ACES apply 2019/20

The ACES Tayside guide to applying to creative courses in Scotland 2019-20
About ACES Tayside

ACES is a nationally funded initiative based across the four art schools in Scotland. Our job is to encourage, educate and empower senior-phase pupils to consider careers and higher education in art, design and architecture.

Our broad programme of events and 1:1 support helps pupils to explore their options, create a competitive application and develop a strong portfolio of work.

ACES advice is always impartial, and we support pupils wherever they want to go.

For more information about our events, support and to see if you are eligible to be a part of aces, please visit our website.

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The ACES Tayside guide to applying to creative courses

This guide offers general advice and guidance on each stage of the process of applying to creative courses at university and college.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information is up to date and correct at the time of print. However, as requirements and formats can change it is vital that you research these closer to the date of your application.

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Researching universities, colleges and courses

Researching the different types of universities, colleges and creative courses out there is a big early step in your application process.

Although courses at different universities might share the same name they can be very different in their structure, teaching style and content. Names can also be confusing – it’s important to look at courses that you might not initially have thought of.

UCAS can be a good place to start - but for in-depth course information visit the university’s website directly.

Visit the universities and colleges

In addition to researching online and via prospectuses, it’s essential to visit the universities and colleges you are considering to get a feel of what they are like in person, find out more information and ask questions.

Remember – it’s best to prepare early. You don’t need to wait until you are in S6 to go to open days!

All universities and colleges will advertise their open days on their websites and usually you are asked to book a place online.

Things to think about:

- What is the university/college like? Could you see yourself studying and living there?
- What is the course structure like? Is it flexible or quite rigid?
- Which modules will you study?
- What are the facilities, workshops and studios like?
- How often do you see your personal tutor?
- How will your work be assessed? What is feedback like?
- Are there opportunities for industry placements? Study trips?
- Are there any additional costs, such as studio fees?
- What is the competition for entry?
- What are the entry requirements – both academic and portfolio?
- What are selectors looking for in a portfolio?
- Will you be interviewed as part of the application process?
- Speak to current students – what do they think?

Remember – if you are moving to a new town or city you will be living there for a long time. Be sure to explore around the university/college too.
How to apply to university: UCAS

Applications to all courses at university are made via UCAS:

www.ucas.com

Your school or college will be able to guide you through what you need to do to register and begin.

In your UCAS application you will be asked to provide personal information, a record of your grades and achievements to date and a personal statement about what you want to study and why.

Your application will also contain a reference from your guidance teacher, giving further information about your suitability for the course and predicting your future exam grades.

The UCAS application deadline is: 15th January

Further Education College

Another option when you leave school is to go to FE college.

- You might not feel ready to begin a degree straightaway.
- You may not have the academic requirements yet.
- Alternatively, you might already have the academic requirements, but need to boost your portfolio.

There are lots of options available, and some FE courses can lead to direct entry to level 2 or 3 of some university courses.

You can apply to both university and college. Even if you are confident in your application to university, it is always a good idea to have a plan B in place.

Choosing a creative course at college

- Think one step ahead and look at what universities are looking for.
- Do you have the academic grade requirements already? In which case a portfolio preparation course might be best.
- If you don’t yet have the academic grade requirements, you may need to sit a HNC or HND in a specific course.

Applying to creative courses at college

- Usually you will apply directly to the college – not via UCAS.
- You may have to provide a personal statement, portfolio or attend an interview.
Know your dates and deadlines

The following advice is correct as of August 2019. We’ve included all dates and deadlines that we know of – but there might be more and they may change.

**September**

UCAS opens for all applications

**January**

UCAS deadline: 15 January

**Interviews:**
- Heriot-Watt University (Textiles/Fashion)

**Digital portfolio deadlines:**
- University of Dundee (All courses)
- Edinburgh College of Art (all courses)
- Glasgow School of Art (all courses)

**February**

**Interviews:**
- Glasgow School of Art
- Gray’s School of Art

College applications open

**March**

**Interviews:**
- University of Dundee (All courses)
- Edinburgh Napier University

**May**

Deadline for accepting offers*  
*If all decisions received by 31/3

**June**

Deadlines for accepting offers made after 31/3*  
*Deadline varies – please check your own!

Summer Schools begin*  
*You might be offered or asked to attend a summer school as part of your university offer. This can be a brilliant opportunity to prepare for your degree – or even an alternative way to qualify.
Your personal statement

Your personal statement is important, and getting started can seem quite daunting.

Creative courses look for a very different kind of statement – it should focus on what you are like as a creative person as well as why you are interested in the subject. Extra-curricular activities that aren’t linked to your course are less important in a statement for a creative course.

ACES has a whole guide to writing a creative personal statement – you can download this from our website: www.dundee.ac.uk/aces

Some key points to think about:

- Why are you applying to study a creative course? Why this subject?
- How do you make work, and what is it about? What materials do you like to use, and how?
- What or who inspires you?
- Exhibitions, galleries, shows or work that you have seen.
- Have you taken part in workshops or activities? Tell us about them!

Getting started:

- Pick a point that comes easily to you and take it from there – you don’t have to begin with why you want to study this course if it more natural for you to begin with your influences or how you make work.

- Do try to link it to the course(s) that you are applying to. Work out the key ethos of the course – such as design, technology, people, pattern, materials, space, research, experiences, problem solving etc! – and think how your work and experiences relate.

- Start small and build it up. Get quick ideas down on paper for each point listed above – and then begin to add in detail for each one.

- Once you have done this, you can begin to make links between your points and develop them further.

- Be flexible – try moving things around and see if they read better.

- Ignore the character limit (4000 characters including spaces) for now – you can edit it down later. Most first draft statements are at least 6000 characters!

- Write meaningful statements and explain your points in depth.

- Avoid cliché openings such as “every since I was young I have wanted to study art.”

- ACES can offer 1-1 support with your statement – email us!
Portfolio: what to include

Most creative courses will ask you to provide a portfolio of work – either digitally or as part of a full portfolio submission or interview.

There isn’t a set formula to creating a portfolio, but generally speaking creative courses at all universities are looking to see how you take on ideas, explore them, develop them and bring them towards a conclusion. This is just as important as your ability to draw.

The work that you create in school may be suitable to include in your portfolio, but you should try to include extra-curricular projects too.

Try to show the following:

- **Research**: ideas, theory, relevant artists, designers or architects.
- **Observational study**: drawings, photographs, collections.
- **Experimentation**: playing, developing your media, your subject, your skills.
- **Development**: keep track of what you are doing and show evidence of this – photograph your work at all stages and include these in your sketchbooks.
- **Sketchbooks** are vital, and some courses specifically ask to see them.
- **Drawing** in general is important – always try to draw from life rather than photographs wherever possible. Be confident!

Just like your personal statement, it’s important that your portfolio is relevant to the course that you are applying for. For example, if you’re applying to 3D courses such as Architecture or Interior Design, you should include some 3D work or engagement with space.

Presentation and editing is vital – take pride in the work that you have created, and present it in a simple and easy to view way.

Not all portfolio requirements are the same, and it is important to find out what each course and university are looking for. Check their websites for details, ask questions at open days – and be sure to find out when the deadlines are!

There is a full list of the formats and deadlines for each university at the end of this guide.
Portfolio: tips for putting it together

Digital portfolios

Lots of courses look for a digital portfolio. This may be all that they will ask to see, or it may be used as an initial selection and then they may invite you for an interview with your full portfolio.

A digital portfolio is just that – a digital version of your full portfolio. To create one you will need to photograph or scan in your work and sketchbooks, and present them as digital slides.

You can use various software to do this – but the ACES favourite is Microsoft Powerpoint as it’s so easy to move your work around and you can save it in a variety of formats (e.g. PDF or JPEG).

**ACES has a whole guide to creating a digital portfolio.** You can download this from our website: www.dundee.ac.uk/aces

**Important things to think about:**

- **SAVE YOUR PORTFOLIO AS YOU GO AND BACK IT UP!**

- Some courses have rules about pixel dimensions or file size – you can sort this out later quite easily if you need to. Each course will ask for a different number of slides, or may request specific things on each. Do your research and prepare for this.

- Photograph your work as best you can – use a clean backdrop and good, bright light – but not flash. Your smartphone camera is probably good enough, so don’t worry if you don’t have a digital camera.

- If your work is smaller and you have access to a scanner, this can be an easier way to document your work.

- You can edit your photographs to crop, straighten or adjust brightness where necessary – but this isn’t the time to show off your Photoshop wizardry. Keep it simple and minimal.

- Take care in how you arrange your work – try to show project development. Pay attention to the details – align your work well, make good use of the space and include multiple images per slide.

- You can include photography, film and animation work.

- Annotate your work – but keep it brief. Just a simple note of what that slide is showing and how it was made. Use a clean, grey font.

- Digital portfolio deadlines are usually in January.
Portfolio: tips for putting it together

‘Full’ portfolios

Some courses might not ask for a digital portfolio at all – and will invite you to submit a full portfolio or bring it along to an interview. In this case you will need to present your work in an A2 or A1 format in a portfolio case. Do NOT just print out your digital portfolio – that should be the highlights of a larger body of work.

The principles are the same – you still need to show how you have explored your ideas, researched, experimented and developed your work. Organise your portfolio so that it shows this development.

Tips for presenting your work in a full portfolio:

- All work should be mounted on either A1 or A2, thick, white or neutral coloured card (aim for 300-350gsm, try to avoid black). Don’t use mountboard, it’s too big and heavy. ACES may be able to provide some mount card for you – please email us.

- You don’t need to use plastic sleeves – they get in the way.

- Keep it clean, neat and tidy. Use double-sided tape or pritt-stick to secure your work, not blu-tack. Erase marks with a good rubber.

- Consider re-mounting SQA work – try to avoid borders, double mounts and overlapping. Spread your work out – let it breathe. (It is likely that you will have to mount your work twice: once for art school, then again for SQA).

- Annotation – keep it brief, clean, in one corner. Try to use printed text rather than handwritten, especially if your writing is hard to read. The work should speak for itself, but a little annotation will help. Credit the work of other artists.

- If you have 3D work or large canvasses, photograph them and present the photo rather than the original. In an interview you can bring along larger work – label it and keep it with the project it belongs to.

- You can include digital or film work – usually on a DVD or USB. In an interview you can bring along a laptop or tablet to show this work.

- Include your sketchbooks and briefs. A really good sketchbook is bursting at the seams – so try to fill it up! Remove blank pages, branded paper or any stickers off the front. You can highlight important or especially good pages for discussion using post-it notes.

- Be sure to put your details on the back of each sheet.
Interviews

Some creative courses will invite you for an interview as part of the application process. This can be quite scary – but if you prepare well and practice then there is nothing to worry about.

Interviews are a two-way process. They are an opportunity for the selectors to find out more about you and your suitability for the course, but also for you to see if this is the place and course for you.

Tips for an art school interview:

- Book your place early, and give yourself time to prepare.

- Print a copy of your UCAS application, personal statement, digital portfolio (if required) and any additional statements. Make notes on anything you think they might ask you – you can take them with you, and it shows that you’ve prepared.

- Review your portfolio:
  - Is your relevant work mounted?
  - Do you need to do more research – both about the course and your creative influences?
  - Practice talking about your work at length, and how each bit links to the next.
  - They might look at your portfolio without you – make sure it is in your current running order.

- Predict questions that they might ask you.

- Practice, practice, practice! Talk to friends, family, teachers, yourself. The more you talk about your work the easier it is.

- Before and on the day:
  - Work out where you need to be, and arrive early. Plan your journey and allow extra time for diversions.
  - Turn your phone off in the interview.
  - Judge your interviewers – are they casual or formal? Act accordingly.
  - Bring your notes with you.
  - Don’t play it cool. Handle your work confidently – take charge of the situation.
  - If you struggle with eye contact, make your work the focus.
  - Listen to the question, and don’t be afraid to ask for clarification.
  - Ask questions. Think about what you want to know in advance.

- First impressions do count:
  - It’s ok to be nervous – tell the interviewers that you are.
  - Try to smile and be friendly.
  - Avoid being negative.
  - Don’t stand with your hands in your pockets.
University portfolio requirements 2019

Frustratingly, different universities and courses have different requirements. It’s essential to do your research and prepare early.

The following advice is correct as of August 2019.

Please see individual university websites for full details and deadlines.

University of Dundee

- Art & Design General Foundation
  and
- Product/Interior/Digital Interaction Design
  and
- Direct-entry to 2nd year specialisms
  - 2-stage selection: digital portfolio (15 slides, PDF, 10MB limit) to be submitted in January, then you may be invited to interview in March.

- Architecture:
  - You may be asked to submit a digital portfolio or complete a create task in support of your application.
  - No interview.

University of Edinburgh

- Architecture
  - No portfolio requirement.
  - No interview.

- Courses in Art and Design
  - Digital portfolio only. 25 JPEGs: 10 development/sketchbook work, 10 concluded work, 5 creative influences.
  - Each JPEG can be no longer than 800px on the longest side.
  - No file size limit for each JPEG.
  - Deadline: 28 January
  - No interview.

- Film and Television
  - One digital video, up to 5 minutes, accompanied by a short passage of text. In addition, you will be asked to give written answers to three questions.
  - Deadline: 28 January
  - No interview.
University portfolio requirements 2019

Edinburgh Napier

- Film, Interior & Spatial Design, Photography and Product Design
  - As part of the application process, you will usually be invited to submit a portfolio and/or attend an interview.
  - Please see their website for individual course requirements.

Glasgow School of Art

Glasgow School of Art have a two-step application process for all specialisms. Step one is a digital portfolio, and from this you may be invited to an interview with your full portfolio.

There are slightly different digital portfolio requirements for the specialisms:

- Architecture and Design subjects: 15 JPEGs.
- Fine Art subjects: 25 JPEGs.

- Each JPEG can be no longer than 200kb and 72dpi resolution
- Ideally each JPEG should have dimensions of 1024x763px (standard screen dimensions, not widescreen).

GSA also requires a 500 word statement. This is separate to the UCAS personal statement, and must focus on your creative work only.

Digital portfolio deadline: 22 January
Interviews are usually held in March

Heriot Watt University

- All creative courses
  - Interview with full portfolio. No digital portfolio required.
  - Interviews are usually held from early January.
  - Each of the creative specialisms at Heriot-Watt University seek specific content - please see their website for full details.

Robert Gordon University

- Architecture
  - Usually no portfolio is required if you are studying or have studied a creative subject at Higher or Advanced Higher.
  - No interview.

- Courses in Art and Design
  - Interview with full portfolio. No digital portfolio required.
  - No size/weight/sheet limit.
  - Interviews usually held from February.
University portfolio requirements 2019

University of the Highlands and Islands

• All creative courses
  • Interview with full portfolio. No digital portfolio required.
  • Interviews are usually held from February.
  • Please see their website for individual course requirements.

Strathclyde University

• Architecture
  • Usually no portfolio is required if you are studying or have studied a creative subject at Higher or Advanced Higher.
  • No interview.