The UCAS Form
Guidance for Pupils and Parents
2017 Applications
Sunday, 16 October 2016

**Introduction: Where are we now?**

Now that your AS examinations are complete and you have your results it is time to focus on the future after Brighton College. You should be considering all of the possible options ahead and one of those options is University. This is an exciting time and I hope you are looking forward to your next steps and please know that we are always on hand to support, guide, encourage and advise you.

Whether you are applying to the USA, Europe, the UK, the UAE or anywhere else in the world it is critical that you carry out plenty of research into your chosen courses so that you are as prepared as possible. You need to consider what subjects are appropriate for your course of study and you need to be aware of the entry requirements. Ensure that you are realistic in your application choices and always ensure that you consider both aspirational and insurance courses.

I am hoping that, by this point, you have a good idea about the subject area you’d like to study at university. You should now be in the process of selecting your specific five courses, which will need to be included on your UCAS form. It is critical that if you haven’t thought about this yet then you must act now.

Once this list of courses has been finalised, attention turns to the completion of the UCAS form itself, and this is the focus of this document. The information in this booklet supports the information given to Brighton College pupils as part of their UCAS training in June 2016. You should therefore read this document very carefully, to consolidate what was covered in school. It should answer all the obvious questions on how to go about filling in the form online and how to write a personal statement.

Finally, ensure that you take advantage of the university talks that have been scheduled. Talk to them about your aspirations, ask them pertinent questions about your course and what life would be like at university. Make sure you show an interest in what will be one of the biggest and most exciting decisions of your life.

*Tim Smale*

Head of Sixth Form
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An Online System of Application

Applications to UK universities are co-ordinated by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Applicants fill in a UCAS form, online, and this is then submitted to the relevant universities on the applicant’s behalf. All communication with applicants, by universities, goes through UCAS. As a result of this, applicants need fill in only one form, write one personal statement, and have one supporting school reference. Applicants can apply to a maximum of five courses through UCAS in the first instance, with some specific restrictions. (The most obvious restrictions affecting Brighton College pupils are that applicants can only apply to one of Oxford and Cambridge, and it is not possible to apply for more than four courses in Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Science. The fifth choice is available for an alternative.)

An Outline of the Online System

Applicants fill in their UCAS form via the APPLY section of the UCAS website: www.ucas.com. The application can be built up online over several sessions, with progress being saved at each stage. Please ensure that you connect your application to the school by typing in the buzzword ‘meTarzan’.

Once an applicant has completed their part of the form, they “submit” the form to their referee. For most Brighton College pupils, this is their HMM. The referee adds the school reference to the form, and checks the content of the pupil’s application. Corrections can be made at this stage. Then the form goes to a member of the UCAS team, headed by Mrs Galbraith. Further corrections can be made at this stage, usually involving a one-on-one meeting. Then the Head of Sixth Form makes a final check of the complete form before it is sent electronically to UCAS. From this point on, no changes can be made to any part of the UCAS form. Ultimate responsibility for your part of the form rests with you.

As part of the application process, an application fee of £23 needs to be paid. Pupils should pay this fee by credit card so please ensure you speak to your parents.

Upon receipt of your application, UCAS will allocate you an application number and a new password; using these, you can keep track of your application, through the TRACK section of the UCAS website. Do not lose this number and password: the school cannot access them.

Having received your application, UCAS will send a hard copy of the application to the universities to which you have applied. The information provided to universities will be ‘blind’ – i.e. no admissions tutor will be able to see the other courses for which you have applied. Once the admissions tutor has made his/her decision – normally a decision to make a conditional offer, or reject – they will communicate this to UCAS, and applicants will see this outcome through ‘Track’. This decision can often be a long time coming – even forms submitted in October may not garner a full set of responses until late April (or even May). The decision may only be made after the collection of additional information, for example, via the submission of a portfolio of work, through interview, or through additional written tests.

Applicants then accept or reject the offers they have received through the UCAS website.

Full details about the application system can be found on the UCAS website.
The UCAS website is a mine of useful information; however, it is hoped that the key information about the practicalities of applying can be found below.

**Registering with UCAS**

Before you can start filling in the UCAS form, you must register with UCAS.

If you have been organised and started the process early, make sure you have registered under ‘Apply 2017’, and not ‘Apply 2016’.

When you do come to register, complete the following steps.


2. Choose ‘Register or log in’, and follow the on-screen instructions. Make sure that you choose ‘Student Login: 2017 Entry’, even if you are applying for deferred entry.

3. If you registered for a UCAS card earlier in the year, you will be asked to enter your details, and this will import some of your data automatically. Note, however, that the UCAS card and UCAS Apply are different systems, with different usernames and passwords.

4. Enter your mobile phone number – you do not need to enter a home phone number unless you want to. Also, enter your e-mail address – I would encourage you to use your school e-mail (which, again, can easily be updated in June 2017); certainly, please make sure that the e-mail address you use is a sensible one. Then, opt how you would like UCAS to contact you. I would advise that you ask for communication by e-mail and text message.

5. Choose a password, and answer the questions posed. If you forget your password, Mrs Galbraith can generate a new one for you.

6. Your username will now appear. This will be the first letter of your first name and the first ten characters of your surname, followed by 1 (or 2, 3, etc.): e.g. tsmale1. If you enter more than one first name, the initials are added. Timothy Louis Smale gives tsmale1. If your name is too long, it is truncated after a total of 11 characters. Terence George Charles Brownhampton would give tgcbrownham1. If you, somehow, forget your username, you must contact UCAS, or start again from scratch.

7. Once registered, log in straight away, and answer the initial questions. You are applying through a School or College. You will be asked to enter a buzzword – for all Brighton College Adu Dhabi pupils, this is going to be meTarzan. Confirm the College address, and select your house from the drop-down list.
8. You will then be given your **UCAS Personal ID**. You **must not lose** this 10-digit code, since you will need it in all your dealings with universities and with UCAS. **I would strongly advise you to save this number on your mobile phone.**

You are now fully registered with UCAS, and can start completing your application form.

**The Six Sections of the UCAS Form**

Actually, there are seven sections to a submitted UCAS form, but you won’t need to worry about section number 7. This is the school reference (alongside your predicted grades), which will be compiled by your HMM or your tutor. This having been said, it should be the result of conversations between you and your tutor/HMM, since you will want to ensure that they have all the salient information at their disposal. Your academic achievements are paramount, but details of work experience, wider reading and excellent co-curricular contributions are also very important.

The other six sections of the form are, however, your responsibility. Before we look at how to fill them in, remember a couple of key points.

- At the end of each session, make sure that you click on ‘save’ at the bottom of the relevant screen before logging off. You want to ensure that all the work you have done is saved – it is not done so automatically.
- As you complete each of the six sections, make sure that you click on ‘section completed’ at the bottom of the screen. That will tell your HMM and the Head of Sixth Form that the section is ready to go.
- You will not be able to ‘send’ the form until all sections are completed. Don’t worry: this does not send the form to UCAS. It ‘sends’ it to your HMM for the addition of the reference, and it will be checked before it is finally submitted. However, **the onus for the accurate completion of the form lies with you, and you are responsible for its contents.** This is a legal document, and you are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of what you write. You are also responsible for ensuring that typing errors are avoided, and that you have suitable qualifications for all the courses that you apply for.
- You should pay the £23 fee by credit card before submitting the form to your HMM.

With these parameters established, let’s examine each of the six sections in turn.

**Section 1: Personal Information**

You will find that much of this information already appears, following the registration process outlined above. Beyond that, much of this section is very obvious, but there are some points that might generate questions.

- Do enter your home address if it is different from the postal address entered in the registration process. This is particularly relevant for boarders.
- You are likely to leave most of the ‘reference numbers’ section blank.
- Under ‘student support’, home students are likely to enter code 02 – this means that the bulk of your fees, and your access to student loans, will be organised by Student Finance England. (You must have had permanent residence in the EU for at least three years to qualify for this
support - although this can differ from one university to the next so check **before you apply.**

Even if you are planning to reject all offers of student loans, you must still enter 02 here, since you will otherwise be charged at overseas student rates.

- If you are from outside the EU, you will have to enter different information here, indicating that your fees will be met by private funding – in all likelihood, code 01.

- Under ‘student support arrangements’, use the list to ensure that you enter the information correctly. This will be the Local Authority for the area in which you live – the Council to which the head of your household pays Council Tax.

- The name under ‘nominated access’ is entirely optional – this is a person who can liaise with UCAS over details of your application, should you be absent. (If you put down your HMM’s name, it will enable him or her to discuss your application with universities directly – and this can be very helpful.)

- If you have any criminal convictions, come and see me before filling in this box.

- If you have any SEN needs then you should select it from the list, and enter any further details if necessary. The emphasis here is on whether you will need any additional support at university (e.g. extra time). Do not expect to be given such support if you have not declared your need for it here. If in doubt, seek advice – but our general advice is to ‘be honest’.

**Section 2: Additional Information**

This section will only appear on the left-hand side once you have declared, in Section 1, that your permanent residence is in the UK. This is because this data is collated for demographic purposes, and will not influence the application process at all. Be honest, but don’t feel that you need to fill in information that is not compulsory. For example, you are under no obligation to say whether your parents have any higher education qualifications.

Other questions here are compulsory, and you should simply be honest. Fill in any details of summer schools or pre-university courses under ‘activities in preparation for higher education’.

**Section 3: Choices**

Before completing this critical section online, you should have thought very carefully about the five choices you are going to make in this section. **Do your research**, speak to your tutor, HMM and Mrs Galbraith (and Mr Smale, the Head of Sixth Form, if necessary), and make sure that your choices are carefully considered.

- Make sure that the entry requirements are realistic, and make sure your choices have a good range. You will be rejected by any course that has an entry requirement in excess of your predicted grades. Check these through the relevant section of the UCAS website (course selection, entry requirements, English/Welsh and Northern Ireland qualifications), and through the university websites themselves. If there is any discrepancy, assume that the highest stated requirement is correct.

- Be aware that there is a distinction between “lowest offer” and “likely grades required”. Edinburgh, for example, has BBB as its lowest offer grade, but will require predictions of at least three As from almost all applicants. The small-print in prospectuses makes this clear: so, you must read them carefully.

- Make sure that you will have any required qualifications for the courses that you choose.

- Remember that you cannot apply to Oxford and Cambridge, and medics/vets/dentists can only apply to four courses of this type. The fifth must be an alternative.
• You only get to write one personal statement – so it is sensible if your five courses will all lend themselves to the same 4,000 characters of text.

You are responsible for ensuring that the choices you make are suitable for you, given your academic profile.

Once you have your five courses, enter them on this section of the UCAS form.

• Use the drop-down lists, to ensure that the information is entered without errors.
• Don’t confuse ‘sound-alike’ universities: Nottingham and Nottingham Trent; Bristol and Bristol (University of the West of England); Southampton and Southampton Institute; Sussex and Brighton.
• The campus code is normally default. For Oxford and Cambridge, you will need to select a college (or submit an ‘Open’ application); for some other universities, you may have to choose a campus.
• Under ‘start date’, enter 2016, unless you are applying for deferred entry, in which case enter 2017. Again, use the drop-down options.
• The ‘point of entry’ is likely to be ‘1’ – i.e. you are starting the course in the first year. With some Scottish courses, you can start in year ‘2’; some courses may have a foundation year, in which case – if you are going to do this foundation year – the appropriate code will be ‘0’. If you have any questions regarding this, speak to me.

Note that your courses will be listed alphabetically and that the institutions do not get to see who else you have applied for on that list. There is no such thing as a “first choice”.

Section 4: Education

Add Brighton College Abu Dhabi as your school, and the Centre Number should appear. If it doesn’t then you will need to enter the details manually. Include the date that you started at the school, and your finish date will be June 2017.

You do not need to enter any other schools under this section, unless you arrived at Brighton College for Year 12. In this case, you must enter the school at which you sat your GCSEs (or equivalent). Again, you will need to enter the centre number.

If your previous school was overseas, the automatic system will not locate it, and you will need to enter details manually.

ENTERING QUALIFICATIONS – PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY!
You should prepare a list of these in advance, or they will look like a jumble on the final form. Enter the month as June or August in all cases – it doesn’t matter which, but be consistent. Enter them in the following order (as applicable).

1. GCE Advanced Level (grades pending).
2. GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level (grades pending).
3. GCSE.
4. IGCSE (if relevant).
5. GCSE Double Awards. (Note, these are entered separately from other GCSEs.)
6. Other (e.g. music qualifications, IELTS). These are not compulsory.

There are lots of drop-down lists involved in this exercise. It’s self-explanatory, but you will see lots of bizarre looking options. Physics, for example, may sit in a list alongside Physics A, Physics B and Physics (Applied). Don’t worry too much about this – just go for the basic Physics!

For GCSEs, you must enter everything – even if you didn’t much like the grade you received! Enter them chronologically, and – within a year group – in alphabetic order. You are obliged to declare grades from all certificated GCSE and A-level qualifications, even where you sat a subject more than once.

If you wish to enter practical grades for Music, enter only the highest grade on each instrument, and don’t include anything below grade 5.

Due to the reforms to the A level programme, you must now declare the results of AS examinations in all reformed subjects on your UCAS application. For unreformed subjects you are not obliged to declare your AS grades. For these subjects the College’s policy is to certificate the AS grades alongside the full A levels. So you can enter them as ‘grade pending’, with a qualification date of 08/2017. Please check with your teachers if you are unsure. If you follow this approach, then you will probably enter three (or maybe four) A-levels as pending, and one AS-level. Do not enter any module-by-module information. The section of the UCAS form will end up looking like this.

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Example.
You will have 2017 as the year for all your subjects.

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Of course, if you are taking all four subjects onto A-level (e.g. you do Further Maths in two blocks, and will end up with Maths, Further Maths and two other subjects at A-level), then you will not have any subjects at AS-level under the presentation above.

This is not, however, the format that we advise, unless your AS-level results are very disappointing indeed. All UCAS applicants from the maintained sector, in the UK, automatically have their AS-levels certificated, meaning that they must declare their AS-level results on their UCAS form. If you do not declare this information, you will be in a distinct minority of applicants and, with an increasing proportion of competitive universities using AS-level grades as a sifting device, your
application may well be at a disadvantage. Our advice, therefore, is that you should declare your AS-level results, so that university admissions tutors are not left to wonder what you got.

You can do this in one of two ways.

1. **THIS IS THE FORMAT WE ADVISE FOR THE MAJORITY OF PUPILS.**
   You can provide all of your module information. You would do this by following the procedure outlined above. However, under each subject (i.e. your three/four A-levels and, if relevant, your one AS-level), you would list the names of the modules you are undertaking. Enter all the modules (including the A2 modules you are yet to take), making sure that you get the precise name correct, and use appropriate capital letters and grammar! For those that you have completed – i.e. the AS modules – you can enter the **score you received or the grade you received.** When you come to fill in the form, it will be obvious where you enter this information. If you enter your module score information, the relevant section of the form will end up looking like the following. (This pupil took four subjects through to A-level, and did not certificate any AS-levels as a result.) The year would be 2017 (including for AS-levels), rather than 2014.

   ![Image of module information]

   If you don’t want to provide module scores, you could provide module grades instead.

   **You must be consistent throughout: do not provide some grades and some scores – it looks ridiculous!**

2. **If you don’t want to provide module information, but do want to provide your AS-level grades, then, you should enter three A-levels as pending, as in the example above. You should then list all four AS-level subjects under the AS-level section, enter a completion date of 08/2017, and enter the grade you received. We will make it clear in your reference that we will only be certificating these subjects formally in the summer of 2017.** Under this
presentation, the relevant section of the form would look like the following. The years would obviously be different as well.

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**Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Below honours degree level qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brighton College (56115, 09/2007 - 07/2012, FT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GCE Advanced Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Board</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>06/2012</td>
<td>Edexcel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government &amp; Politics</td>
<td>06/2012</td>
<td>Edexcel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>06/2012</td>
<td>OCR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GCE Advanced Subsidiary (first award 2001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Board</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Edexcel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government &amp; Politics</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Edexcel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>OCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>AQA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Note on Further Maths**

Pupils who take Further Maths have completed at least six units by the end of the L6th; they could therefore qualify for a full A-level at this stage, but we do not certificate until June 2016 (the end of the U6th). You should show A-level Maths as pending, as well as either AS Further Maths (if you are going to end up with 9 modules) or A-level Further Maths (if you are going to end up with 12 modules).

If you are listing your modules — which the majority of you will — then C1 to C4 should be set against A-level Maths, and FP1 and FP2 against A-level Further Maths. It does not matter how you allocate the applied modules, but you are advised to allocate at least one of the applied modules that you have already sat against A-level Further Maths, such that it does not appear that either A-level is complete.

The completion and certification of a full A-level at the end of the L6th might lead some universities

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You will need to enter all your **exam boards**. Check these carefully with departments. All of them will be AQA, Edexcel or CIE. If there is more than one possible specification, make sure you enter the correct one. The GCSE data will be available from your results slips. The A-level data will be available from your AS results slips this summer.

**Section 5: Employment**

Serious work, which may be relevant to your application, should be included. Any long-term jobs should also be included, if only as evidence that you can hold down a job. ‘Newspaper delivering’, if carried out for 12 months or more, demonstrates commitment. **Do not lie.** There is no problem with leaving this section blank — it is mainly appropriate for mature students, who have been in long-term employment.

Medics, vets and dentists will want to list their work experience here.
Section 6: Personal Statement
See the next section, which is an entire section on how to write your Personal Statement.

Remember…
When you ‘submit’ your form, it goes to your HMM/tutor who adds your reference. The
form is then proof-read, and then checked by a member of the UCAS Team, and then by
me, the Head of Sixth Form. The Head of Sixth Form and the Head of Higher Education
are the only members of staff able to submit the form to UCAS. Following your completion
of the form, the College will complete its work as quickly as possible, but back-logs do
build up at busy periods (e.g. mid-October). The earlier you get your form in, the earlier it
will go. Once submitted to UCAS, nothing on the form can be changed; before that,
nothing is irreversible.

The Personal Statement

Receiving offers from universities involves demonstrating high standards of:

1. MOTIVATION
2. POTENTIAL
3. ABILITY

for the course(s) you have applied to.

Opportunities to prove yourself in these three areas exist in:

1. UCAS APPLICATION
2. INTERVIEW
3. ADMISSIONS TESTS
4. THE SCHOOL REFERENCE
5. PERSONAL STATEMENT

The body of the UCAS application contains only facts, so the most it can help you in this context is
by setting out your historic academic achievements (i.e. GCSEs, or equivalent). Equally, most
universities do not require you to attend interviews or sit admissions tests. Thus, most applications
stand or fall on the quality of the School Reference and the Personal Statement.

And, since the reference is out of your control, the only opportunity you have to convince universities
that they should make you an offer is your Personal Statement. For over 99% of the 55,000 courses
available in UK universities, the personal statement is the only bit of ‘you’ that admissions tutors get
to see.

You may have read that admissions tutors ignore the Personal Statement. This is only true for some
tutors at Oxford and Cambridge. And, if you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge, you will be
applying to other universities where the Personal Statement is very important – so it is a critical part
of your application.
It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the Personal Statement. At the vast majority of competitive universities, this will be the factor that determines whether or not you get an offer. Your academic profile simply gives you a chance to be heard. Once you have earned that chance, this is what you do with it. Your Personal Statement is therefore the most important page of A4 you will ever write, since it will determine which university you go to, which in turn will influence your future success and career profile.

Writing an effective Personal Statement is hard but vital – and this booklet offers some advice on how to go about it. There are plenty of books and websites that offer further advice and even standard templates; if you choose to go down that path, be aware that you are most likely standardising your Personal Statement along with thousands of others – in which case it is difficult to imagine how you will be able to stand out from the crowd. The best personal statements are genuinely personal, so generic advice can only go so far.

Medics, vets and dentists should work with the Head of Biology on their personal statements, since you need to pack in evidence of work experience, and your reflections on it. Medics should read the websites of their chosen universities very carefully – they will provide clear guidance on what they expect to see in a Personal Statement.

Some Basics...

- You write one personal statement. It must therefore “work” for all five courses you have chosen.
- It can be a maximum of 4,000 characters, including spaces.
- There is no ability to format: it is simply a stream of text.
- Primarily, it should tell an Admissions Tutor why you want to study the course for which you have applied.
- It must be evidence-based – i.e. what have you done? You demonstrate your attributes through the use of evidence.
- It must be reflective – i.e. what you have learnt from what you have done? Do not tell me what you have read; tell me what you learnt from it.
- It can include material on extra-curricular achievements and interests – but this should never be more than 30% of the statement, and, if you are applying to the most competitive academic universities (e.g. Oxbridge, Imperial, LSE), then it should be about 15%.
- It should be humble. We will be arrogant on your behalf in the reference!
- It will go through many drafts.
- The hardest bit is to come up with a first draft. It’s one of those things you’ve just got to do. Then, you have got something to work with.

Some Common Errors...

- Statements of “interest” or “passion” that are unsupported by the tone of the personal statement, or the evidence included.
- Applications for joint honours courses where the personal statement does not address all sections of the course. You need to watch out for this if you are, say, applying for Economics and Politics at three universities, and for PPE at the other two – the PPE tutors will want to see reference to Philosophy.
- Spelling and grammatical errors, and nonsensical statements. Read the statement back: does it make sense? Does it flow? Get others to read it for you.
Advice from Durham University
Durham University has, rather helpfully, published nine criteria by which they judge UCAS applications. Here they are...

1. A-level grades (or equivalent).
2. GCSE grades (or equivalent).
3. The personal statement.
4. The reference.
5. Evidence of the development of study skills.
6. Motivation for the degree programme applied for.
7. Independence of thought and working.
8. Skills derived from non-academic extra-curricular activities such as engagement in sport, the arts or voluntary and community work.
9. Contextual consideration of merit and potential.

Obviously, the personal statement appears here as an item in and of itself. But, how do they judge criteria 5 to 8? It’s from the personal statement. So, this is quite a useful checklist of the sorts of things you want to communicate through your statement.

A Big, Fat Warning…

UCAS now runs all applications through anti-plagiarism software. This compares all personal statements with: all other UCAS applications submitted that year; all UCAS applications ever submitted before; all software providing UCAS advice available on-line or through bookstores; all other text available on the internet.

If you copy and paste your Personal Statement, it will be picked up. If this occurs, then your application will be void, and you will not get into university through this application cycle.

Don’t be foolhardy. Write your own Personal Statement.

Some Very Basic Thoughts
As an absolute outline, the typical personal statement has the following structure.

- Paragraph 1: a statement of why you want to study the course you have applied for. What has captured your interest?
- Paragraphs 2/3 (and maybe 4): a development of some evidence that would convince a tutor to accept you onto the course, with your reflections on it. A fourth paragraph might consider what particular elements of the degree course you are excited about, but it needs to be relevant to all five courses. One of these paragraphs might relate your current studies to your prospective degree course; otherwise, it is likely that you will reflect on your reading, your work experience and other relevant academic and life experiences.
- Paragraph 4 (or 5): extra-curricular interests.
- Paragraph 5 (or 6): a round-off.

Some Further Thoughts
There is an underlying piece of advice that I would give. Don’t over-do the superlatives. Words such as “passionate” and “life-changing” are overdone on Personal Statements, and they sound artificial.
Admissions Tutors know that you are 17/18 year-old young adults: they don’t expect you to have had epoch-defining, Alan Sugar-esque experiences in the field of business before accepting you on to a Business Management course. So, the Personal Statement should try to be as natural as possible. You will find it hard to write – but don’t react to this by going over the top. Try and follow some of the following advice.

The Personal Statement needs to do three things.

1. Tell Admissions Tutors why you want to study the course for which you are applying.
2. Tell Admissions Tutors why you would be good at the course for which you are applying.
3. What other interests you have, and – if possible – why they are relevant to the course for which you are applying. (Some will not be.)

Section 3 must be included, but it should be a minority of the Personal Statement – certainly, no more than 30%. If you are applying for the most academically competitive courses, this may well fall to about 10%, but it must still be there. (Please don’t take this to mean the very academic universities are boring places at which to spend your time. It’s just that the Admissions Tutors have to find ways of cutting down the number of applicants, and they will do this on academic grounds. Places such as Oxford and Cambridge are heaving with extra-curricular activities and social events!)

Taking these three points in turn…

- **As a pre-cursor…** The ratio of applicants to places at the best universities is high (as high as 35:1), and Admissions Tutors may have over a thousand UCAS forms to read through. If you don’t have a convincing first paragraph then it’s game over.

- **I want to study the course because…** This is your chance to wax lyrical about your love and interest for your subject. Why is that? What things have you seen/done/read that influenced/confirmed your decision? Lectures, museums, projects, books, work experience, reading trip?

- **I would be good at this course because…** What attributes make you suitable, character-wise and academic-wise? How do your A level subjects help – even subjects not directly related to your course? What are you doing out of the classroom to demonstrate your enthusiasm and suitability?

- **My other interests are…** What are the major extra-curricular activities in your life that you do? Hobbies, sports, service, leadership, responsibilities… Why do you do them? What do you get out of them? How might they help you at university?

Let’s think about this another way. How might you go about building up your Personal Statement?

- You might start by telling tutors why you want to study their subject. **Brainstorm.** What sparked your interest? How has it been sustained? Think of examples from the course structures (that you’ve researched) that have ‘fired you up’.

- You might continue by providing evidence of your academic and intellectual curiosity. **Brainstorm.** What books have you read (that are not included on the A-level specification)? How did these books affect you? Why are they relevant? What journals do you like reading? What particular articles have interested you recently? What recent developments in your
subject area have caught your eye? Have there been recent scientific breakthroughs, or seminal contributions to an artistic debate?

- You might continue by providing evidence of a related (and possibly practical) interest in your subject. (This is critical for all practical courses, including Medicine and Engineering. For Medicine, the aim here must be to show tutors that you would make a good doctor – they are looking for personal skills, and an awareness of what it is like to be a doctor, right down to the nitty-gritty.) **Brainstorm.** What work experience and voluntary work have you done? What did it teach you? What did you enjoy about it? What competitions have you entered? What courses, lectures and other seminars have you attended? Who gave them? How did you respond? How did they change the way in which you think about a topic?

- You might continue by talking about your extra-curricular contributions. **Brainstorm.** What sports and other hobbies do you do, and at what level? What scholarships do you have? What societies and music groups do you participate in? Why do you enjoy them? What positions of responsibility have you had, and what did you learn from this? What takes up your free time, and why do you give it so much space in your life? Why do you think these qualities will make you a good undergraduate when combined with your studies?

- You might finish by ‘signing off’. This is up to you – you don’t have to “round off” with reference back to your subject if you don’t want to, but it might be a way of giving the Statement a good ending.

**Some Frequently Asked Questions**

**How do I write a Personal Statement if I want to apply for different courses within my five choices?**
You can only write one Personal Statement, which gets forwarded to all of your institutions. The wider the difference in courses, the harder it will be to make a convincing case for any of them. You are better off deciding on one avenue to pursue – maybe you could do a Masters in a different curriculum area after your first degree.

**I’m applying for Medicine. How do I make my Personal Statement appropriate for my fifth choice?**
Since you can only make four applications for Medicine, your 5th choice could be left blank or could be a related course such as Biochemistry, Neural Science or Biomedicine. When you make this choice, you need to make sure that the Admissions Tutor is willing to consider applications from wannabe medics.

**My chosen course (e.g. PPE, Natural Sciences) does not exist at five institutions I want to attend. What do I do?**
To take PPE, you might apply to 3 places for PPE and 2 for straight Economics. But since the various strands are interlinked, you should still be able to write a Personal Statement that covers all the bases, perhaps focussing on Economics; it will need to cover Politics and Philosophy as well, though.

**I am applying for a joint course. How do I write my Personal Statement?**
Joint courses involve two precise disciplines, such as History and Modern Languages. In this case, you need to justify (a) why you are suitable to study both subjects and (b) how you see the two being related to each other. Be aware, however, that you may not find five institutions that offer the same joint course, in which case one of the disciplines is perhaps better made out to be a minor, loosely connected subject area of interest.
Will I be asked about my Personal Statement if called to interview?
Probably. You should expect questions on any aspect – so make sure you have refreshed yourself with any claims on books read! A story from last year…

_A candidate arrives for interview, prepared to talk about the article from ‘The Economist’ that he had referred to in his personal statement. The Admissions Tutor asks the following. ‘I see from your Personal Statement that you read ‘The Economist’, and note that you enjoyed a particular article on providing economic aid to sub-Saharan Africa. What articles have you enjoyed reading since then?’_

**Personal Statements: A Top Ten List**

1. Spend a long time on this. Start soon. It will take many, many drafts. Ten drafts is not uncommon. The first of these, by far and away the hardest to write, should be done by the end of this term.

2. Seek advice. Liaise with your HMM/tutor, since there may be some things that the school can put in the reference, in order to free up space for you in your statement, and help to make you sound less arrogant. We can be arrogant on your behalf. **Don’t, however, seek advice from too many people:** opinions on statements are subjective, and ultimately what you include is up to you. If you keep showing the statement to new people, you will keep getting new opinions, and that can be overwhelming.

3. Be original. Avoid cheesy clichés and quotations, and don’t expect someone else to write it for you.

4. **Be specific.** Specific examples are much better than generalised waffle.

5. Ooze enthusiasm and commitment, and back it up with evidence – but avoid over-doing the superlatives.

6. Check spelling, grammar and punctuation very carefully indeed. Get several people to check this before you submit the form on UCAS. At the same time, remember the character limit: no more than 4,000 characters, within 47 lines. When you cut and paste from Word into UCAS, all formatting will be lost.

7. Don’t refer to specific universities or courses. The same statement goes to all five course choices you make.

8. Be wary about including too much information about career plans, especially if they revolve around making money. Admissions tutors are university lecturers: they have shunned financially lucrative careers. They feel queasy about “training” the mega-rich of tomorrow, so don’t ram it down their throat. Obviously, if it’s a vocational course (e.g. Medicine), ignore this point!

9. Include comments on GAP year plans, if relevant, but keep these brief, and try and relate them to your course.
10. Get started soon. I know that this is the same as point number (1), but it is so important, it is worth repeating. This exercise will take you a long time, and you will have a major panic if you leave it to the last minute. There is lots of help available from College staff. But, they can't always provide it at 10 seconds notice; so, if you start this the day before your UCAS form is due in, you're going to end up without any advice, and you will submit something horrid. Get going and be organised. Do not treat this like you treat a prep essay.

And finally…
Every personal statement is read by me prior to submission to UCAS; if there are any problems with I will get in touch. However, I am not in a position to provide advice on various drafts of a Personal Statement – use your HMMs, tutors and teachers (in the most relevant A-level subject) for this advice. They will be happy to read a final draft, before you upload it to UCAS, if you like them to at that point.

Don't panic. Thousands of Sixth Formers have done this before, with great success. Follow our advice, and all will be fine. Get a first draft down on paper. It will be horrid to read, for you at least, but it is much easier to change something that exists already than it is to give advice when all we have is a blank piece of paper.