



Writing the reference

FACT SHEET

Supporting your students in applying to study in UK

Writing the reference for the UCAS application

A reference is an essential part of a UCAS application. There is no single correct way of producing this but this fact sheet gives some advice from UCAS and British Council. Within the reference you will be expected to give predicted grades for your student. Advice on this is included overleaf in this leaflet.

Many schools start with brief description of the post-16 curriculum. The focus should be on the student's suitability for the subject applied for.

Comments should fit the predicted grade (i.e. if you predict high grades – then use *outstanding, best student in this subject for a decade, exceptional, highly fluent* etc; *NOT fairly good at*)

In general, HE admissions tutors are looking for your comments on your student's:

- Independent study skills
- Insight into chosen profession
- Motivation and commitment
- A realistic understanding of what the course entails
- Good numeracy and literacy
- Note taking and research skills
- Time management skills
- Enthusiasm to learn and to go beyond the syllabus
- Transferable skills and attributes
- Ability to work with others

For **health & social care**, for example, the admissions tutor will be seeking a positive endorsement on the student's communication skills; skills as a team-player; caring attitude; and ability to complete his or her academic study.

Example

'Mei-lin is a confident student who has impressed her teachers with her willingness to go beyond the syllabus. Quick on the uptake and with a refreshingly open attitude to differing learning and assessment approaches, her application to your degree programme comes highly recommended'

Accentuate the positive

'She should make the transition to degree studies smoothly, given her study skills, and experience of team working, action learning and reflective practices.'

'His generosity of spirit is evidenced by his voluntary work teaching computing skills at a local special school.'

If applicable, add any factors which could influence performance, such as illness, special needs, family problems/personal circumstances, social deprivation, and teaching problems.

Assembling the components

- Student provides fact sheet (out of college activities & interests). Their Student Learning Profiles should be very helpful for this.
- Subject tutors provide comments on subject area
- Personal tutor provides statement on personal qualities
- Someone reviews the material, smoothing rhetoric, focusing comments, ensuring consistency

The importance of a positive concluding sentence

End with an unambiguous recommendation.

Predicting grades

Your reference needs to include the predicted grades your student is likely to achieve in the HKDSE. This British Council's advice, based on feedback from UK universities.

- UK universities are keen to recruit students from HKDSE but accept it will be difficult for teachers to predict accurately in the first year. Do not worry if your predictions are wrong: aim for the "ball park".
- Base your prediction on what you expect the student to achieve given their current performance and if they continue to work hard up until the examination. If they are a top student in a top school in Hong Kong you should be confident in predicting 5s and 5*s.
- Be optimistic rather than pessimistic! That will maximise your students' options in applying to top universities. If the grades are not achieved, universities may still confirm the place. If they reject, students can opt for their second choice with lower offer requirements or apply to other courses.

You can find out more about the application process and writing the reference, directly from UCAS. Visit the following:

<http://www.ucas.com/advisers/>

<http://www.ucas.com/advisers/online/references>

The British Council in Hong Kong is also here to give you support, particularly in the transition to the new academic structure and HKDSE. Do contact us if you'd like further advice, or for us to organise seminars and workshops on applying to study in UK for your students in your school. E-mail us at enquiries@britishcouncil.org.hk or visit www.educationuk.org.hk