



Thornhill College

UCAS

UCAS Policy

*Predicted Grades
References*

Updated September 2021

UCAS Predicted Grades Policy

UCAS predicted grades for Year 14 students at Thornhill College will be **honest** and based on an **informed professional opinion by Year 14 subject teachers**.

Anything else, would be in the long-term disadvantageous to the student body as well as the academic reputation of the college.

UCAS predicted grades play an important role for universities in their decision-making process.

The time-table for university applications can be an emotional and stressful time for all who are involved in this process including students, their parents, subject teachers and careers teachers.

However, it is the responsibility of Thornhill College to ensure that any **predicted grades made are realistic and in the best interests of the student**.

Overly optimistic predictions have shown, with experience, to have a significant negative impact on both the student's progression after leaving Thornhill College.

Overall Aim:

The school and Year 14 subject teachers will work with students to ensure their predicted grades accurately reflect their current level of attainment while also considering their ability and potential.

How Are Predicted Grades Made?

Thornhill College will, as a matter of course, take responsibility to guide Year 14 students through the UCAS application process in their Careers lessons with the school providing for each student subject references and predicted grades.

Year 14 subject teachers may take a combination of the following factors into account in their decision-making process when making predicted grades. Some of the below may not be relevant to all students. Greater weight may also be given to some of the items in the list below than others.

- 1) **Grades awarded at AS Level.**
- 2) An appreciation of the **weighting of A-Level examinations and the increasing level of difficulty** (AS = 40% and A2 = 60%).
- 2) In the case of linear exam boards continuous assessment and the grades achieved in **internal exams**.
- 3) Students previous level of attainment (continuous assessment tests, **tracking assessments** and performance in **homework tasks**).
- 4) Consideration of the **number of exam modules being taken or re-taken**.
- 5) The **commitment and effort** demonstrated by the student to their subject and studies.
- 6) **Concerns regarding the level of attendance** to school / class by a student.

7) If relevant - a previous educational establishment's comments on performance and capabilities.

8) **Any special circumstances**, which are known to staff, which may have negatively affected a student's performance causing them to underperform.

9) The view of the student's progress and ability based on the **professional judgement and experience in making predictions** of their Year 14 subject teacher.

Thornhill College recognises that **students can and do in many cases mature from their AS exam performance over the course of Year 14 to their final A2 exam performance** and as such some students do achieve higher at A-Level than their previous AS exam performance.

However, we also recognise that **those students who have underperformed at AS will have a considerable workload, in-order to improve on their performance.**

Year 13 internal examination grades and awarded AS grades will be taken into account but achievement at this level should not be presumed to be the same as the predicted grade at A-Level.

A predicted grade at A-Level could in some circumstances, be lower than that achieved in the Year 13 internal examinations or at AS Level because the complete A-Level course is more demanding; conversely, a higher prediction at A-Level than the level achieved in the Year 13 internal examinations or at AS Level may be justified because of improvements in performance over time. **The final predicted grade used in the UCAS application process is at the discretion of the Year 14 subject teacher who will be able to justify this decision in the light of on-going monitoring and assessment of the student's progress and achievement.**

Students should be predicted an honest and realistic grade which in the professional judgement of their subject teacher can be achieved by the student based on the empirical qualitative and quantitative evidence they have regarding the student's progress.

It ultimately comes down to trusting the professional knowledge of staff who know their students and their abilities.

As noted by UCAS <https://www.ucas.com/advisers/managing-applications/predicted-grades-what-you-need-know-2021-entry#what> (Sept 2021), predicted grades made by teachers **should be:**

- 1) **In the best interests of students**
- 2) **Achievable**
- 3) **Determined by professional judgement**
- 4) **Data driven**

As noted by UCAS <https://www.ucas.com/advisers/managing-applications/predicted-grades-what-you-need-know-2021-entry#what> (Sept 2021), predicted grades made by teachers **should not be**:

- 1) **Affected by student, parental, guardian or carer pressure**
- 2) **Influenced by university or college entry requirements or behaviours – predicted grades should be set in isolation of an application’s university or college choice(s)**
- 3) **Affected by student behaviour or background – predicted grades should be made objectively**

Over-Inflated Predictions

The consequences of over-inflated UCAS predicted grades could lead to students having unrealistic expectations and could disadvantage them.

More realistic predicted grades encourage students to select more appropriate higher education courses and institutions so that the actual grades they achieve mean that they will have a greater chance of securing a university and course of choice.

The dangers of over-inflated predictions, as noted by UCAS <https://www.ucas.com/advisers/managing-applications/predicted-grades-what-you-need-know-2021-entry#what> (Sept 2021):

- 1) **An applicant may receive an offer(s) they are unlikely to meet, leading to disappointment on results day.**
- 2) **Applicants might gain admission to a course they cannot succeed in – choosing the right course is a very important decision as they will be investing a lot of time, money and effort and it can be difficult to change.**
- 3) **If a university or college has reason to believe that a predicted grade is grossly inaccurate, they retain the right to withdraw any offers.**

Scenario:

Take this situation as an example: A student is predicted BBB, they pressure their teachers to predict them AAA to meet the grade requirements of the course they want. In August however, they get the BBB the teacher originally predicted but end up with no place because they did not get the AAA they needed for the course they applied for. They then have to go through ‘Clearing’ and are likely to only have the choice of courses which have much lower entry requirements.

Inflated predicted grades can also have a negative impact on the college community as a whole. Especially for students in lower years groups who will be applying in the future. University admission tutors build up knowledge of applying school and colleges and how well their predictions match the eventual final outcomes. Gaining a reputation as an educational establishment that over-predicts its students’ means that future applications are significantly disadvantaged as concerns are raised by a history of disparity between predicted and actual grades and may jeopardise future student’s opportunities.

UCAS Adjustment

Students will also be made aware of a process called UCAS ‘Adjustment’ in their Careers lessons. UCAS Adjustment is a process whereby **students who have met and exceeded the conditions of their firm choice can hold onto that choice on results day and ring round other institutions/courses to see whether they can be accepted there for courses with higher entry requirements.**

Scenario:

A student is predicted BBB. The student makes a BBB course and institution their Firm Choice after receiving a conditional offer. The student ends up getting AAA. They can then apply to other universities and courses with higher entry requirements than their original firm choice to see if they will be accepted on that course with their higher final grades. This system allows a student to do this whilst holding onto their Firm choice.

This is a much safer way of getting the place you want as you do not risk missing out on the BBB institution or losing it.

However, please do note that going into Adjustment does not automatically assure a student of getting the place they want as this is at the discretion of the university.

Process to Follow

In making a UCAS predicted grade for a Year 14 student, **subject teachers should discuss with each individual student the grade which they are predicting them and the reasons for this decision. This should be an open and honest conversation with staff communicating the exact predicted grade they are making for a student to the individual.**

This grade and a subsequent subject reference comment (from a bank of subject comments) will then be **recorded in SIMS by the deadline given** to staff by Mr McSorley (Senior Teacher with responsibility for overseeing the UCAS application process).

It is the school policy to allow students and their parents to know the students UCAS predicted grades. The school will provide a copy of a student’s predicted grades across their A-Level subjects to parents / guardians in order to keep them informed.

UCAS References Policy

A student’s UCAS academic reference is designed to provide universities and colleges with an informed and academic assessment of the applicant’s suitability for a chosen course.

Importance of a UCAS Reference

It is important for a number of reasons:

- 1) The UCAS academic reference is one tool used by universities and colleges to help determine whether to offer a student conditional or unconditional university place on the course of their choice or reject their application.
- 2) It is the only part of the application that the applicants do not write themselves. As teachers know their students and universities and colleges don’t – they rely on it to demonstrate the real potential of the student.

3) It will be read and may be scored to assess whether the applicant has the necessary skills and academic ability to study their chosen course.

What Universities are looking for?

UCAS states that universities are looking for an informed and academic assessment of:

- Their **academic performance** in their **post-16 education**.
- Their **potential for academic success** in higher education.
- **Why their chosen course is suited to them**.
- Any **personal qualities** which will benefit them at university: such as **skills, aptitude and enthusiasm**.
- What they can bring to the university, such as **extra-curricular activities and interests**.

School Policy

- **Members of staff will be actively encouraged to become involved as UCAS reference writers to contribute to their own C.P.D.** (Continued Professional Development).
- **UCAS reference writers will sign-up to the Year 14 students they will write a reference for.** This will ensure staff are writing references for students they know to ensure they can provide the best possible reference.
- Mr McSorley (Senior Teacher with responsibility for overseeing the UCAS application process) will provide **support for staff in writing UCAS references**.
- **Each reference writer will receive a copy of the information sheet completed by each student to help inform their reference writing** on: GCSE & AS grades achieved, courses / career pathway they are applying to follow, relevant work experience / enrichment / extra-curricular & super curricular interests and skills and qualities.
- **All reference writers should have a brief meeting with the student they are writing references for** to discuss their information sheet and find out the 5 courses they are applying for.
- **All references should be shown to students before they are submitted.** Under the **Data Protection Act** UCAS applicants can ask for copies of their reference and any other personal information UCAS has about them. So it is their right to see it and they should be shown it.