have anyway, because you need to make the money.

**Georgie** [00:17:51] Yeah, I was going to say exactly the same as us sometimes people around you, because they might identify something new that you haven't realised or a skill that you have that they have that you don't automatically recognise, but they see about you. So, definitely so on the other side of it. And Gerry, I'm sure you've got some funny examples of this one that you may not think of top over your head, but cliches and things to avoid in a personal statement, what do we not want to see?

**Gerry** [00:18:15] So this could be this could be a podcast itself. But I think, you know, I hope as an admission selector, I'm empathetic to that, to the applicant, because I think it must be so overwhelming nowadays, like seeing all these huge amount of choices and then having a blank page in front of you where we say, tell us about you. And they just don't know where to start. And oftentimes, as with my students, when they do arrive just to get going, they'll write something down at the beginning. Just, you know, since the beginning of time, people have been applying to university or some, you know, some whatever to get going. So my biggest piece of advice and I'll talk about some cliches in a minute, but my biggest piece of advice is don't leave the person's statement to the end. Right. Don't go through all the other processes and then finish off the process. When I say that applicants always look at me funny, but I think you should start with your personal statements because that forces you to think about what you like, what you're good at, and how you might fit into the to the world of university and work and so on. And then that once you've thought about that, that helps you think about which degrees might be a good fit for you. So you might start off thinking, oh, I really want to be a lawyer. And then you think about what you're good at, what you like, and you realise maybe I don't like that is that wouldn't be as good for me. As I say, it sounds good, but maybe it's not for me. But in terms of cliches, like I said and others already said this A it's you don't you're not showing off. Right. It's not a list of all the amazing things that you've done. So don't just list loads and loads of stuff, especially don't list lots of other stuff for no apparent reason other than just to show that you've done all these things. B When you're talking about something, make it very clear why that's relevant to the issue at hand, which is why you think you would do well at university if you do get an offer of a place. And C, I mean, this is a related point. Don't just tell me things and especially don't tell me vague things like, oh, I'm really passionate about the subject or I'd really love to be a lawyer. OK, great, that's great. But that's not any good reason for me to let you do a law degree. But if you say if you show me your passion by, for example, telling me that you're really into some podcast on law, the legal profession, and they talk about this particular thing and you're really interested in nothing because and then you explain this a little bit, then immediately I can I can actually see that you're passionate rather than you telling me that you've shown me in a way that shows me that you're also you've already a little bit knowledgeable about what it is that you'll actually be studying when you come.

**Georgie** [00:20:49] Yeah. Very good advice. Anna, did you want to add to that?

**Anna** [00:20:52] Yeah, totally agree with everything that Gerry said. Another thing I tend to suggest that people avoid as any kind of long quotes, you know, you've only got four thousand characters, is it? So I think it's kind of a page of A4 word once you type up, which seems like a lot, but it's actually not when you come to do it. So get rid of those, you know, make it your own words. You're far better to use that space to reflect on something that you've actually done. And another thing I would avoid, just kind of similar to what Gerry said as well, you know, avoid making statements and not properly evidence them or avoid exaggeration as well. I'll tell you a funny example, actually, from a medicine interview or change some of the details of it. But I remember one year a student came through the interview process and had written in their personal statement that, you know, they're keen saxophonist and they do performances regularly, I think every week or something. They said and the selector that we had on that day was also a saxophone player. And he looked to the personal statement and said, oh, that's really good. You know, what grade do you play? And the candidate was just like that. And actually, they dug a little deeper and he does do performances to his mum and dad's in the living room, so not in, you know, the music hall or something like that. And actually, if that student had just said, you know, I'm learning a new instrument, then that would have been really good. But because they kind of overegg to just be mindful of who might be reading that and just be honest, make sure it's an accurate reflection of yourself.

**Georgie** [00:22:45] Yeah. You never know, do you, who might have an interest or a passion and might end up interviewing you. Lying in things like CVs when you're applying for jobs, you never you never know who might read it and find out good advice. So something else people are asking about is obviously on a website when we have all grades listed as we have our standard and then we also have a minimum and adjusted grades. So sometimes when we're looking at applications, a student might think that they meet some of that criteria. So they need to tell us somehow. So and I'm going to come to you because you work in kind of widening access and things. Is that something they should include in their personal statement or are they allowed to send us that information separately? How should they do it?

**Anna** [00:23:24] Yeah. So for Aberdeen. Yeah, you're welcome to discuss any kind of mitigating factors or widening access criteria within your personal statement. So thinking about anything really that's had an impact on your education or personal life, for example. So you might be experienced, you might be a young carer, so you might care for a family member. You know, you might have suffered an illness going through your school exams as well. Please do tell us about these things, because we can only help. We can only make those adjustments in terms of your grades. If you tell us, you know, we're not mind readers, you can do that in your personal statement or you can certainly send an email to our admissions team as well if you prefer to do that. But please tell us in some way, other students might have attended a school that's maybe quite rural or quite small where you've not been able to choose the subjects that you want to do, or you've maybe had to travel to another school to undertake those subjects, which in turn can have a bit of a negative impact. So just let us know about it. And if you're in any doubt at all about what to include and if it's appropriate or not or how to go about that, please just contact us. You know, we want to hear from you. And if you are submitting anything additional, then please remember to pack up your UCAS ID number in that, or else there's no way for us to identify who it came from. So, yeah, absolutely include those factors in your personal statement or in another way so we can help.

**Gerry** [00:25:04] It just to come in on that point, George, so on this very last point about, you know, communicating with the university about these issues, so I just emphasise in this particular case and generally that the conversation doesn't begin and end with the UCAS form. So and I think especially if there's something that you're not sure about in terms of is this relevant or not? Or, you know, given the person statement is quite short, how much detail do I have to give about, you know, like a physical health issue or anything like that? Get in touch with the university, all of the universities you're applying to and ask for somebody in admissions or in recruitment to have a look at your question and give you an answer. So I think having that conversation before you apply, especially if it's sort of a non-standard whatever that means application and after you have applied, you're still. So I obviously I'm Irish, right. So I didn't come from the U.K. application system systems different in Ireland, in the Republic of Ireland. But I just think it's amazing that you can actually I get emails directly from so we have thousands of applicants degrees that I and this admission selected for. But I correspond individually with applicants. Then there's not thousands of them, but applicants that have legitimate questions about entry requirements. You know, they might have different academic qualifications. They might have circumstances that they want us to consider, et cetera, et cetera. And you can have that conversation directly with the people who are making the decisions on your application before and after you've submitted your you question.

**Georgie** [00:26:43] Yeah, that's a really good point, Gerry, because we have a lot of people sending queries through our website as well, which we will all help to answer. And that includes things like this is the grades I got in S5. What should I take in S6, do I need advanced highers, is that what Aberdeen looks for? And we're really happy to help with those things, especially we're recording this during lockdown. But still, you can see us as far as Newcastle events and things. So do you just send us a message and we'll be very happy to look at your situation for you. I think sometimes people think they can't ask and they can ask us. And we'll be happy to advise you and help you choose the right subjects, because we don't want you to make an application and find that you could have taken the right subject and you didn't. So we're here to help you as much as we can. Something we also get people ask about is they want to apply to more than one subject. And maybe this isn't medicine. This is someone who's interested in history. But they also quite fancy their philosophy. And it's something that's a kind of tricky one to answer that. Gerry, what do you recommend if people are doing that? They're applying to different courses, a different universities.

**Gerry** [00:27:47] Yeah. So I guess the first thing to say is that all of the universities know that you're applying to the universities and that you might be applying to different degree disciplines and we don't take it personally. So it's obviously weird to try to write something to five different, possibly five different institutions and maybe more than one different degree subject. But we do know that that's, you know, what you have to do. So if it seems that your personal statement tends to talk about two subjects or talks about a subject that you haven't applied to us for but is related, then we'll make allowances for that. I guess more generally, I would say that's my hope would be that there's some connection between the different subjects that you're applying to, that there might there might be a very direct connection in terms of the subject content, but in terms of you and what it is that you're good at, then I would definitely say maybe explain a little bit. You know, in general, what it is that attracts you to those different degree disciplines and there should be some common thing. So one example is, you know, I had this question with a student who was applying to law but also wanted to do politics. And that's an obvious connection, right? You can definitely see why somebody interested in will be interested in the other. And I said, well, I will tell you, no, speak about the things that you find interesting that



overlap in those two subjects. If you're applying to biology and history, you can still do that. But then it is trickier. And of course, sometimes the other things are very minor is that each institution can only see what things you've applied to for that institution so we can see what you apply to other institutions. But you can always, as we said earlier, it's better to be honest and open and say, I'm applying to these two different things. You know, they both attract me for different reasons. Here's why I'd like to do that one. Here's what I'd like to do. This one I haven't necessarily made up my mind. Yes, I think that's fine. You know, it doesn't it doesn't make me think you're indecisive. It just makes me think that there's still a lot of options available to you and you're still thinking through your options. And as long as you can explain why you are interested in both of those paths, then I'm happy.

**Georgie** [00:29:58] I've got a question for you, Gerry, that's just come to mind, as always, sometimes students would have taken their A-levels or their higher subjects. And to me, they don't relate at all to the subject. They're then applying to universities and maybe they've taken like four sciences. And then they say, and I want to apply for English, like maybe they just had a change of heart. I mean, you have to decide really early and that's difficult. So how do you look at that as well? I mean, as long as they've got the right subjects for the degree they're applying to. How does that work for you as an admissions factor?

**Gerry** [00:30:26] Yeah, I guess. I mean, obviously, different institutions work differently. But Aberdeen, because it's an ancient Scottish university and it has these four year sort of degrees that even though the students might come in thinking or doing biology or doing history rerate, I'm really thinking of them as well. That person is doing A, B, C, and that person is doing an AMA or an arts degree. And that means that the first year is set up. So that's pretty much for nearly everything, except with a few exceptions, obvious exceptions like, you know, you need to have done maths to do maths and physics, or you need to have some biology and chemistry if you want to do biomedical sciences. But generally, the idea is that any student who has who's demonstrated academic ability in the school leaving exams should be able to come to first year in Aberdeen and they should be able to follow any of the degree programmes that we offer. And just like you said, Georgie, like, you know, especially in the British system, both in Scotland and in the rest of the UK, students are being asked to make decisions when they're 15 and 40 or 50 years old. And somebody might have thought when they were 14 they wanted to do medicine. So that's why they focus on the sciences. But they always kept an interest in. So let's say they did Highers and everything is sciences, except they've got English. I mean, obviously, English is a good thing for them to do anyway. But then they decide they want to do an arts degree, then we're happy. I mean, obviously, if somebody came in and they had all science qualifications and they wanted to do something that was very arts and humanities like, I would be worried about that. And I expect them to address the worry in their personal statements, like by talking about their personal interest in literature or history and what they might have done outside of school to demonstrate their interest and knowledge in that area.

**Georgie** [00:32:13] OK, great. So they should just sort of address it. They say, I understand that this looks a bit odd, but this is why I want.

**Gerry** [00:32:20] that's one thing I say in general is that, like, oftentimes I completely understand this, that applicants will say I just gloss over that and hope they don't notice, but we can read so. So if it looks like you had some really poor GCSE or not five grades, but your your predictions for Essex are like steadily high, then there's no harm saying, yeah, look, maybe I'm more focussed. I mean, obviously you have to think about how to

phrase us, and that's where it's good to talk to guidance teachers and to your parents and to other people who know how to speak in the right way, you know, presented in a positive way. But you might say, like, look, you know, back then I didn't really know what I wanted to do and but now I'm clearer. So I got focus and drive a less demonstrated in my improvement in my academic performance. And that actually is a positive rather than a negative.

**Georgie** [00:33:11] Great. You he said something else people ask us about is work experience. So we've talked about how you can use the kind of part time jobs that you have already had there, maybe like you think are irrelevant or not, and how you can use those in your personal statement. But what about subjects that we actually need them to have done some work experience, something relevant to their degree. So I'm thinking medicine out of my head. Primary education law, perhaps. Again, these more competitive subjects. And from the students you've worked with for medicine and things, what do you recommend they do? Because not everyone has a relative who's a doctor or a lawyer or someone who can easily get in that. So what advice can you give?

**Anna** [00:33:53] Work experience was always quite tricky to come across anyway, but the pandemic is kind of heightened that, if you like, with a lot of in-person opportunities being cancelled. If you're interested in medicine, I would really strongly suggest doing some online work experience. So this is something that has launched last year in response to lock down. So there's a couple of different ones you could do. The Royal College of GPs have a really good online work experience to Brighton and Sussex Medical School have got one as well, which is open to any student who's hoping to study medicine. So they're really good starting point. You might also want to consider something like volunteering so it doesn't have to be a paid job. It could be something like working and volunteering in a food bank, helping out in your local community, maybe helping groups for people with disabilities. For example, you could use part time jobs as well, maybe part time job in a care home or it could be anything. You know, it could be a retail job. It doesn't have to necessarily be medical related. So we don't require any clinical experience in order to study medicine. So I'd highly recommend the online ones as a starting point lol. We don't require any form of work experience for. But again, there's some online options that have come on for law in response to the pandemic. There's also other organisations you could look at volunteering with and whether that is a food bank somewhere like the Citizens Advice Bureau, they take volunteers as well, which would be certainly very relevant to local teachings. Another one that we would potentially like for you to have some sort of understanding of a career in education. So it might be doing something like a bodying system in your school if you're currently in school helping out with younger pupils, for example. And, you know, as history, it might be going into local primary school if you're interested in teaching. So it's really, really broad. What we would consider. But again, is what we've kind of discussed throughout the podcast is, you know, don't just list your work experience, make sure you're actually reflecting on it. And we'd far rather you had, you know, one period of work experience than 10 really short things that you just list. We'd rather hear about what you've actually gained from that and how that's really kind of sparked your interest in the subject or, you know, confirm the decision that you want to study this degree.

**Georgie** [00:36:48] Yeah, definitely, I think that's really important. They can be anything I say, it doesn't have to be in a surgery or something that is so hard to get in except for the pandemic even harder. Gerry, did you want to add anything to that about other causes as well? You need someone applying for history. Do they need work experience?

**Gerry** [00:37:03] So far, the degrees that I work with, which are the science and the and the arts degrees. No, we don't you don't need any work experience. But again, as I said, it's always good to talk about any experiences that you've had that might serve as evidence that you would do well at university, both academically and personally. Right. So, you know, independence, time management. And of course, if you were involved in anything that's related to your degree subject, like if you volunteered at a local museum or worked for the National Trust or, you know, any sort of stuff that demonstrates an interest in the subject, that will obviously help. But as Ana said, we're very aware that these sort of opportunities are hard to come by for everybody. And they're particularly hard to come by for people who don't have the sort of connections that some people have. So I think sometimes you have to be a bit more imaginative. So let's say you work for Sainsbury's, for example. Like, you know, there's other supermarkets are available. Plus you're working for a multinational corporation there. And if you're interested in it, systems or business management or legal issues, maybe have a look into what's going on and have a chat with your manager. And like about like, you know, Brexit and the import of food entrusted for a law. How the team is that you work in the structured of why it's structured that way and how it all works. And the same would be true if you're working for a third sector organisation or a small business, that if there are things you're interested in, you just need to think a bit harder about it. Like is there anything here that might practically relate to some of the things that I would study, especially in the professions? Maybe not. I mean, medicine is trickier because it's a very specific health care issue. But as I said, working in volunteering in any area that might relate to public health and that could be a huge, broad area. It's not just about being a GP or a surgeon or working in a hospital. It could just as easily be about working somewhere where you signpost people to cancel services or stuff like that. So yeah, I think again and this goes back to our initial point, which is like your first job is to think about you and what you're good at or what you like, and then work out how that might mop on to the things that you want you want to study. And it's the same with the experiences you've had. Of course, if you could get to work in a law practise for a month, that's amazing. But most people won't get that opportunity. So they have to think a bit harder about how to demonstrate that they have experience of what the practicalities of the profession involve.

**Georgie** [00:39:41] Brilliant, thank you. So the last part of an application we've talked about the person statement and we talked about applying three weeks is your reference. So, again, for people who or prospective students who are at school, that's fairly straightforward. They would ask one of their teachers and the teacher would write them a reference that tells us, again, from the teacher's perspective, a bit about that student. What if someone is not in school anymore? So they've left school already. They've maybe taken a gap year and then they're thinking, actually, university is what I want to do and I want to apply now. And I. Can you suggest who they could speak to? Who should they ask to be their reference?

**Anna** [00:40:21] Yes. Or if it's someone who's maybe had a gap year, often we find that they might go back to their school and ask them to supply a reference. Maybe if you're in college, you would ask one of your lecturers. I don't know, Gerry, do you have any examples for people who are maybe mature students and have been out of education for slightly longer,

**Gerry** [00:40:43] so so that this is a tricky, a tricky case? Because when I'm looking at a reference, what I'm looking for is an academic reference. So I want somebody who has the ability to make a professional judgement on the academic ability of the student or the applicant applying. And also, well, whether if somebody is still studying something, then

they'll also be predictions. The reference person who supplied the reference also supplies predicted grades. So usually when they apply to the degrees that I deal with, we would expect them to have had a recent academic qualification. So within the last, say, three to five years, and just as you would if you took a gap year, you would go back and ask somebody from there to serve as a referee. Now, obviously, if you can't do that, fine. And a character reference is better than nothing. And it's also maybe worth bearing in mind, while you are still studying that you will have to come back and ask somebody to serve as a referee. So does anybody know you are not able to be able to do that? So, yeah, the short answer is if you are applying as a mature students but you haven't done any formal academic study in the last 15 years, then you shouldn't really be applying directly to us anyway. You should talk to us about what the pathways would be into university. But it's likely that that pathway would involve either doing an access course or going to college and then transitioning to university. But if you have done something more recently and that could be anything from school to like open university courses or something like that, then go to an academic for a reference.

**Georgie** [00:42:22] Brilliant, thank you. I said that was the last point about applications of actually interviews is something that we're often asked about, of course, as well. So for Aberdeen, we only interview for medicine, primary education, and we audition for music. So any other degree dentistry? Slightly different because it's a very, very small cohort. So we won't focus on dentistry, but any other degree they were applying for. We don't do interviews. So you don't need to worry about being called up to come to Aberdeen to have an interview for medicine. We people know how that will work and they will ask us what kind of structure we use. So I know you and I have both done medicine interviews. Do you want to just explain briefly roughly what we do at Aberdeen?

**Anna** [00:43:08] Yeah, sure. So for Aberdeen, we use the MMI format for our interviews, so that's multiple many interview and traditionally pre pandemic, you would come onto campus, into the city centre, into our medical school, and you would rotate around seven different stations. So you would see seven different selectors for your interview. So each station is kind of standalone on a specific topic that might be communication skills, it might be team working skills, etc. And you're seeing a new person at each one and you've got two minutes in between. So the kind of overall time would be about an hour for that. In response to the pandemic, we shifted everything online, as did most other universities as well. So we still used them in my format. But it was almost kind of blended with a traditional panel interview, which sounds slightly complicated. But you were still tackling the same sort of topics as you would see it on MMI, but you would meet with just two selectors and you would kind of swap around for that as soon as we know more about what will happen with restrictions, etc. for this year's cohort will pop that on our website and we'll also inform our applicants as well. But we hope to do something similar, maybe having online as well as an option, but it will just depend on the restrictions that are in place at that time.

**Georgie** [00:44:43] Yeah, brilliant, thank you, Anna and Gerry, I don't know if you know, if either of you know about primary education, of music, how do those two work? I've only been involved in medicine, so.

**Gerry** [00:44:54] So I don't know about prime education because it's a separate category, sort of entirely from the arts and the social science degree as well. It is an arts degree, but it's standalone. So I'm not quite sure how that works. But music, I think the auditions happen at the beginning of the academic year or maybe just before the academic year starts. So most people who apply to a music degree already have music qualifications,

which we already discussed in relation to the saxophonist earlier. And there's certain minimal sort of grading requirements that they would have to meet. So there's already an expectation that they have a certain level of competence on their instruments or voice or whatever it is that they're doing. But yeah, so I think I think the audition isn't a make or break audition, but it's more like sort of to see where people are. And in some cases, if somebody doesn't quite have the competency to sort of address that and see what to do to a basis.

**Georgie** [00:45:55] Yeah. So I know for music they have to be a grade eight standard. So you may have taken maybe grade six or seven and be performing at grade eight standard. I know I peaked at grade six playing the flute and that was where I got to.

**Gerry** [00:46:07] It's very respectable. That's very respectable.

**Gerry** [00:46:09] Thank you. But yeah, if you've taken great day, that's quite an easy way to show us. But we might be more interested in your audition if you're saying that you're a great standard, but you haven't actually taken that exam yet. So, yeah. And if you are, we've mentioned medicine on and off occasionally throughout this. So if you are a medicine napkin, we are going to have another podcast episode all about medicine coming up in a few weeks' time after this podcast. So do you check that one out if you are medicine specifically? And we'll go into even more detail about all the complications that as medicine and I do want to add to that.

**Anna** [00:46:43] Yeah, I was just going to make a point that came to me earlier. No matter what you're applying for, if it has an interview or an audition, whatever it is, make sure you received your personal statement before going to the interview because they may well ask you questions based on that. So it's always good just to kind of refresh your memory and it might help you identify what you might get asked to expand on as well.

**Georgie** [00:47:09] Well, I think that was a lot of information. So hopefully all of our listeners listening have got some top tips for their personal statement and applying to university. As we've all said throughout this episode, if you have any questions, please just reach out to us. We're really happy to hear from you and to give you advice. We've got an episode coming up next week on student accommodation. So if you're thinking to that stage when you've received your offer and what to do next, listen to our podcast on accommodation. And we've had many podcast episodes before this one. So if you've missed any of those, you can check those out on the website or on Spotify or Apple Music or wherever it is. You're listening to this podcast. So thank you very much to Gerry and Anna. That was brilliant. And I hope our listeners enjoyed that.

**Voiceover** [00:47:57] Thank you for joining us for this episode of the Ask Aberdeen podcast, if you would like to suggest a topic we should cover, please email us at [ukteam@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:ukteam@abdn.ac.uk). We would love to hear from you to be alerted about new episodes. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.