

## Results Day for A level and BTEC Summer exam series.



### How UCAS works.

This is a day that has been looming for a while. We've all seen the pictures on the telly of students opening their envelopes, huge toothy grins everywhere. This utopian view of the day is not really representative of how it works (surprise surprise!). Have you ever seen one of these live unveilings where a student eagerly rips into their envelopes and hey-presto..... Much worse than anticipated results? Cue the tears. The school knows the results and carefully selects the students to be put forward for the photo opportunity.... So if your child is invited, it's a great thing! Whether they are university bound this year or not, here's how it all works.....

#### **A rough timeline of events.**

Post 16 results day (for A level and BTEC) is always the second Thursday of August. This isn't some miraculous event where UCAS / teenagers/parents and universities suddenly discover those all important grades. There is a carefully choreographed sequence of events that culminates in the checking of the UCAS website and opening of envelopes and the associated whooping, sobbing and screeching (of parents) and occasionally their teens too.

#### **Monday of results week**

The UCAS website is locked and students will not be able to access anything meaningful. This is done so that any places confirmed or rejections dished out will not be accessible until 8am on results day when the site is unlocked.

On the same day, the exam boards release all results to UCAS and the universities/colleges. This is the starter gun for a frenzied week of discussion and debate within faculties across the land as to what to do with students who have not quite made their offer grades.

Students who did meet the terms of the offer are automatically accepted to their firm choice. Their insurance choice is automatically rejected. This information is loaded onto the (still locked) UCAS website.

#### **Tuesday of results week**

Faculty meetings. This is the big day where the decisions have to be made by the university departments.

Decisions about rejecting students.

Decisions about rejecting them from their first choice course but offering them something different at the same university (known as a changed course offer).

### **Wednesday of results week**

All A level and BTEC results are released to schools under a strict embargo that students must not be told. This allows the school to print off the results and put them into the appropriate envelope. The early release also allows the school to perform a statistical analysis of the results and prepare a press release for the next day that will appear in the local paper. It will also give the school the chance to decide who might be the best students to appear in any press/TV opportunities.

Whilst all this is going on behind the scenes, students need to be proactive. Being thrust into the uncertainty of the clearing system is not something that anyone wants to think about, but it's a grim reality that 47,000 out of 508,000 (8%) of students starting university gained their place through clearing.

### **Thursday of results week - the BIG day**

The UCAS website is unlocked at 8am, and approx 600,000 teenagers will be trying to log on at the same time. With our twins, one got in straight away and could be heard whooping in the other room. I was with the other who couldn't get in and this continued to be the case for (what seemed like 3 and a half weeks) another 15 minutes. The wait is HIDEOUS.... You have been warned. Some teens will prefer to slope off to their room to find out by themselves, some will be happy with everyone peering over their shoulder. I suggest you check and confirm a plan in the days before so everyone knows what and how it is going to happen.

Once into the UCAS Track portal, they will find out whether they have had their places confirmed or rejected. *They will not know what their results are.* If they have been rejected, then it's a pretty good bet that they were at least 2 grades below what they required. If they have been given a change course offer, then they have not got the required grades, but probably weren't far off. The school/college will have a clear plan for when results envelopes are handed over so make sure you know how, when, where this will happen. The earlier the better if clearing is required.

**What might your teen see on UCAS Track?** (University and course names have been selected randomly to make the point)

1. "Congratulations! Your place at The **University of York** has been confirmed to study **BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE**".

This is the message you're all hoping to see.... Unless of course it's confirming the insurance choice which would indicate that the required grades for the firm choice were missed out on. Read the information carefully as just seeing the word congratulations can occasionally be misleading.

2. "You are in clearing. Your clearing number is **00000**."

The message no student or parent wants to see. I'll come to how to devise a clearing plan shortly. Even though it's a plan you don't want to have to enact, as the Scouts once taught me, be prepared. Your teen will need to wait for confirmation of their grades from school before contacting clearing places by phone. Clearing plus is another great option and this can be used straight away - more on that in a bit.

3. "**Bath University** has offered you an unconditional place with substantial changes to your original choice. You are now waiting for confirmation from **Bristol University**."

A long story short, they've not met the terms of the original offer, but the university wants to offer them a place on a similar course but one that would normally have lower minimum accepted grades. For example, they apply for economics at Loughborough, but the changed offer is for economics with geography. The substantial changes are well worth looking hard at before any decisions are made about whether to accept that, go for the insurance offer, or enter clearing. The substantial changes could be a change of course, a change of start date (ie in 12 months time), or the point of entry. The point of entry would normally describe entry to a foundation course before moving onto the course they wanted 12 months later. This way, your teen gets the course they want, eventually, and the uni doesn't lose them to their competitors (and makes an extra £9250 into the bargain).

4. "At least one of your universities or colleges has offered you an unconditional place with substantial changes to your original choice."

This is much the same as above but your teen now probably has 2 changed course offers; read them carefully.

### **Declining a place (normally only used if you have a changed course offer)**

This is a huge step and one that shouldn't be taken lightly. Always take advice. I'm available all of results week, and particularly on the Thursday at very little notice. Please get in touch if you want advice, and I'll arrange an immediate call back or a Zoom. The school should have people on hand to help, although in my experience they are rushed off their feet and it's difficult to pin down someone with the required knowledge. The head/deputy head of sixth form or the lead UCAS link are the go-to people.

## **Don't panic**

If your teen does not get the message in point number 1 (above) about their firm choice, then don't panic. Remember, universities need your teen every bit as much as your teen wants to go to university. There is usually a solution. Clearing and Clearing Plus are well trodden paths that serve tens of thousands of students every year. If you can find me a student who is at university in their first year who has regrets about their eventual choice through insurance or clearing then you're doing better than me.

As soon as they are at university, Fresher's Week a hazy memory, they now realise that this is the right university and the right course for them. Another point that may not provide much comfort, (but it probably should) is that if your teen is rejected by a university, it's because the grades they achieved at post-16 would indicate they would struggle on the course they applied for. Why sign up to 3 or more years of struggle? It's not too dissimilar to day one of 6th form when a student wants to study A level biology on the back of a grade 5 at GCSE. The chances of success on that course are next to zero and hence why the student 999 times out of 1000 will be rejected.

## **Clearing Plus**

This is a relatively new creation but nevertheless, it's proved to be a hit. Essentially it's a dating site for students without an offer and university courses with places still available. Using Clearing Plus does not mean you can't use the more traditional form of clearing, and in fact they are probably best used in tandem. If your teen has a match through Clearing Plus that they like the look of, it's always well worth phoning that university's clearing hotline to talk about the course and make sure it is the right choice.

## **'Traditional Clearing'**

This is where I strongly recommend a plan is made. Parents can do this for their teens and keep it under lock and key only to be brought out if required. Contemplating disappointing results is a tough sell to most students. Parents will know who the 5 universities they applied to are, and the others that were strongly considered, so it's worth researching the clearing phone numbers of those universities and putting the info together on a list. All your teen will need when they make the call is their clearing number and their UCAS track ID. Start at the top of the list and work your way down. If a university offers them a place, this can be confirmed 'live' online by the university and accepted immediately by the student. Universities generally don't insist on an immediate decision, but they will inform you how long the offer is valid for. Remember,

they need to fill their courses, so if your teen doesn't want the place, the university wants to know so that they can offer it to another student.

### **Getting better grades than expected?**

This is a nice problem to have, but no doubt will mean your teen wishes they'd done more to boost their mock grades (you can't win!). There used to be a process called 'adjustment' that enabled the student to seek a better course while still holding the offer that they have in their back pocket. It was akin to already having a partner, but looking to upgrade to someone else but not telling your existing partner that you're looking. This was done away with a couple of years ago as it was so infrequently used. Instead, students now have to decline their existing offer and go into clearing. To decline your first choice offer takes some serious bravery. The absolute key here is to contact universities as if they are in clearing and explain the 'problem'. If there is space on the course your teen wants and they've met the minimum grade criteria, there's a good chance that the university will invite them to decline their existing place so that they can make an offer. This can all be done 'live' on the phone.

### **Not going to university?**

For those deferring applying until next year, or pretty certain that university is not for them, the first hint they'll get of their results is the grand envelope opening. Again, having been there with the twins, it's important that you know how this is going to work. Most students want a moment alone to digest their results before handing the information over.

### **Entry next year?**

If your teen has a change of heart and decides to apply for 2023 entry having received their grades and watched all of their mates disappear off to university, the application process is pretty straight forward as an independent student. If your teen needs guiding through it then bear Paul in mind. You won't be members any more, but we'll still be able to help your teen out.

### **Any other questions?**

If you have any question ahead of results day that isn't covered here, please let us know and we can add to the information.