



University
of Exeter

The UCAS reference

UCAS made some changes to the Reference section of the application from 2024. Further information is available from the [UCAS website](#), including some examples of good practice available [here](#).

Here at Exeter, we have not used references actively as part of the selection process for some time, though the background information they contain can sometimes be helpful. We therefore feel these changes are positive, helping to reduce the pressure on schools and colleges to compile and craft text with input from several different teachers and tutors. Please do not worry that how you handle the new format will advantage or disadvantage your candidates. If there is something we really need before reaching a decision we will contact you or the applicant directly.

The format has three distinct sections.

Section One: Enter a general description about your school, college or centre

Many of you will already have a standard piece of text for this. We welcome information about the size of your centre, the typical qualifications taken and any detail that helps us understand distinctive aspects of the educational experience you offer. If you are an international centre, you may wish to comment on English language delivery and support. If you are providing a reference for an applicant who is applying direct without a school or college, you will need to briefly explain your relationship to the applicant (such as former teacher, private tutor, employer, etc).

Section Two: Enter any information about extenuating circumstances that may affect this applicant's education and achievement

All information will be treated confidentially and only used as part of applications processing and/or to provide relevant information about student support arrangements. Please focus on:

- Any individual circumstances such as serious illness, bereavement, or family disruption which has had a major impact on the applicant's past or future performance.
- Each provider may have a different process for mitigating circumstances. At Exeter we ask that the applicant or a third party such as a parent or teacher completes our [Mitigating Circumstance online form](#). This will ensure that the information provided is taken into consideration. You will need to make sure this form is completed in addition to anything supplied on the UCAS reference. Further information can be found on our [website](#).
- Any particular changes or disruption between GCSE or equivalent (if appropriate) and Years 12/13 (sixth form/graduating class).
- Subject limitations/disruption: all candidates are required to meet core subject requirements (eg. A level Maths) but you can let us know if a particular preferred subject was not available for some reason or its delivery was unusually disrupted.



Section Three: Outline any other supportive information specific to the applicant and relevant to the course applied for that you think universities or colleges should be aware of

At Exeter, we do not have any specific academic information requirements for this section and do not expect you to provide separate individual comment from each subject teacher. You are welcome to supply one or two sentences of general support for the candidate and the overall contribution they can make but we will not use this information selectively. The following additional guidance may be useful:




- We value and recognise, within our admissions process, the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and Core Maths qualifications. It can be helpful to know the level of support at school for these extra elements. If a student has persevered with one of these but has not had extensive support for this, it shows real motivation, independence and commitment.
- If you are providing a reference for a student studying outside the UK school system, or perhaps within it but with frequent moves and changes of target qualifications, you may want to provide any further detail not included elsewhere to help us understand the educational journey of the candidate.
- For those who have undertaken a baccalaureate-style qualification with many different subject components, you may want to emphasise any specialism or strength the candidate shows that is relevant to their chosen degree.
- If your applicant is applying a second time around, or after a gap, perhaps as a result of a change of direction or a transfer from another university, a brief explanation of the circumstances can be helpful.
- Similarly, if you are another university and are providing a reference, please confirm that the student

is leaving in good standing and that there are no disciplinary matters outstanding. It can be helpful to know if the student has already left or is still registered.

- If your applicant engages in extra-curricular activities that represent a significant commitment (such as high-performance sport), you could note this here but please do not give an account of extra-curricular activities routinely for each of your candidates.

Qualification information

- Please do check the applicant has entered their qualifications correctly, including listing whether each qualification is incomplete or has already been achieved. Applicants sometimes confuse qualifications where they are available at different levels or offer a range of very similar subject titles (such as BTECs).
- We want to take into consideration all level 3 and above qualifications completed or being studied, even if completed for instance in Year 10. The applicant will not be penalised for listing all these qualifications but may be disadvantaged if they don't detail all that they hold, so please encourage them to add all of these. Further details can be accessed on the UCAS webpages for entry requirements.
- The UCAS application allows you to confirm you have verified the achieved qualifications listed by your applicant in their application. Please do this as it can reduce the additional contact we need with your candidate.
- If you are providing a reference for an applicant studying an Access to HE Diploma, we may ask you to provide more detailed information later in the application process. We do this as we know you may be submitting a reference for an applicant who has only just begun their current studies.

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