

## Timeline for US Applications for entry in 2022 *(includes resources)*

*(For entry in 2021, you need to pay particular attention to how the COVID-19 situation develops.)*

A successful US university application takes TIME. You can begin preparations in the summer of Year 12, but you stand a far better chance of success if you start researching the possibility of studying as an undergraduate in the US immediately after your GCSEs in year 11. American universities have a more holistic approach to admissions and are all about building a strong freshman class: you will come across the term “fit” and you will need to be able to demonstrate that you are a good “fit” for each institution you apply to. You will be judged on “hard” and “soft” criteria.

### **“Hard” factors include:**

- The challenge of your A level choices
- Your transcript (external and internal exams)
- Your SATs or ACTs results, SATs subject tests (beware: test optional is becoming more common in times of COVID)
- The strength of Reading School and your standing within it (although we do not rank you as such).

### **“Soft” factors relate to personal straits and evidence can be found in:**

- Extra- / Co-curricular activities (what do you do in your free time – how do you impact your community?). **YOU NEED TO CONSCIOUSLY BUILD YOUR ACTIVITIES LIST.**
- Essays (you’ll need to write several!)
- Recommendation letters (one from the “school counsellor”, one or two from teacher recommenders)
- Interviews (usually carried out by alumni visiting the UK)
- Demonstrated interest (your application needs to show that you know the institution well, you have taken the time to book and attend interviews etc)

You can see why you need time to prepare: you’ll need to come up with a short list of universities, you’ll need to practice for the SATs/ACTs, you’ll need to ensure you have evidence of good study skills and good internal exam results and you’ll need a solid bank of extra- curricular activities (some of which can relate to your choice of degree). You will need to become an expert in US applications! Private schools will often have a department dedicated to US university counselling and support for the whole process. At Reading School, there is only one member of staff who has other responsibilities and a full teaching timetable. YOU will need to take charge, get “skilled up”, but you will have as much support as possible and this document should give you a framework to guide you. In addition, the Non UK University Applications Team has lots of useful posts and resources. From the start of year 12 you should also have access to Unifrog.

**Some things to note:**

- US undergraduate degrees are all 4 years
- Medicine and Law are NOT undergraduate degrees
- In the UK you apply for a specific course, in the US you apply to the university and often (but not always) do not specialise until your second year. US curricula are broader initially – you may find something you enjoy that you have never thought about before!
- You can study at a community college for 2 years and transfer into a 4 year programme later (sometimes financially more viable)
- Classes are smaller with more contact time
- More extra-curricular opportunities
- American Universities vary in cost. The average cost including living expenses is around \$74,000 but few students pay the “ticket price” due to Financial Aid packages available. Most, but not all, scholarships are provided by the universities – some have deeper pockets than others. Around 5 are completely “needs blind” (including Harvard). You will have to fund any extra expenses not covered by your scholarship yourself – the UK student loan is not portable. “Full ride” scholarships are rare and highly competitive. A student visa will have work restrictions that limit your earning ability. Saying that, sometimes a US education can cost you less than a UK one. **YOU will need to apply for your own financial aid / scholarships.**
- Athletic Scholarships are a different ball game: inform Ms Pickering **IMMEDIATELY** if you intend going down the college athlete route.

**TIP: Read the whole suggested timeline that follows, then create your own Gantt Chart / Action Plan / Checklist if you are still interested.**

## Summer after GCSEs

Conduct extensive research into applying to US universities – BECOME AN EXPERT!

To give you an overview of the process, explore the following FULLY:

- <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/>
- <http://www.harvard-ukadmissions.co.uk/>

To help you start making a short list of potential universities you can use the following search engines:

- <https://www.petersons.com/>
- <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>

Find out which of your favoured universities use the Common Application (a bit like the UK's UCAS but more complex) and familiarise yourself with the CommonApp:

- The CommonApp <https://www.commonapp.org/>.
- The CommonApp has a YouTube channel – will be more useful if you actually decide to apply - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1Kh8bz7z0tQwZK0a3avFiw>

The following are good sources of information on multiple subjects:

- The collegeEssay Guy <https://www.collegeessayguy.com/college-application-hub>
- The University Guy (David Hawkins): <https://www.hawkinglobaleducation.com/blog2>

If you have extra time, do some research on SATs and ACTs (Most students do SATs)

- SATs <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/>
- ACTs <https://global.act.org/content/global/en/products-and-services/the-act-non-us.html>
- Useful article to read <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/act-vs-sat-how-to-decide-which-test-to-take>

Other things to check:–

- Individual University / College websites
- Individual University / College social media accounts
- Individual University / College admission website – may give access to virtual tours and/or Youtube videos, admissions blogs
- Individual Department websites at your favoured institutions
- Student profile for the institutions on your list of favourites

- Presence of an International Student Office?
- Is there a host family programme?

Create a list of 10-20 universities you are interested in (may be influenced by the following criteria: environment and location, size and demographics, culture and philosophy, campus life, curricula and degree programmes, selectivity, costs and aid). Your list can be smaller!

Research Early Action, Early Decision and Regular Decision (EA, ED and RD). Basically you can apply early to US institutions or you can go the regular route. It is worthwhile finding out what percentage of students who gained a place at your chosen universities went the “early” route. Also check the number of successful international applicants. Note: if you decide on ED, you can only apply to one institution and if you are accepted you HAVE to go to that institution, it is a legal contract. Some EA programmes have restrictions, others do not – you will need to find out. If you go the early route, you will know if you have a place by mid-December (usually).

**Important:** Register for the appropriate Fulbright Commission’s events, especially the <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/events> US College Day (college fair – you can talk with representatives of many US universities / colleges. This year the event is virtual and is on the 26 September.

**DO NOT WASTE YOUR TIME! INVESTIGATE FINANCIAL AID EARLY IN THE PROCESS – COULD BE THE DEAL BREAKER. DISCUSS WITH YOUR PARENTS!**

<https://www.theuniversityguys.com/paying-for-a-us-university-education/>

Make sure you know and understand the terms “needs aware” and “needs blind”. Few colleges are needs blind – finding out how many international students successfully secured financial aid at the colleges you are interested in will be useful and may influence your choices. Most US families, if they are able to, will have been saving into a “college fund” for their offspring from birth and so you may not get as much aid as you’d like!

Financial Aid Webinar <https://youtu.be/nld7aCfOsMg>

Good place to start your research on funding <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/going-to-the-usa/undergraduate/educationusa-advice/funding> and their webinar <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/going-to-the-usa/undergraduate/educationusa-advice/funding/university-funding>

You will need to start applying for funding along with your application. (There are merit based scholarships and needs based aid available – you will need to investigate.)

## Starting the Sixth Form at Reading School

### Ist Full Term Year 12 (Sept – Dec)

If you have not done the research detailed above, you will need to do it this term. If you have done it, carry on with your research – explore Unifrog if you have a login.

Make sure you are a member of the Non UK University Applications Team (on MS Teams)– if you are not, request to join.

Access one or both of these books in the LRC:

- Uni in the USA: The Definitive UK Guide to Universities in the USA Paperback – 23 Sep 2019 by [Harriet Plyler](#) (Editor)
- Fiske Guide to Colleges 2021 Paperback – 7 Jul 2020 by [Edward Fiske](#) (Author)

Attend Fulbright Commission’s Virtual US College Day 2020 (September 26)

<http://www.fulbright.org.uk/events>

At the end of September, if you are still interested, complete “**Year 12 US Universities Form**” and submit to Ms Pickering by email. This form will be available in the files section (class materials) of the Non UK University Applications Team.

Attend an individual meeting with Ms Pickering to discuss your intentions. (You will be invited to attend a meeting at a mutually convenient time, after October half term). If you intend going ahead with US applications you will need to meet with Ms Pickering regularly in order that she can begin getting to know you ready to write your counsellor reference in year 13.

As soon as possible, start thinking about SAT or ACT practice

<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/act-vs-sat-how-to-decide-which-test-to-take> . ACT has a science section, SAT does not; ACT favours students with strong English skills, SAT may favour stronger mathematicians; SAT is slightly more popular than ACT but both are accepted by universities. SAT has been the choice of past Reading School students. You can sit the exams more than once and submit your best scores, but avoid repeated retesting (also cost involved). One strategy could be to do a practice test for both and chose the format that gives you the best percentile then focus on that format for perfecting your exam technique before trying a real set of exams. (Remember some universities are test optional <http://fairtest.org/university/optional>).

Consider forming a SATs study group – practice leads to serious gains and group study is more “fun”! <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice/khan-academy>, <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice/study-groups>. That last link has advice on how to set up a study group – make sure you know which test dates you are aiming for <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/international> and register when you are certain you will apply to the US (this may not be this term). There are fees payable – investigate cancellation terms etc..

Many colleges also require that you sit SAT Subject Tests for admission. Some colleges specify the SAT Subject Tests that they require, others allow applicants to choose which tests to take. Each test is a 20 min M/C. It is worth checking what is required by the colleges you wish to apply to.

When you sit the tests is up to you, but there are only a few specified dates available for international students and SAT subject testing is not always available. You will need to plan around your school commitments (I suggest you avoid doing these tests when you have internal exams or you are trying to complete your UCAS entry) – go for as stress free an option as possible. You can re-sit as mentioned previously. If you are going for EA / ED you need to have them completed before the deadline for these applications (1<sup>st</sup> term of year 13)– obviously!!

---

## **2nd Full Term Year 12 (Jan – Easter break)**

Finalise an application short list (if you are adamant you want to attend a US institution it is worth ensuring a good spread of aspirational, appropriate and safe choices). Make sure you know the requirements of each (Unifrog can help).

Meet with Ms Pickering to discuss your choices at the start of term in January.

Continue with SAT/ACT, SAT subject test practice – monitor your test scores. Register for testing / do your tests if ready. Report results to Ms Pickering.

### 3rd Full Term Year 12 (Easter break - July)

Continue with SAT/ACT, SAT subject test practice – monitor your test scores. Register for testing / ideally do your tests if ready. Report results to Ms Pickering.

Create a Common Application Account ready for when the CommonApp opens on 1<sup>st</sup> August. It will “roll over” into the next year.

Identify the 2 teachers you wish to be your recommenders. Inform Ms Pickering of your choices so that guidance for letters of recommendation can be provided to them. Ask your teachers if they are willing to write you a letter of recommendation and if they are, fill in a BRAGSHEET. This form will be available in the files section (class materials) of the Non UK University Applications Team. Guidance on filling in the form is also available. Put as much effort into this as possible since it will influence the quality of the letter of recommendation you will get. You will need to fill in 2 separate bragsheets. Email the appropriate completed bragsheet to each teacher and cc Ms Pickering. THIS NEEDS TO BE DONE BEFORE THE END OF TERM TO GIVE YOUR TEACHERS ENOUGH TIME TO WRITE YOUR RECOMMENDATION. Remember, a US letter of recommendation is very different to a UCAS ref and requires a lot more work on the part of your teachers. If you leave it too late, your letter will be rushed since they will also be writing UCAS references.

**INFORM MS PICKERING AND YOUR RECOMMENDERS IF YOU ARE EA/ED or a college athlete** (your application needs to be prioritised – informing the school in September will be too late!)

If enough students apply to the US, an essay writing workshop will be run by Ms Pickering. Attend this workshop if it runs, otherwise materials will be made available (in Teams).

---

## Summer Holiday Between Year 12 and 13

Begin Filling in your CommonApp information. (The CommonApp officially opens August 1<sup>st</sup>)

Work on your funding. “Applications for university funding are often integrated into the application for admission. For need-based financial aid, you will likely have to fill in the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE form to demonstrate your family's financial background. You should check if the university accepts PROFILE, or if they use their own system. Niche and merit scholarships might require writing an additional essay or submitting your application by an earlier date”. <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/going-to-the-usa/undergraduate/educationusa-advice/funding/university-funding>

Prepare essay drafts and Activities list draft. If concerned / require help, have the drafts ready to see Ms Pickering in September. Essay guidance will be available in the files section (class materials) of the Non UK University Applications Team, in the meantime try <https://www.collegeessayguy.com/college-application-hub>.

Register for Fulbright Commission’s US College Day 2021: hopefully we will be back to normal and this event will be a real one held in London.

If you have not already done so, complete all standardised testing and report results to Ms Pickering.

---

## Ist Full Term Year 13 (Sept – Dec)

*(Last opportunity to sit SAT/ACT and SAT subject tests if ED/EA. Even RD students should finish with their standardised testing in this term. Report results to Ms Pickering).*

Attend Fulbright Commission’s US College Day 2021: hopefully we will be back to normal and this event will be a real one held in London.

Flag any problems with essays – assistance may be available – ask Ms Pickering.

Meet with Ms Pickering to discuss counsellor reference. If not EA/ED or College Athlete this will need to be after UCAS early entry admin (i.e in October). If you are EA/ED or College Athlete you should have let Ms Pickering know at the end of last term!

If EA/ED or College Athlete, you will need to complete all forms and essays by the end of September if you want assistance in October. Make sure financial aid documentation is completed and submit application by the end of October.

EA/ED (College Athlete?) decisions are made by mid December, you need to accept by end of month. **If you are ED and get the offer you will need to withdraw from UCAS.**

Regular Decision applicants should be working on their applications to meet their January - March deadlines. You should know when these deadlines are and work towards them autonomously! Keep your recommenders and Ms Pickering informed of these deadlines so that we can ensure we do not hold up your application. (The school will aim to have all of your letters of recommendation completed by the end of this term).

---

## **2nd Full Term Year 13 (Jan – Easter break)**

Regular Decision students submit their applications if you have not already done so – depends on individual colleges, but the earlier you submit your application the better.

RD students may be offered interviews with university alumni – arrange one with each college that offers so that you “demonstrate interest”. Advice for interviews is on Teams.

Regular admissions and university funding decisions are released between March and April. Please inform Ms Pickering of outcomes.

### 3rd Full Term Year 13 (Easter break - July)

Reply to any RD offers (usually by May 1<sup>st</sup>) and pay deposit to hold place if required. NOTE: you may be asked (by email) to request your “final transcript” from the School Counsellor (Ms Pickering). You will need to let the university know that A level results are due in August and that the school will send your results then.

**REMEMBER YOU WILL BE SITTING YOU'RE A LEVEL EXAMS THIS TERM SO YOU NEED TO BE ORGANISED!** Your offers are not dependent on your results – however, if your results are miles away from your predicted grades, colleges can withdraw their offers.

Begin your visa application process and attend a visa interview between May and August (after A levels best).

Read the [Fulbright pre-departure guide](#)

Orientation usually begins between mid-August and early September, but don't book your flights until you know your arrival date.

Begin studying in the USA – **Good Luck!**

**NOTE: Europe and Canada are strong alternatives for a US education and can be cheaper.**