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Extra chance to secure a place

Those facing the stressful clearing process have a lifeline, reports

Jenny Knight

Applying to university can be a stressful process, not least for school-leavers who pin their hopes on attending a specific university, only to have them dashed.

The lucky ones win a place and just have to hope their examination results will be as good as predicted. The less fortunate have to go through the clearing process run by Ucas (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) to hunt down university courses where vacancies remain.

These students could save themselves the last-minute panic of clearing by applying through Ucas Extra, a service for online applications that is open from the end of February until early July and allows one new application per student at a time.

Ucas Extra is still comparatively little known, although numbers using the service have been building.

A spokesman for Ucas explained: "Extra is an important part of the Ucas cycle. Nearly 10,000 students were accepted through Extra last year. It is a key part of the Ucas application cycle as it allows eligible applicants a chance to secure an offer or a place before clearing begins later in the year."

Those eligible to try for a place through Extra are people who applied for five courses on their original Ucas application and either received no offers or turned down the ones they did receive. Using Ucas Extra gives a further chance to secure a place before all but the least popular remain, by selecting one course at a

time using the website's Track tool.

Quite a few of those applying through Extra do so because they have decided they would prefer to study another subject to the ones they first opted for, according to Victoria Bel Gil, head of UK marketing and student recruitment at Bournemouth University.

She says: "We get people applying who have changed their minds. Maybe they wanted to do graphics and now they want to do journalism. May-

be they have decided that the world has changed and they should change with it. However, because they can't change the form they first submitted to Ucas and are now looking at different courses they should send a brief e-mail to the university explaining why they have decided to study for a different degree.

"People who go through Extra, rather than waiting for clearing, experience less of a panic and have more time to make decisions and plan.

"We aim to turn round applications in two to three weeks. Extra applicants are treated in the same way as other applicants. We look at personal statements and predicted grades, and try to assess their suitability for the course."

Most students find that the Ucas website is commendably easy to use. On the Extra link, universities list courses that still have vacancies. Bournemouth University follows the practice of indicating those courses that have only a few vacancies left to

fill and removes details once a course is full.

A major consideration for students is that if they decline their existing university offers and add an Extra

choice, they will not be able to accept any of their original choices later.

Another consideration is that the most prestigious courses at the most competitive universities will probably not have vacancies offered through Extra. So students aiming for top universities, or for a course such as medicine, may have to lower their sights or apply again next year, hoping that their A-level results will be more impressive than their predictions.

It pays to research the courses before deciding which one to apply for on Extra, and teachers, careers advisers and the universities themselves can be helpful.

Those who were rejected for high-demand courses are ill-advised to pitch themselves at equally competitive places. It is better to consider related, alternative or completely different subjects.



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Staff handle queries at London South Bank University's clearing centre

