

UK Rolling Applications: The Early Bird Catches the Worm?

By Emma Brownlow

If you're applying to UK universities, you may have been told that your chances are higher if you submit as soon as you can. In fact, there has been [debate](#) about this for years, along with many conflicting pieces of advice about the optimum time to submit your UCAS application. So, is it true that the early bird always catches the worm?

Here are the basics: Unless you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge or for courses in medicine, dentistry, or veterinary sciences, the [deadline](#) for submission is not until 15 January 2018. Once you click submit, your application goes to all of your university choices at the same time.

You might have heard the term "rolling applications," and you're right to wonder what that means exactly and how it should affect your own submission date.

What it doesn't mean is "first-come, first-served." This phrase implies that speed is the main criteria for selection and that as long as you act quickly, you are more likely to get a place. This is certainly not the case when it comes to the way UK institutions choose their future students.

"Rolling applications" actually means that UK universities CAN start to give out offers as soon as they receive applications. Each degree course will have a certain number of places available, and universities CAN offer some of these places immediately if they find strong candidates - but do not confuse strong candidates with fast candidates!

Despite the fact that universities can, and do, give out offers as soon as applications open in September, UK universities and UCAS maintain that your chances are not increased by applying early, nor are you at any disadvantage if you apply in January. Sounds confusing, right? How can that be the case?

Handing out offers to prospective students can be a tricky task for universities, and each will adopt a different approach. Some hand out immediate offers, others will "wait and see," holding back until they have viewed all applications on 15 January.

The majority of UK universities will do a combination of both - making some offers early on, but limiting these so that a high proportion of places per course are still available in January. It is widely understood that universities operate this way simply because it spreads their own workload over the course of 5 months. It boils down to this: whilst early applications may indicate the strength of your interest in a university, they do not necessarily increase your chances of being offered a place. There will always be offers available for strong candidates until the January deadline.

What does all of this mean for you? When should you apply?

Unless you are required to submit early, there is no hard and fast rule about when you should finally hit that “submit” button. If you are a strong candidate, you will not be significantly advantaged by applying early, nor significantly disadvantaged by applying in January.

Here’s what you should take into consideration:

Reasons to apply early - Oxbridge, Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry.

If you are applying to Oxbridge or to these courses, your deadline will be 15 October. However, Cambridge applicants who would like to be considered for an interview overseas may have different submission deadlines. For example, an applicant from Singapore would have to submit their application by 20 September to be considered for an interview locally. Please [see here](#) for complete details. International applicants who could travel to Cambridge if they are invited for an interview must submit their application by 15 October. Plan your time well to meet these deadlines - there’s nothing you can do if you miss them.

1. More places are available. It is true that when you apply earlier, you will be competing for a greater number of places in your chosen course, which will indeed start to decrease as time goes by. However, there is a difference between places and offers. A university will always give out more offers than it has places.

2. You may receive offers earlier. Nobody likes the waiting game. Submit earlier, and you may receive offers earlier than you would have otherwise, which can give you and your parents some peace of mind. Then again, the university may wait to see all applications before they send you their offer!

3. Get it out of the way! Perfecting your personal statement takes time and effort. It is understandable that you will want to finish this process before your final exams. This is a valid strategy, since grades are a key factor in determining whether you will actually be able to take up your offer of a place. A UK university offer is usually conditional on you actually achieving the grades you were predicted, and that takes some hard work and focused study! However, take note, this comes with a word of caution...

When might early be too early?

1. When quality suffers.

Remember, this is not a simple race. It is about crafting a personal statement that clearly articulates, in just 4000 characters, your motivation and passion for your chosen area of study, and also demonstrates that you have developed some personal skills alongside your studies. It's about understanding why your chosen subject is important, and why you are driven to learn more about it. This is a fine art. Do not allow the quality of your application to suffer at the hands of haste. That would be one surefire way of being rejected by your dream universities!

The same advice goes for leaving your application to the last minute. Admissions officers read hundreds of applications each year. They can spot a rushed application in an instant.

2. When you have a strong profile, but won't be applying to Oxbridge.

If you have an Oxbridge profile on paper (you're a straight A student) but you have made the decision NOT to apply to Oxbridge (and there are many reasons why one might make this decision), then you should consider waiting until after the Oxbridge deadline has passed before you submit.

There is an oft-cited idea in the UK that, though they might never admit to it formally, some UK universities do not like to be considered as communities of "Oxbridge rejects!" It is often assumed that strong candidates who apply before 15 October are aiming for Oxbridge.

It is of course absurd to suggest that a university would reject a top candidate simply because they think this candidate has applied to a competitor. Nonetheless, universities do want to admit students who are keen to study with them. They want to be your first choice. So you needn't give them any reason to think otherwise.

Even if this is all hearsay, it's a good idea to spend a little more time choosing the right course and university for you. If you are not applying to Oxbridge, there is no real benefit to applying before 15 October.

The key to a strong UK application lies in a finely crafted personal statement, excellent school grades, and a well-considered selection of university courses which suit you well. Therefore, the best advice is to plan your time well and take into account all of your other activities and commitments when deciding when to submit. Unless you are required to submit by 15 October (or earlier), we usually advise that November is a sensible target for submission. The most compelling reason to submit early is so you can focus on your studies. But, whatever you do, and whenever you decide to submit, do not compromise on quality in your eagerness to catch the worm!