



THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN GENOA  
SINCE 1966

# Workshop: Applying to Universities

10th - 11th grade Families

Thursday, 9 November 2023  
18:00 - 19:00

# Agenda

1. Mission
2. It's all about mindset ...
3. A few country overviews
4. The concept of "fit"
5. Just what ARE university admissions officers looking for?
6. Selectivity and Reach, Match, Safety universities
7. Timelines
8. Essays / Personal statements / Letters of motivation
9. Letters of recommendation
10. Some special cases (e.g. medicine, student athletes)
11. Admissions exams and interviews
12. Extracurricular activities, supra-curricular activities, and the summer
13. Financial matters
14. Pulling it all together with Unifrog
15. Setting students up for success
16. Q&A

**How are you  
feeling right  
now?**





THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN GENOA

SINCE 1966

## MISSION STATEMENT

We are a community of adaptable learners who inspire a love of learning that extends beyond the walls of the school.

The following principles are the foundations upon which our school is built:

### **Respect**

We foster respect for self, others and the environment, which is based on compassion, inclusivity and a celebration of diversity. We embrace the interconnectedness of our world, while maintaining a sense of individual identity.

### **Responsibility**

We develop creative problem solvers who have the capacity to enact positive change, and who feel empowered to take action in their immediate and global environment.

### **Reaching for Excellence**

We nurture the confidence, imagination and resilience that form the pathways to individual success.

**Respect, Responsibility and Reaching for Excellence**

# It's really a question of mindset

Focus less on ...	Focus more on ...
What's the best university?	What's the best university for <i>me</i> ? (Best "fit") What university will best meet my academic and personal needs?
This is so much work ...	This is a great opportunity for personal discovery!
Do I have what's needed to get into X university?	What skills am I developing that will help me be successful wherever I go?
What's the best university to help me become a doctor / lawyer / engineer?	In what ways might my unique skills and talents be useful in a future career? What careers exist that I haven't considered yet?
This is hard ...	I can do this!

# Country overviews - UK

- You apply to the course through UCAS
- You can apply up to 5 courses (almost always at 5 different universities)
- Components of an application
  - Predicted grades (totals, individual subject scores)
  - Personal statement - focus on the course
  - 1 recommendation
- Application read by admissions tutors (academics in the field)
- Universities are looking for a good “fit” for the **course**
- Students receive conditional offers (conditional based on final exam results), and in the end may keep at most 2 offers (firm and insurance)
- Conditional offers become unconditional when students meet conditions, usually following publication of IB results in July after 12th grade
- Search: <https://digital.ucas.com/search>



# Country overviews - The Netherlands

- You apply to the **course**
- You can apply to up to 4 courses through Studielink and then the individual university's application portal – max. 2 Numerus Fixus courses
- Research universities (and university colleges) vs. Universities of applied sciences
- Components of an application
  - Academic record
  - Sometimes essay + interview + admissions test
- Search: <https://www.studyinnl.org/>



# Country overviews - USA

- You apply to the university
  - Many through Common App
  - Others through their own portal
- You can apply up to ... universities
- Components of an application
  - High school transcript (appropriate level of rigor)
  - An essay
  - Maybe some supplemental essays
  - Counselor recommendation
  - 1+ teacher recommendations
- Application read by admissions committees
- Universities are looking for a good “fit” for the **university**
- Students receive unconditional\* offers in spring, but **MUST** maintain same academic progress to not risk having the offer withdrawn.
- Search: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>

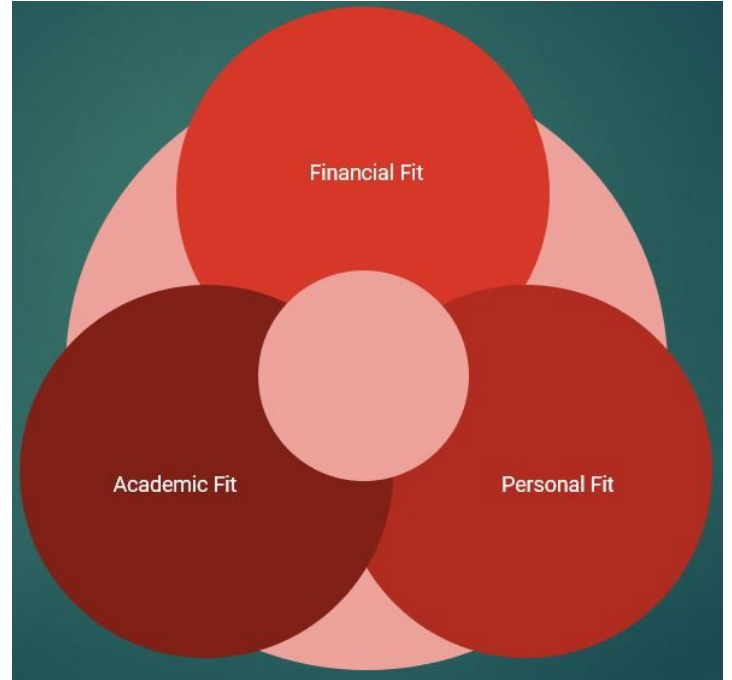




# The concept of “fit”

This is as much about “Which university will offer me what I want and need to support my development towards my future goals?” as it is about “How well suited am I to the universities in which I’m interested?”

Keep an open mind, and speak to those who know you well.



# The concept of “fit”

- What programs best match your academic and personal profile? (Safe - match - reach)
- Size – Large, medium, small?
- Location – Consider not just the university, but the area surrounding it. What things would you expect to find in the city? What about climate? How close would you like to be to water and related activities? How will you get around? Urban vs. suburban vs. rural?
- Distance from home – Just how far away from your family are you interested in going, and how far away are they willing to send you?
- Available majors and classes – Are there certain academic programs you’re interested in?
- Teaching approach – Do you prefer more “traditional,” theoretical approaches or more practical, “hands-on”?
- Housing options – Do you want to be able to live on campus, and if so, for how long?
- Makeup of the student body – Internationally-minded students? How active are the international students?
- Available extracurricular activities – What are your special interests? How involved are students at the university?
- Campus atmosphere – Do you prefer a serious, very academically-minded university, a place with a more relaxed atmosphere, or something in-between? An “enclosed campus,” or one with buildings throughout a city?
- University services - What services does it need to offer to support your learning? How is the career services center?

# Just what ARE university admissions officers looking for?

- Students who will be successful in their academic programs and thrive in their university environment
- Intellectual vitality
  - Active enjoyment of and engagement in the learning process
  - This is not just a list of accomplishments
  - Demonstration of responsibility, maturity
  - Deep reading, energetic creating
  - Insight, thoughtfulness
- Personal qualities
  - Students who “contribute” to those who “make an impact”
  - International polyglots
  - Personal and academic integrity
  - Commitment and motivation
- A good “fit” of skills
- Strong academic results (grades) – improving scores throughout the four years
- Challenging academic program – the IB counts!
- For some universities, specific courses/credits
- Appropriate SAT (and other test) scores
- Appropriate predicted grades (as well as final grades!)
- A captivating personal statement
- Strong, detailed letters of reference

# Selectivity and Reach, Match, Safety universities

Some statistics:

- Harvard: 56,937 applicants, 1,966 admitted (3.5%)
- UCLA: 145,904 applicants; 12,779 admitted (8.8%)
- Oxford: 23,819 applicants, 3,271 admitted (13.7%)
- Bocconi

Where to apply: Recommended 8-10 universities max.

- Reach - 2-3 universities
- Match - 4-5 universities
- Safety - 1-2 universities

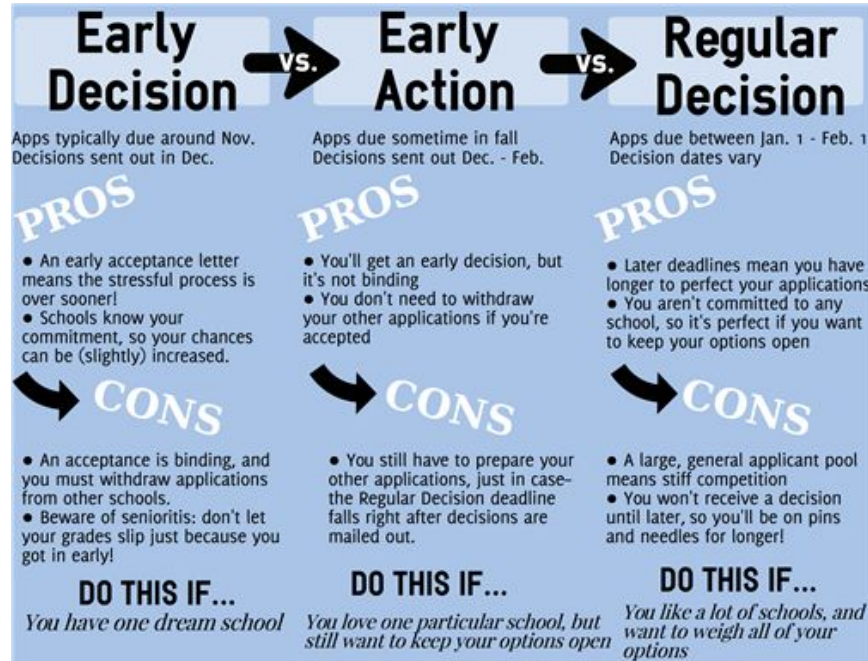
# Timelines - for applications

All of the following dates are from 12th grade year:

1. USA applications
  1. Early decision / Early action – as early as 1 November
  2. Regular decision – Varies; most between late December and mid-January
  3. Some particular ones, e.g. University of California – 30 November
2. UK applications
  1. Oxford / Cambridge / Medicine – 15 October
  2. All others – 31 January
3. Applications in The Netherlands
  1. Numerus fixus courses and university colleges – 15 January
  2. Many others – 1 May
4. Applications for the Bocconi
  1. Early session – Mid-September
  2. Winter session – Mid-January
  3. WBB – 1 November
5. Rolling admissions and Admissions “rounds”

# Timelines - for students

See university planning timeline handout



# Essays / Personal statements / Letters of motivation

## Essays / supplements:

- Much more personal / general in nature, e.g.
  - The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
  - Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
  - Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

## Personal statements:

- Why are you interested in the course?
- What have you done (at school and outside) to prepare for the course?
- How suitable are you for the course?
- UK: 4,000 characters max

# Essays / Personal statements / Letters of motivation

Letters of motivation:

- Very similar to personal statements, with a focus on the university

All types of essays / letters:

- Show, don't tell! Use anecdotes that reveal your qualities.  
**“Anecdotes outshine adjectives!”**
- Make them more analytical than descriptive
- Good opportunity to reflect





# Letters of recommendation

- The school aims to provide the most comprehensive and supportive recommendations possible.
- We are required to write realistic recommendations and provide evidence to support our claims. (Our recommendations can't be just a long list of adjectives.)
- In general, we must comment on your suitability for your chosen course and/or university, again with evidence.
- The school ensures that external reporting and/or predictions are as accurate as possible, based on the IB's published grade descriptors. Teachers can change these predicted grades following the outcome of the mock examinations in February, to ensure that predictions are as accurate as possible. Universities value candor, not perfection.
- Recommendations are confidential and never shared with students, but we seek detailed input from students through the "recommendation worksheet."
- Who writes them? It depends!
  - USA: 1 counselor + at least 1 teacher
  - UK: 1 reference writer
  - Bocconi (not WBB): none!

# Letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation attempt to answer questions like the following:

1. To what extent is the student suitable (with evidence) for his/her chosen course?
2. In what ways have they expressed their commitment and motivation?
3. What skills (communication, research, inquiry) / personal qualities (caring, balanced, open-minded, principled) have they demonstrated that will help them be successful in university? *How* have they demonstrated these?
4. What do they contribute to class discussions? How do they interact with others?
5. How have they demonstrated interest in course content that goes beyond the course?
6. What evidence is there to support their predicted grades?
7. What kind of learner are they? What questions do they ask? How do they reflect on their learning, and take action as a result?
8. What challenges has the student faced, and how has he/she dealt with them?
9. Are there any extenuating circumstances to consider?

# Some special cases (e.g. medicine, student athletes)

## Medicine

- Often earlier applications
- May require specific courses
- May require entrance exams
- May require practical experience

## Oxbridge (Oxford / Cambridge)

- October 15th deadline
- Admissions tests / interviews

## Student athletes (esp. USA)

- NACC account
- Apply early
- Communicate with coaches



# Admissions exams and interviews

## SAT

- Reading and writing / Math - 2 sections each
- Digital as of spring 2022 - Bluebook testing application
- Offered at ISG:
  - SAT - October, December, May
  - PSAT (10th and 11th grades only) - October
- Many universities are test-optional; but great scores can supplement an application

## University-specific

- Bocconi - Their online test or SAT
- Oxford - TSA
- IE University - Their online test or SAT
- Italian universities - Sometimes TOLC exams

## Subject-specific

- Medicine - UCAT, Other
- History - HAT / Law - LNAT / Math - MAT / Physics - PAT
- Submitted work for some courses

English language proficiency exams ...

**Registration deadlines are often earlier than application deadlines.  
Some registration deadlines could be 30 September of 12th grade.**





# Financial matters

Costs can vary incredibly!

General:

- Scholarships based on merit vs. need
- Sometimes additional information needed

USA:

- “Need-aware” vs. “need-blind,” especially for international students
- FAFSA – 1 October of 12th grade is first day you can file; complete in the fall by deadline
- CSS Profile – complete in fall of 12th grade by deadline
- Some universities – early application deadlines (e.g. 1 December of 12th grade)

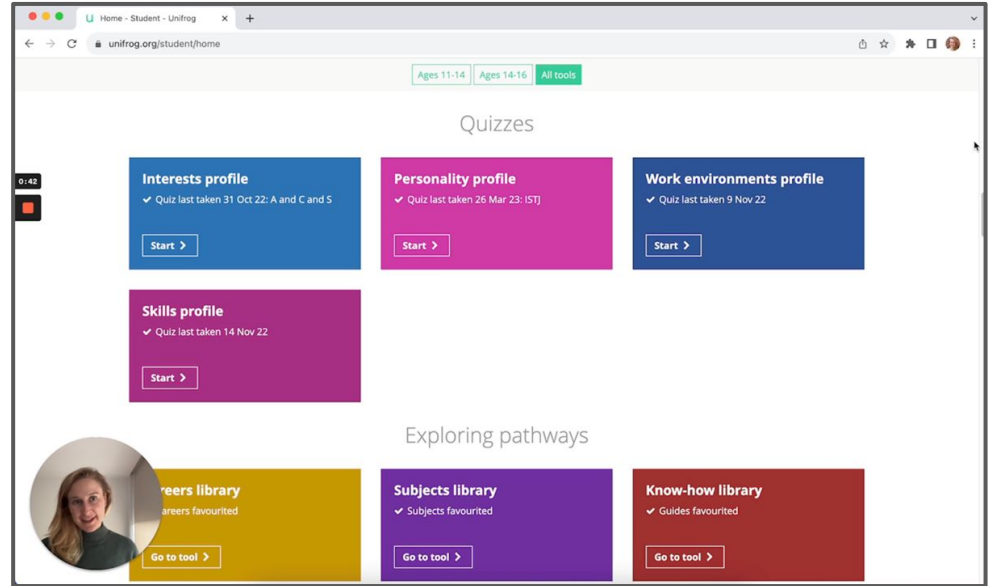
UK:

- Some scholarships for EU students

# Unifrog!

Unifrog is a one-stop-shop where students can explore their interests, then find and successfully apply for their best next-step after school.

## Unifrog Introduction video for parents



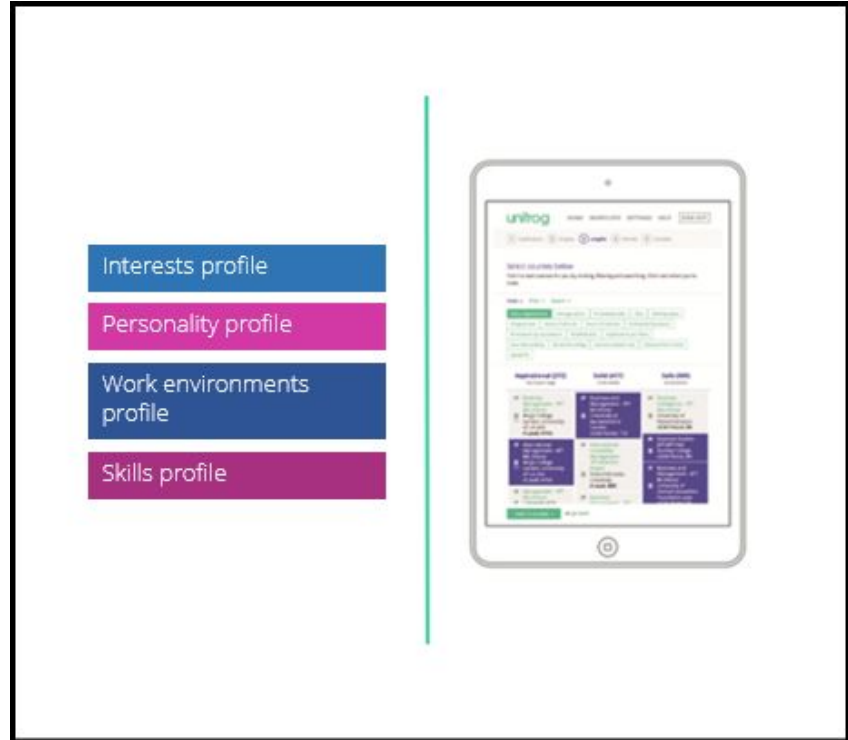
# Unifrog: tools

Quizzes	Exploring pathways	Recording what you've done	Searching for opportunities	Drafting application materials	Making applications
Interests profile	Careers library	Activities	UK universities	UK Personal Statement	Post 18 Intentions
Personality profile	Subjects library	Skills	US universities	Classes	Locker
Work environments profile	Know-how library	Interactions	European universities	Subject References	Applications list
Skills profile	MOOC		Oxbridge	CV / Resumé	
	Webinars		Canadian universities	Writing tool	
	Read, Watch, Listen		Asian universities	Common App Essay	
			Australasian universities	US recommenders	
			MidEast and Africa unis	Notes for Reference writers	
			Irish universities		
			Special Opportunities		
			Events		



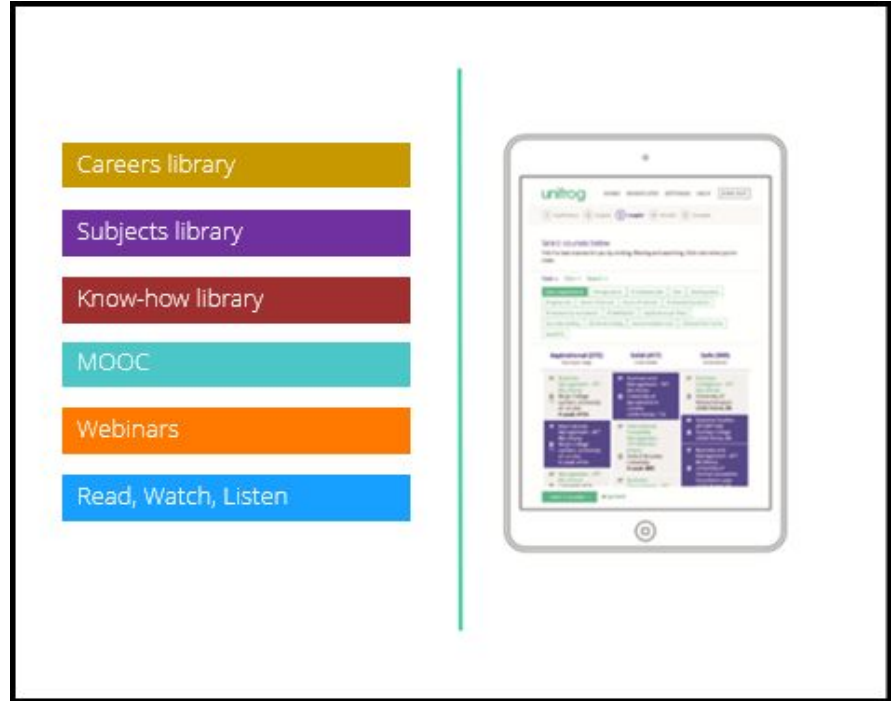
# Unifrog: quizzes

The tools in the *Quizzes* section allow students to understand how their personality, skills, and aptitudes relate to possible future pathways in a fun and engaging way.



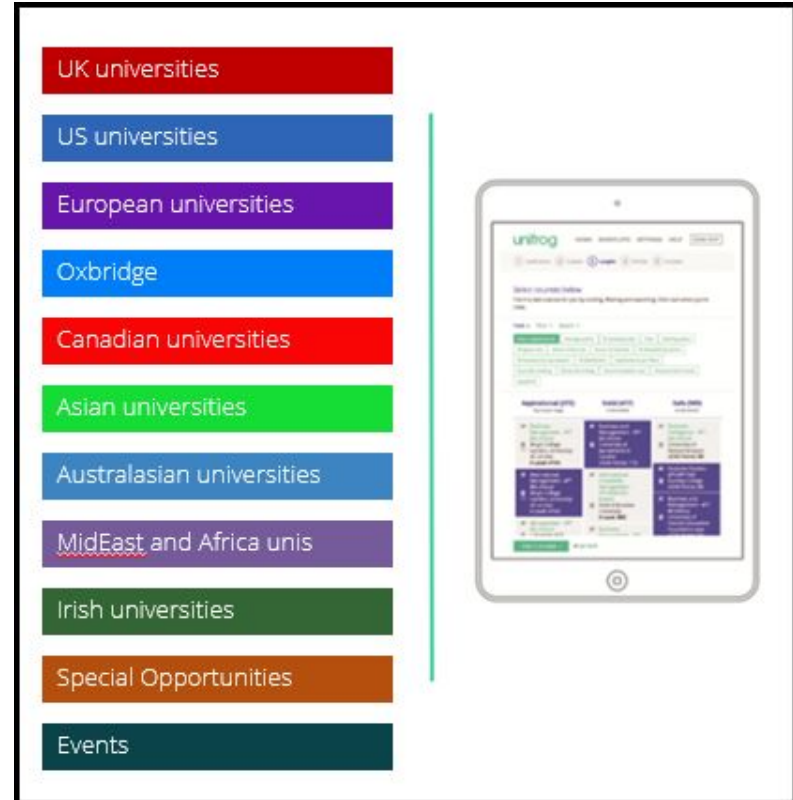
# Unifrog: exploring pathways

The tools in the *Exploring pathways* section allow your child to research the types of exciting options available to them after school.



# Unifrog: searching for opportunities

The tools in the *Searching for opportunities* section allow you to compare universities, degree options and special opportunities around the world.



# Unifrog: recording what you've done

Use the tools in this section to start *Recording what you have done!*

Use guidance and examples to prepare students for making applications.

Activities you've done

Record what you've done. Then use this material for your applications.

2 of 10 recommended minimum recorded so far

Almost anything can be considered an extracurricular activity - from having a job, to taking care of family members, to extreme sport loving.

+ Add an activity

**Babysitter**  
Work experience  
August 2017  
Regularly looking after the children of family friends.  
Reference: Wendy Taylor

**Member of a book club**  
Reading books / academic journals  
September 2018  
Meeting to discuss books we have read on a biweekly basis.  
Reference: John Page

# Setting students up for success

1. BALANCE IS IMPORTANT!!
2. Keep in mind the time commitment to prepare even just one application.
3. An open-minded approach is also important. You should be considering universities you've never heard of before.
4. Maintain a strong academic record. Interact in class with both teachers and peers. Seek guidance and help outside of class where necessary.
5. Participate in extra-curricular, supra-curricular, and community service activities. Take on larger roles (possibly leadership roles) in your most significant activities.
6. Make a personal list of what you are looking for in a university. What programs should it have? Extra curriculars? Location, size, cost? Learning mode? Student community?
7. Estimate your financial aid need and research resources.
8. If possible, visit some universities. Attend Open Days. Take virtual tours where in-person visits not possible.
9. CV – Start it in 10th grade; update it in 11th grade.
10. Plan for any admissions tests.
11. Each student will have an individual “future planning” folder in Unifrog where they will keep lists of universities they are researching, those to which they have applied, copies of their essays / personal statements, recommendation worksheets, CV's, supplemental essays and supporting documents.
12. Students also have access to a Google Classroom with a wide variety of resources.

# Questions and Thank you!

