

# The UCAS reference: A view from LSE

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THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

## Session overview

- ❑ The purpose of references
- ❑ How to approach reference-writing:
  - ❑ The school
  - ❑ The predicted grades
  - ❑ The applicant
- ❑ Assessing references
- ❑ Any questions?

# Holistic assessment



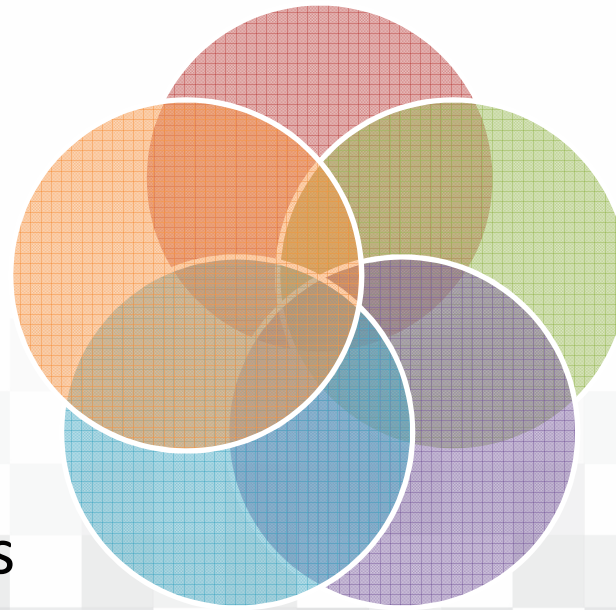
UCAS  
personal  
statement

Contextual  
data

Academic  
record

Admissions  
Test\*

Teacher  
reference



# Selecting students



Rank the students from most to least likely according to how likely you would be to make them an offer for a programme with the entry requirements AAA

Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Rank?
Alice	AAA	ABBB	5A 5B	
Bilal	AAB	AABB	11A*	
Caro	A*AA	AAAA	9A 1B 1C	
Dieter	AAA	ABC	8B 2C	

# Does this change your opinion?



Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Extenuating Circumstances
Alice	AAA	ABBB	5A 5B	GCSE School was in Special Measures and 73% FSM
Bilal	AAB	AABB	11A*	Mother has been severely ill over last 6 months
Caro	A*AA	AAAA	9A 1B 1C	None
Dieter	AAA	ABC	8B 2C	Arrived in UK (Y9) with no English

# How to approach reference-writing



# References: purpose?

Help us to understand the contextualised opportunities available to students, especially in light of qualification reform



# References: purpose?

- ❑ Assessment of a student's *academic ability & potential* for degree-level study in their chosen field
- ❑ Offer a *clear, comprehensive & realistic evaluation* from an educational professional
- ❑ Tell the *story of the student and institution* to help us place the student's achievements **in context**





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# Information about the school



# References: School Info

What we already see at LSE
GCSE 5 grades at 9-4 incl. English & Maths (GCSE year)
A level points score per entry for previous year
School type



# References: School Info

What we don't see
School type: selectivity, academy, (convertor, sponsored, merger), college. Size
Intake: Selectivity, Free Schools Meals, Pupil premium or IDACI
Progress 8 (how your school's performance relates to starting points)
Finer detail on GCSE performance i.e. 5 grades 9-7
Historical data – have results improved/dipped
Availability of subjects pre and post 16 (F Maths)
Problems with teaching, resourcing etc
Standard qualification offer (AS entry)– has the applicant done more or less than usual? (EPQ/ independent learning)



Use bitly, tinyurl or a simple webpath and include edited highlights in the main reference

“Details of Rydell High School’s policy on A-levels and details on the school can be found at <http://bit.ly/s23dcgi>”



# References: School Info

“Erinsborough High School is an oversubscribed large multicultural school. The sixth form of about 200 students reflects this diversity.”

“Grange Hill School is situated in an area of high social and economic deprivation.”

“Waterloo Road is a school undergoing challenges with staffing difficulties a major concern.”



# References: School Info

“Pontypandy Community School is a large rural comprehensive school with majority of students living in areas of deprivation. Students come to us from a range of backgrounds, including a significant proportion with no family experience of HE. Our small sixth form (150 students) teaches in mixed classes and offers 9 subjects to A2. Students do not sit AS exams. Students study four subjects in Year 12, then three in Year 13, although the most able are permitted to continue with 4. Further Maths is offered as an off-timetable option with two hours teaching time a week. The EPQ is offered as an enrichment activity to all students, around 30% take this up.”



# Predicted grades



# References: Predictions

- ❑ Be supportive, but realistic
- ❑ **Please tell us how you are making predictions**, particularly if you don't have AS grades
- ❑ Justify any prediction up or down from academic record (in light of reform)

AS levels

Mocks

Coursework

ALIS

Formative  
assessment

Professional  
judgement





# Information about the applicant



# References: The Applicant



What we already see at LSE
All qualifications entered
All <b>declared</b> schools/colleges
POLAR 3 – postcode data on progression to HE
Care leaver
Any <b>declared</b> disabilities or special educational needs
Age – is this student in cohort?
Participation in an LSE widening participation scheme

# References: The Applicant

What we don't see
Free School Meals or Pupil premium
Acorn/IDACI data
Family background inc. HE
English language proficiency- arrival in UK
If they have a disability – when was this diagnosed. Have they always had adjustments in place?
Specific details on home/family situation and impact

# References: The Applicant



Assessment of student's **academic suitability** for their chosen degree, with specific examples:

- ❑ Attitude to study: motivation & commitment
- ❑ Potential
- ❑ Intellectual flexibility & curiosity
- ❑ Independent & original thinking
- ❑ Analytic ability & logical reasoning
- ❑ Ability to cope with sustained workload & flourish in intensive academic environment
- ❑ What is the student like as a learner: quiet, thoughtful, bold, lively? What do they stand out for?

# References: The Applicant



- Give prominence to subjects most relevant to chosen degree, but include all subjects
- Include strengths and weaknesses, particularly where grades aren't perfect
- Extra-curricular achievements & responsibilities
- Leadership skills, social skills
- No surprises: tell us about anything that has affected performance or progress

# References: The Applicant



“Frank is a hardworking student who works well in class.”

“Rebecca is a pleasant student who is a credit to the Sixth Form. She is a form captain and has raised some money for a local charity.”

“Ahmed works well both in the classroom and in his own time. He is a dedicated student. Mathematics is a particular strength and she excels in this area, scoring highly in tests.”

“Nyola would make an excellent student of Economics.”

“Zaima is an extremely capable linguist. I am confident that Zaima is the most academically able student I have taught over the previous 10 years. In assessments Zaima has regularly achieved near perfect grades and in a recent mock exam based on AS content she scored 92% placing her at the top of a very able class. Zaima is confident when speaking in class and engages readily in debates and discussions. Her wider reading is apparent as she often asks challenging questions suggesting she is thinking about the subject beyond the curriculum requirements.”

# References: Extenuating Circumstances

- ❑ If extenuating circumstances have affected a learner please give *detailed, specific* information about how they have affected their *education*
- ❑ If it does not fit in the reference, please include a line that further information will be sent via LSE's extenuating circumstances form
- ❑ LSE Deadlines:
  - ❑ by 31<sup>st</sup> July for examination circumstances (A levels)
  - ❑ by 30th June for examination circumstances (IB)





# References: Ex Circs

Rasheed's father was recently diagnosed with Arthrofibrosis. He has to take 240mg of Exprofulene daily. He has had two fibriolcty's to remove fibroids from his lower sacrolectum and is currently on the waiting list for a diplodoidectomy. Please see attached letter and scans from his consultant.

Rasheed's father was diagnosed with Arthrofibrosis, a curable but debilitating disease in December 2018 (during mock exams). He has had two two-week stays in hospital (December and February) during which Rasheed missed several days of school to visit him. He has also assumed greater caring responsibilities for his two siblings. His father is on the waiting list for a further surgery which could occur at any time in the next sixth months. This has caused considerable worry to Rasheed.



# Examples



# Examples

- ❑ Look at the mock application forms provided
- ❑ The Personal Statements have been removed
- ❑ Consider the references alongside the other information provided
  - ❑ How was each reference helpful?
  - ❑ Was there any information missing?



# Hannah

Hannah is a highly original, intelligent, analytical student with enormous determination and unusual independence of mind. She is a remarkably quick learner. Her GCSE results, obtained at a time of some personal unhappiness involving absence from school at crucial periods and a change of school, by absolutely no means do justice to her ability. Putting that behind her, she joined us in the Lower Sixth and her attendance has continued to be good. She quickly took the lead in lessons, becoming known for her astute contributions to class discussions. Above all she has steamed ahead independently, powered by a strong and quirky intellectual curiosity.

**Mathematics:** Hannah is a natural mathematician who never accepts ideas simply because she is told that they are true; she questions and works away at that which appears inconsistent, illogical or incomplete. She appreciates the beauty and brevity of mathematical solutions and can work quickly and efficiently. This year she has taken up AS Further Mathematics as an extra pursuit outside school, and is predicted a grade A.

**Economics:** Hannah loves to pursue her own line of enquiry and research and she always seems to be exploring new lines of interest independently. She has developed a rich knowledge of economic facts, concepts and theories. She has excellent powers of analysis and her understanding of the links between the different theories, particularly in macroeconomics, is frequently documented in her essays. Her strong mathematical ability enables her to tackle data manipulation questions with confidence. With her independent study of Further Mathematics, she will have no problem meeting the mathematical requirements of an undergraduate course in Economics. As Economics Prefect, she is an assured and persuasive ambassador for the subject at Open Evenings.

**Psychology (149/200 yr 12 internal exam):** Hannah reads widely and she demonstrates, in discussion and in her written work, an impressive knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories and case studies far beyond the curriculum. As in Economics, she can argue effectively both orally and on paper; she often pursues a line of enquiry right up to the boundary between Psychology and Philosophy. She has a particular interest in Psychopathology.

**Geography:** Hannah studies Geography outside school. As with her other subjects, she is keen, very able and self-motivated.

Hannah is independent-minded and self-motivated, but she is also considerate and ready to support others, for example by helping at a games club at lunchtimes at our local primary school. She participated in the Young Enterprise Scheme last year and was a vocal, cooperative but powerful team member with clear leadership instincts.

Hannah is an exceptionally intelligent, curious, deep-thinking and ambitious student who challenges received truths and pursues alternative lines of enquiry, seemingly on a daily basis. Her sense of humour is a bonus.

Hannah is totally committed to the study of Economics and I very strongly recommend this very interesting young woman to you.

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# Clive

Newtown Sixth Form College serves a diverse community of students from the local area. We offer a broad range of A-Level and vocational courses and are proud to extend educational opportunities to learners who have some of the lowest qualifications on entry of any sixth form college in the country.

Clive has a strong understanding of sociological perspectives that can be applied readily to the wider world. Clive is insightful, well read, enthusiastic and passionate about sociology. He has been able to make links between other social sciences which has not only strengthened his understanding of the subject but given him a deep philosophical foundation to evaluate and assess cultural aspects of society. He has understood that theory should be underpinned with sociological research and can easily differentiate between positivist and interpretivistic stances. His sociological thoughts are strengthened through political convictions and a general attitude that real sociology is 'action' based. His knowledge of feminism, Marxism, functionalism and other theories has developed beyond classic A Level approaches and is more akin to an undergraduate understanding. He has covered topics such as the sociology of the family, education and research methods and has made a swift transition to the higher demands that a second year of study entails. His written work is detailed and will often go beyond assessment criteria; an A\* grade is in his grasp.

Likewise, in Psychology, Clive presents as a conscientious, mature and polite student who has worked exceptionally well throughout the course to develop and maintain his natural flair for the subject. His work ethic has led to a number of outstanding test results and other written pieces. He has an impressive grasp of psychological concepts and theories. He also has an excellent understanding of research methods, which he has applied effectively when preparing for the research methods exam. In addition to this, he has consistently demonstrated that he also has an excellent understanding of the key evaluative issues in Psychology, which he discusses to an impressive level in each of his essays. He has advanced organisational skills, which he has used to complete all work to an exceptional standard by the deadlines set. He has maintained an excellent level of motivation and interest in the subject throughout the course, which has led him to become an admirable independent learner.

Clive is passionate about political, economic and social issues; he writes and speaks eloquently on a range of matters and is able to reflect on issues from a range of standpoints. Clive picks up complex concepts with ease and can analyse political arguments using complex terminology. He enjoys exploring topics which link his Economics and Political studies to Sociology; he is particularly articulate when discussing the impact of fiscal and welfare policy on families in poverty and is very interested in how social policy changes like how the legal position of gay marriage reflects wider social change. Clive works tremendously hard and as a result should gain an A grade in AS Government and Politics; he has already gained a B for Economics A Level.

Clive is an active member of the college, and wider, community. To name just a few examples, he is Secretary for the Student Union, fully utilising his excellent organisational and people management skills; he runs his own society in college (Film and Visual Culture Club) where he has recruited regular attendees and is effective in communicating with staff to follow internal policy and procedures; he confidently represents the college at local secondary schools and marketing events and has even chaired a borough assembly holding parliamentary candidates to account on local issues. Clive is mature, proactive and hard-working. He is an ideal candidate for Higher Education and will be an excellent student and an asset to the university community.

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# Summary

Do's	Don'ts
Read statement and application first	Repeat information already on application
Confirm personal circumstances	Include vague comments on home life
Shape reference in light of programme choice	Refer to specific university or programme (if multiple)
Comment on academic suitability and preparedness	Focus too much on extra-curricular activities
Justify predictions in context	Paste unedited comments from reports (can be negative)

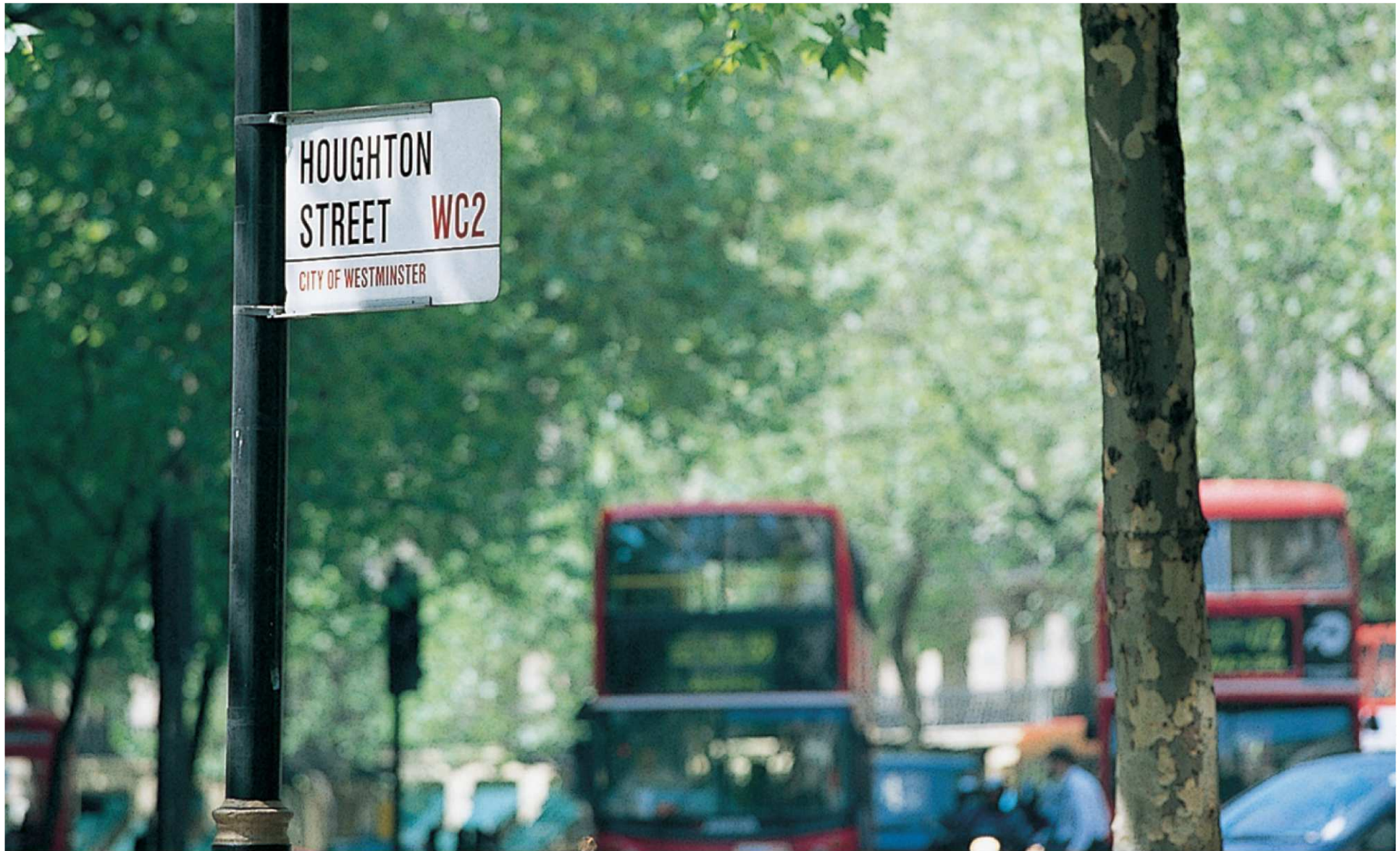
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/informationForTeachersAndSchools/Admissions-Advice-for-Teachers.aspx>



[lse.ac.uk/study](http://lse.ac.uk/study)







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# Any questions?