



# ACES apply 2023 /24

The ACES Tayside  
guide to applying  
to creative courses  
in Scotland  
2023-24

## 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.

### Contents:

- How ACES can help you
- Choosing the right course: research and questions
- How to apply to university (UCAS) and college
- Further Education Colleges and why you should consider them
- Timeline of dates and deadlines
- Personal Statement
- Portfolio: what to include
- Portfolio: tips for putting it together – digital portfolios
- Portfolio: tips for putting it together – physical portfolio
- Interviews
- Portfolio requirements across Scotland: 2024 entry

## How can ACES help me?

ACES is here to guide and support you through the whole process of thinking about and applying to creative courses.

We'll help you get there – whether that's straight to university from school, or via FE college.

Even though ACES Tayside is based at the University of Dundee, you don't have to be applying to Dundee to come and take part, or to gain our advice. We will help you get to wherever is right for you.

### Come to our on campus events

Our on campus events are the best way to explore your options and make work for your portfolio.

Plus you'll meet other people who are applying to a creative course too. ACES friends are the best!

- **All our events are listed on our website:** [www.dundee.ac.uk/aces](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/aces)
- They are always free, and we provide all materials!
- Options include: Explore Days, Life Drawing Courses, Portfolio Preparation Courses, Skills Days, Gallery Trips – and more!

### Come to our online application info sessions

Whether it's finding out where to apply, what a university is looking for, how to write a creative personal statement or start your digital portfolio – we've got you covered.

**Our online sessions are listed on our website:** [www.dundee.ac.uk/aces](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/aces)

### Book a 1-1 chat with us

Our ACES staff have a wealth of knowledge about all the creative courses and universities in Scotland – and beyond!

Having a chat with us means that we can get to know you and your aspirations in more depth, and can make recommendations for courses, universities, portfolio ideas and more.

You can get in touch via email: [aces@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:aces@dundee.ac.uk)

Our chat can be in person – in school or at the University – or online

## 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.

ACES can also give advice – so book a chat with us!

## 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? Gut feeling is important!
- 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 or workshop 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. You're there to live – not just to study!

# How to apply to university: UCAS

Applications to all courses at university are made via UCAS:

[www.ucas.com](http://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: **25<sup>th</sup> January**

## Further Education (FE) 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 at the same time. Even if you are confident in your application to university, it is always a good idea to have a plan B in place – just in case things don't go to plan.

### 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 will probably 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.

### HNC/D or Portfolio Course – what's the difference?

- HNC/D programmes are an alternative to Highers, and all universities accept them
- They are recognised as academic qualifications at the appropriate SCQF level for entry to university
- Portfolio courses usually do not have a high enough SCQF level for entry to university
- If you don't have the Highers that you need from school, study a HNC/D. A portfolio course will not be a high enough academic qualification.
- You can study a HNC/D instead of Highers!
- Although most HNC/D courses are advertised as two years, you can leave after the first year for entry to university as long as you have the right grade. You do not have to complete the full two years.

# Know your dates and deadlines

The following advice is correct as of August 2023. 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

## February

### Digital portfolio deadlines:

Edinburgh College of Art (all courses)  
Glasgow School of Art (all courses)  
Robert Gordon University (all courses)

### Interviews:

Glasgow School of Art  
Gray's School of Art

College applications open

## May

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

## January

UCAS deadline: 25 January

### Interviews:

Heriot-Watt University (Textiles/Fashion)

## March

### Digital portfolio deadlines:

University of Dundee (All courses, not Architecture)

### Interviews:

University of Dundee (some courses)  
Edinburgh Napier University

## June

Deadline 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

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

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.

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:

- We recommend using mind maps and post it notes!
- 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 “ever since I was young I have wanted to study art.”
- ACES can offer 1-1 support with your statement – email us!



## Digital 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.

Each course will have different numbers of slides, and some might have specific requirements. Check our digital portfolio guide for more info!

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.

# Digital portfolio – how to make it

**ACES has a whole guide to creating a digital portfolio.  
We also have example portfolios!**

**You can view and download these from our website:**

[www.dundee.ac.uk/aces](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/aces)

To create your digital portfolio 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).

## 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. You will probably have to make two or three different versions of your portfolio.
- 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. No filters!
- 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/February.

# Physical portfolios

It's less common for universities to ask to see a physical portfolio.

However – some courses might invite you to an interview with a physical portfolio

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.
- Don't 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.
- Re-mount your SQA work – 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, USB or link to youtube/vimeo etc. 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.
- Write your details on the back of each sheet in case anything goes missing.

# 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:
  - 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:
  - Find out if it is online or in-person! If the interview is in person, 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 2024

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 2023.

Please see individual university websites for full details and deadlines.

## University of Abertay

- Courses in Computer Arts
  - You may be asked to submit a digital Portfolio, 10 images
  - Deadline: please see website

## University of Dundee

- Art & Design General Foundation  
*and*
- Product/Interior/Digital Interaction Design  
*and*
- Direct-entry to 2<sup>nd</sup> year specialisms  
(Animation, Illustration, Graphic Design, Jewellery & Metal Design, Textile Design, Art & Philosophy and Fine Art)
  - Digital portfolio (15 slides, PDF, 50MB limit)
  - **Deadline: March**
  - You **may** be invited to submit a second portfolio or attend an interview in March/April.
- Architecture:
  - No Portfolio
  - No interview.

## University of Edinburgh

- Architecture
  - No portfolio requirement.
  - No interview.
- Courses in Art and Design
  - Digital portfolio only. 25 slides.
  - ECA are announcing their updated plans about format and how to submit in autumn 2023.
  - **Deadline:** February
  - No interview.

# University portfolio requirements 2022

## University of Edinburgh (cont.)

- Film and Television
  - One digital video file or URL to one 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:** February
  - No interview.

## 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

Art and Design courses have a two-step application process. Step one is a digital portfolio, and from this you may be invited to a zoom interview.

Architecture will make offers based on the digital portfolio only.

- Architecture: 10 images/slides – JPEG or PDF
- Design subjects: 15 images/slides – JPEG or PDF
- Fine Art subjects: 20 images/slides – JPEG or PDF
  
- Each JPEG can be no longer than 2MB and 72dpi resolution
- Ideally each JPEG should have dimensions of 1024x763px (standard screen dimensions, not widescreen).
- PDFs must be no larger than 50MB

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:** February

**Interview:** February - April

## Heriot Watt University

- All creative courses
  - Digital Portfolio
  - 10-15 images – JPEG or PDF
  - Heriot-Watt also require a creative statement. This is separate to the UCAS personal statement and must focus on your creative work only.
  - Interviews are usually held from early January.

# University portfolio requirements 2022

## . University of the Highlands and Islands

- . All creative courses
  - . Digital Portfolio
  - . Interviews are usually held from February.
  - . Please see their website for individual course requirements

## Queen Margaret University

- . Courses in Costume Design and Construction
  - . Digital Portfolio, 14 images
  - . You will also be asked to complete a short design exercise and attend an online interview

## 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
  - . Digital Portfolio, 25 images, uploaded to [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)
  - . Digital portfolio deadline: February
  - . You **may** be invited to attend an interview in March/April.

## 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.

## University of the West of Scotland

- . Courses in Computer Animation Arts
  - . You may be required to submit a portfolio

