

UK Personal Statements 2026

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Cardiff University
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Introductions



Sarah Tompkins UG Student Recruitment Manager (International)

- Worked in Higher Education for 9 years in various roles
- Previously worked at Falmouth University and University of Leicester, now at Keele University
- Keele University – established in 1949, offering over 190 undergraduate programmes, campus location on the edge of Stoke-on-Trent (in between Manchester and Birmingham)



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Introductions



Becci Denmark

**International Officer & Country Manager for Europe,
Turkiye, Central Asia and UKi**

- Worked in Higher Education for more than 8 years in various roles.
- Chair of the BUILA Regional Interest Group for Europe
- Previously worked for University of Surrey and University of the Creative Arts.
- Cardiff University: Established in 1883, only Welsh member of the Russell Group, 186th QS Ranking and 350+ UG courses
- Architecture, Business, Engineering, Journalism, Law and Psychology.



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Introductions



Caroline Halling **Head of International Student Recruitment**

- Worked in Higher Education for more than 15 years
- Royal Holloway, University of London was opened by Queen Victoria in 1886 and is known as one of the most beautiful universities in the world. It's a supportive, top 10 safest, campus just outside of London, 10 minute drive from Heathrow Airport.
- Psychology, Politics, Computing, English/Creative writing, Earth Sciences, Music, Theatre and Media Arts



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Today we will be discussing...

- The current personal statement and how this was formed
- The new UCAS personal statement questions
- How to approach each questions with examples/areas of consideration
- University and guidance counsellor perspectives on the new personal statements
- Plenty of time for Q&A/discussion on best practices
- And you will learn more about the UK!



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Did you know...



We always complain about our weather! More than 9 in 10 Brits will have talked about the weather in the last 6 hours, but we think that's fair since it rains 156.2 days a year on average!



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The application form

- **Personal details and additional information** – includes funding, scholarships and residential options .
- **Choices** – can choose up to 5 options in no order .
- **Education** – all grades you have received from secondary school onwards and predicted grades .
- **Employment** – information on any paid part or full-time job .
- **Statement** – your personal statement .
- **Reference** – a written recommendation from a teacher or tutor .
- View all details before you pay and send the application - **£28.50**



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The current personal statement

- One piece of writing
- Maximum of 4000 characters or 47 lines
- Free form
- One place to focus on relevant skills, achievements and work experience



We all know the Brits love a cup of tea – we drink approximately 165 million cups per day!



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What universities see now...

While discovering undergraduate courses to pursue at university, my search aimed to find one with its foundation and primary subject, Chemistry, with the application of life science and Biology incorporated. This would be the ideal composition since Chemistry is a subject I consider a dear friend. No matter the increasing complexity of its syllabus, I have had some constant reassurance over the years that I would eventually understand the concepts. This description aligned well with that of the MPharm program.

In the last year, the more I have researched into a career as a pharmacist, the more I have grown to feel a sense of belonging. Being a pharmacist presents an opportunity for me to be a next-door medical helping hand, a trustworthy, approachable assistant the patient can rely entirely on to help them safely and effectively use medicines. As a pharmacist, I will bridge the doctor to the patient, simplifying medicine plans to each patient's understanding. Pharmacy will allow me to contribute to people's good health and well-being and to be a small but significant part of their lives. This profession will not only encourage me to dive deep into and explore the structures, formulations and dispense of clinical drugs; it is also a medium to build valuable relationships as I will advise and guide the patient at every step to ensure that they are comfortable consuming the prescribed medicines.

At four, my family moved from Dubai to Madagascar. This beautiful country had an extraordinary tropical atmosphere, and we spent six years isolated from the rest of the urban and evolving world. We were always surrounded by raw and grounded natives who have significantly influenced my outlook on life and continue to inspire me to date. Their simple lifestyle and pure innocence bridged our differences. They welcomed us with open arms and considered us amongst their own. Since returning to Dubai, relating to the typical teenager here has been challenging. Translating my unusual upbringing to my peers has been a hurdle in forming friendships. As a Pharmacist, I would be able to befriend various people regardless of their age or background and provide medical care with the same welcoming, wholesome attitude that I received in my childhood, which every patient deserves. I have adapted well to the British curriculum and consistently progressed since Year 10. I was granted a scholarship of \$2,585 from my school for my academic performance and an award for outstanding achievement in Chemistry. I was also recognized as a Pearson Edexcel High Achiever for receiving Grade A in 3 subjects in International AS levels. In October 2024, I was accepted for an Observership program by Unilabs Middle East. It was a five-day program where I shadowed the lab technicians in their five departments: molecular biology, microbiology, chemistry and immunology, and serology and histopathology. I had the opportunity to witness how an RT-PCR test is conducted on blood and urine samples to indicate the presence of some viruses (e.g., HPV) and how bacterial cultures are grown to be identified and tested with antibiotics. I saw the machines used to find the CBC and chemical components such as ion levels of blood samples and the examination of tissues such as breast tissue for a tumour. This experience has provided me with a lot more knowledge of the use of technology in healthcare and the practical skills necessary to excel in the MPharm course.

What I look forward to most during the program is working in a simulated environment where my professional practice skills will be tested thoroughly. Through work placements, I will be aware of the day-to-day situations handled by expert pharmacists, ensuring a smooth transition when I start working as a registered pharmacist.

It would be an honour to play a small role as a pharmacist in developing the rapidly evolving healthcare field and a privilege to make a difference for the betterment of those around me.



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September 2026...



You probably know that we have a lot of regional accents, but did you know that our cows do too?!



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What's the same?

There is still an overall character count of 4000 characters (including spacing and grammar)

UCAS will use the same similarity detection software

The purpose of the personal statement remains the same



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What's new?

- Scaffolded structure with three questions designed to support students
- Each section has a minimum of 350 characters
- There is no line count
- There is a lots of updated guidance on the UCAS website

<https://www.ucas.com/advisers/help-and-training/guides-resources-and-training/pre-application-support/personal-statements-2026-entry-onwards/personal-statement-2026-entry-classroom-resources>



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The Questions



You are never more than 70 miles (or 113km) away from the sea in the UK, although you might have to travel a little further to find views like this!



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Section 1: Why do you want to study this course or subject?



Students' opportunity to show interest and passion, conveying their knowledge and experience



Motivations for studying the course



Knowledge of this subject area and interests (if they have not studied before, show research)



Future plans and why this is a good fit



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Section 2: How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject



Focus on **relevant or transferable** skills they've gained from their formal education



Include any relevant educational achievement like winning a national competition, serving as a student ambassador, lead role in a play



Essays, projects or EPQs



Private lessons, tutoring or online courses



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Section 3: what else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?



Include work experience, employment or volunteering to demonstrate transferable skills related to the course



Personal life experiences or responsibilities



Hobbies and any extracurricular or outreach activities



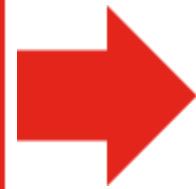
Achievements outside of school or college



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ABC Method – exercise for the classroom

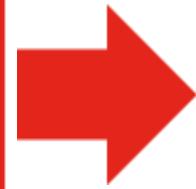
Action



What is it that you do?

“I spent two weeks doing an internship at GlaxoSmithKline in the summer”

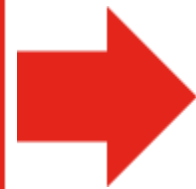
Benefit



How has this helped you?

“From this, I developed a deeper understanding of the drug development process, from conception to production”

Course Relevance



Make it relevant

“Having an understanding of how drugs are developed will be a useful foundation for the pharmacology modules within the Biochemistry degree.”



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Example

Business Management

- **Action:** I play football twice a week. My team often enters local tournaments, and I am the team captain.
- **Benefit:** Teamwork, dedication, leadership skills, competitive drive
- **Course Relevance:** Shows competitiveness and enthusiasm for an activity which are vital skills in Business. Leadership skills are essential for success in Business Management and lead to strong skills in project management, presentation, and managing other staff.



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Example

Psychology

- **Action:** I have had a part time job at my local primary school as a teaching assistant for three years.
- **Benefit:** Close regular contact with children over a relatively long period of time, classroom management, interaction with parents
- **Course Relevance:** Excellent for developmental psychology modules, child psychology, family issues, basic understanding of how some special needs affect the learning process. Could have sparked passion for studying psychology.



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Don't forget the reference...!

ESTABLISHMENT DETAILS

is a private, fee-paying school, which is part of a small group of independent schools in . Our school was founded in 1985 and offers education to pupils aged 2 - 18+. We currently have over 800 students enrolled in , including 47 students aged 11+ in the Boarding House. We have 61 countries and 36 first languages represented in our classrooms. We are a non-selective coeducational school, focusing on the positives of each individual student and fostering their abilities and talents. The schools' curricula are based in the National Curriculum for England and the International Baccalaureate Programmes: the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) and the IB Career-related Programme (IBCP). We offer 25 Diploma Programme courses, as well as the Pearson International BTEC Diploma as part of the IBCP. Predicted grades are calculated in Year 13 based upon the following data: performance in mock exams (based on official past papers from the IB), completion of subject Internal Assessments and Individual Orals (submitted coursework that counts towards the final IB grade). Prediction for the IB Diploma Core are based on teachers' assessment of the student's work in line with published IB assessment criteria.

CIRCUMSTANCES

has a diagnosis of ADHD, which was known about before joining the school, however, this information has only been shared with the school in the final year of her studies. It is fair to say that did not receive the support to which she is entitled during the first year of her studies, which may have impacted her performance. Important to note, is that took on the challenge to move to Germany with her father, leaving behind the rest of her family in . This has been particularly difficult considering the events taking place in this part of the world and the worries she has carried for her remaining family members.

OTHER SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

is a conscientious, hardworking student who joined the school from at the beginning of Year 12. Her passion and understanding of veterinary medicine are clear when speaking with ; she is someone who understands this from an academic and experiential perspective. had to make an adjustment to a new educational system when she joined the IB programme, but it is clear that she has taken on the challenge of this academic approach and has made strong upward progress with her grades. is a keen biologist and has been making improvements as she adjusts to the course and content. In Psychology takes a proactive approach to her studies, demonstrating clear motivation and progress through attending clinics or arranging meetings to clarify her understanding of the course content. In Maths, she asks insightful questions and grasps concepts quickly. has gone above and beyond by selecting a seventh subject in her timetable. She took on as a way to build her understanding of the language in her new surroundings, showing a keenness to integrate through learning her fourth language. is a very creative student who displays very high levels of dexterity and dedication to her creations. She took the initiative to make drawings for the local care home, a project that allowed her to show her compassionate nature. She also volunteers at two horse stables, one where she works directly with the horses and the other where she works together with disabled individuals.

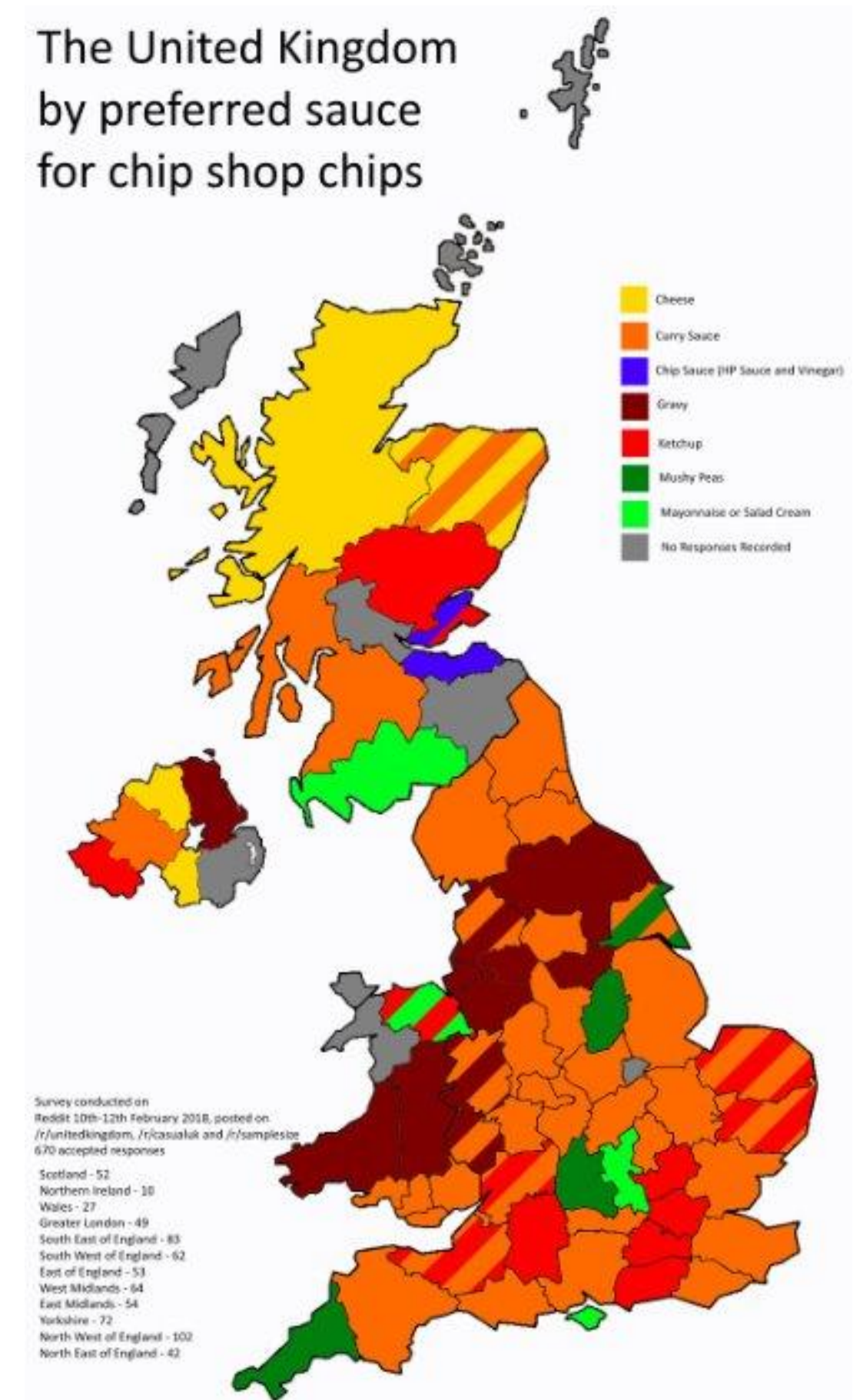


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Reflections...

You have **10 minutes** to discuss

- How you might adapt your processes to support students writing personal statements
- What good practice can you bring from what you are doing already
- The best way to spread awareness to students



Summary of our thoughts

University perspective

- Easier for us to find what we are looking for
- Gives more opportunity for students to be direct with experiences
- Gives students a structure to work within when they are unsure

Counsellor perspective

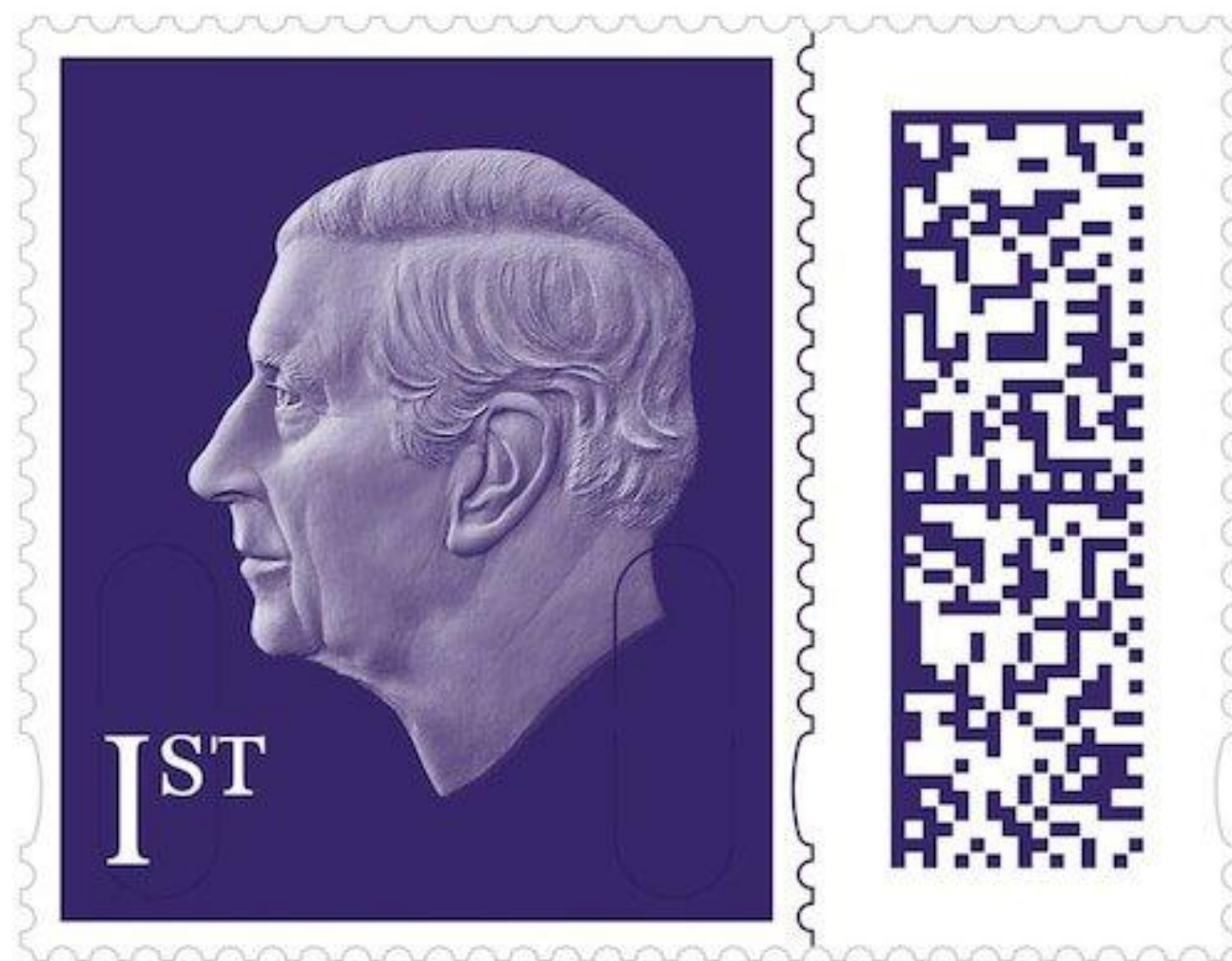
- Structured approach promotes clarity and focus
- Encourages authenticity and self reflection
- Reduces pressure on students to 'perform' and create a narrative



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Any questions?

It is considered an act of treason to put a stamp with the King's head upside down on an envelope.



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Thank You



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