

Speaker 1: [00:00:02] Hi, everyone. I'm Emily. I'm the regional manager for sub-Saharan Africa. [00:00:05][3.5]

Speaker 2: [00:00:07] Hi, everyone. My name is Ron Peter. And I'm the international officer for the sub-Saharan region. [00:00:11][4.0]

Speaker 3: [00:00:12] Hi, everyone. I'm Blessing. I'm the country manager for the University of Aberdeen and I'm based in Nigeria. [00:00:17][5.2]

Speaker 1: [00:00:18] Welcome to our University of Aberdeen West Africa podcast series. We're going to talk about lots of relevant and interesting topics which we hope you find useful. Join us for this week's episode. This week's episode focusses on undergrad admissions and we are joined today by the lead admissions officer. So I will let Kate introduce herself. [00:00:45][27.0]

Speaker 4: [00:00:47] Hello, I'm Kate Davidson and the lead admissions undergraduate admissions officer for the University of Aberdeen and I deal with most application forms that come in and help make decisions on them. [00:00:59][11.9]

Speaker 1: [00:01:00] Perfect. Thank you so much for joining us today. And obviously this podcast is focussed towards our West African audience, but hopefully it will also be useful for other students who are listening in to today's conversation. Okay. So let's start by asking some questions about admissions. Why don't we start at the beginning? So when will an applicant get a decision on their application? [00:01:30][29.8]

Speaker 4: [00:01:31] Right. Okay. Well, you submit through UCAS for undergraduate admissions, so a lot depends on when you submit, because if you submit in November, that's at the start of the year and we don't have very many applications, which means that you'll get a very quick time turnaround. However, if it gets into December, January, February, when the majority of our applications come in because it's timed with UCAS, is that we have a huge backlog. It's not that we've forgotten you, but it just takes a few weeks to work our way through. So it can be anything from a week to four, five weeks. But you mustn't worry. Just because you haven't heard does not mean to say we have forgotten about you. [00:02:11][40.1]

Speaker 1: [00:02:13] Perfect. And most of the time we encourage students to go by the UCAS deadline, which is in January. And is that for all international students or can students also apply after that date? [00:02:26][13.1]

Speaker 4: [00:02:26] To be honest, for the international students, you can apply right the way up to the 30th of June for most courses, obviously medicine is the exception and law and teaching. So there the three, medicine teaching and law, the three are really really popular, very competitive. It's competitive all over, but they're very, very competitive. If you haven't got your application in by October then, you cannot be considered for medicine and there will be more or less the same restrictions for law. Basically, for most of our courses, the majority, then you can apply all the way up to the end of June. [00:03:13][46.4]

Speaker 1: [00:03:15] Perfect, Blessing and Ron, do you have any questions? [00:03:18][3.1]

Speaker 2: [00:03:19] Thanks, Emily. Kate I would like to know how many programmes can an applicant choose while applying with UCAS? [00:03:24][5.3]

Speaker 4: [00:03:25] Yes. Well, UCAS you can do for up to five choices. It can be five choices in one university, although we don't recommend that or five universities and five choices. So you see you don't need to know whether you want to do history or you want to do politics and or international relations or whatever. So you apply for international relations and then you think about it a bit more and you think, well, actually, no, I do not want international relations. I want, you know, I want psychology. Then you just need to contact us and all we'll do is we'll just amend the choice when we send it back to you. So that's why it just gives, you know, it gives you or the student more choice in a way, by just putting a subject once as opposed to five times. [00:04:19][53.6]

Speaker 3: [00:04:20] Students apply directly to the university or it has to be strictly UCAS. [00:04:23][3.8]

Speaker 4: [00:04:23] You know, they have got to apply through UCAS. Yes, for Aberdeen. [00:04:34][10.2]

Speaker 3: [00:04:34] Q Is there an age limit for applications for undergraduate studies? [00:04:37][2.8]

Speaker 4: [00:04:38] No, absolutely not. No. You can be 16 to 60 or 70 or even. [00:04:45][6.8]

Speaker 1: [00:04:46] Ah amazing. So can you really tell us a little bit more about UCAS? Because some students won't be at all familiar with what we're talking about. [00:05:02][16.0]

Speaker 4: [00:05:03] So what it is, is that you can see the universities and colleges admissions service. It is fantastic in that you do not need to write a separate application for every single university that you go to. So it's the one generic application form that you fill in and you then send that off and then you can send it out to the universities. So it's the central system. So everybody, every university across the country for undergraduate studies do it in this manner. And so that that is the good thing. So it's all online. You go into UCAS.com and you register in the hub, what they call the hub will tell you how to do that. You're registered in the hub. And that actually is a very good way of even for research, even before you want to start applying. And because that tells you, you know, you can find out about the universities. It can tell you what they expect that you put into the form. And there's a lot of good tutorials and things like that. And it all comes through what they call the student hub. So once you submitted the application, you've got your user ID, you've got your password, and you go in so you can see what decisions universities have made. So it tracks you all the way through. And when you're doing your research to begin with, for you, searching is what I want to do and what universities again, you can see them, you can have your favourites so you can go back and have another look. So its a huge resource you can see and they've recently done it up a bit more and it's even more user friendly than it was before. And for students to walk you through that path of applying and understanding personal statements? So we look for, you know, do you know about the course? What do you understand about the course. So what have you done? Have you done anything connected in your interests that might help you in that course that you're coming to do? So you want to do business. Include work experience and not only you've worked in the shop for a while, that's fine. But what have you learnt from that that you think you can bring to the course? Okay, so it's that type of thing that we're looking for. In a personal statement, you are restricted in your character. You're only allowed 4000 characters And I can guarantee you, you can draught it, you can save it. You know, you can work on it again. You know, again, there's no there's no restrictions. You don't need to just do it the ones to send it. And I can guarantee you the first time that you write it, it will be more than 4000 characters. This is a really good discipline for you to actually think about the course you do and what you want to do. And you know, when you come to university, you have to write essays, so you've got to get into that mindset as well. So this is a good start for you to do it. And the other thing, though, is don't stress yourself too much about it. Don't really go over the top. And because some students get very stressed about it, you know, don't be too stressed, but just think about what you do. And the other thing that you probably

find is that we do need to have a reference and Aberdeen does require a preferable academic reference that from your school or from your college. So you do have to have that to send that as well. And the rest is just, you know, about how old you are and your school and what grades have you gotten? What are you doing now? So they're very they're very simple. But those are the two. The two main ones, the personal statement and the reference. [00:09:16][253.0]

Speaker 1: [00:09:18] All right. That's super informative, Kate. And what happens if a student submits all of their things to UCAS and then they feel like they want to go back in and edit something? Is that at all possible? [00:09:29][11.6]

Speaker 4: [00:09:31] It's not really. You can edit things like your address and things like that, but you can't edit your personal statement. However, if you really feel that you want to edit it and or that you've done some more that might be relevant to do there you can email admissions and we will attach it on to your file. And because we process your forms centrally in UG admissions, it's very good because it will be attached. Some universities you can send it to department, or you can send it somewhere else and it gets lost. But in Aberdeen we are very good at attaching everything we get sent to us at that the admissions address has on your file. [00:10:18][47.4]

Speaker 1: [00:10:19] Great. And obviously when students are writing their personal statement and we do advise that they use all five choices on their UCAS application form and they will submit to other universities. You've obviously read a lot of personal statements. Do you have any advice for students who are feeling a little bit confused as to what they write when they applied for a particular course at Aberdeen and then one somewhere else that was similar but a little bit different and they were worried that their personal statement didn't really apply to both. How do they keep it generic? Yeah. How do they keep it generic enough? [00:10:54][34.4]

Speaker 4: [00:10:55] Well, I mean, you know, it's not generic. I mean, the problem comes if you actually want to do, I don't know, teaching. And marine biology. Okay. So they are so different. Completely different. And that's quite difficult to weave both interests in. Again, if that happens, then then you can do a separate personal statement and you can send it into your admissions and we'll attach that on to that is more focussed to whichever one. But you know, to be honest, most students don't have that diverse, so they might want to do business at one and marketing at another. And again, not that you can make your personal statement that it's both. So what are the things that are similar about it? You know, sort of

what I mean, if you want to do law, you know, what are the attributes that we're looking for a law degree? And are they the same attributes? And the answer if you then want to do for politics. So what are the similarities? And that, again, is thinking about your personal statement and what it is that you want to actually put in it. UCAS has got very good examples and is building a personal statement builder and that you can do on this which will actually kind of guide you, the applicant through that and how to build that personal statement and what we're looking for. And on the website, again, university heads of admissions, I have said this is what we were looking for. This is the type of thing that we're looking for. So there is a lot of help about how to build that personal statement. But if you think that really I haven't had room for this, then again for Aberdeen, we welcome you to send in that additional personal statement and that'll be attached to your file and hopefully other universities do that. But it's sometimes difficult if, if it's depending on how they operate admissions, but certainly Aberdeen, that's what we do. [00:12:53][117.7]

Speaker 3: [00:12:55] Okay. I have a question for prospective students in West Africa. So do our university accept WAEC as the appropriate result. If yes, what are the grades that are required? [00:13:08][13.3]

Speaker 4: [00:13:11] I have to say, school leaving and we generally ask for more than just school leaving qualifications. So then we would suggest a foundation course or we would add you can then go in and do an 810 programme at college or something post-school. If you've got excellent, really excellent school leaving grades, then yes, we will look at that. But in the main, we find the term, you know, it is difficult, a completely different education system and this struggling. We don't want students to come and struggle. So if it just takes an extra year and if we feel we can't do it, we have got a foundation programme and we would direct them to the foundation programme. So it's not as if we sort of say, no. We do direct them to that. So it just, it does depend on the subjects that they do and the grades that you've you've had in the past. And that's not very helpful, is it? [00:14:07][55.8]

Speaker 3: [00:14:07] And I think that's helpful enough, right? [00:14:08][1.5]

Speaker 4: [00:14:09] Yes. [00:14:09][0.0]

Speaker 3: [00:14:10] Okay. So in addition to the question, are these applications required to write an English test as well? Yes. Yes. [00:14:19][8.3]

Speaker 4: [00:14:19] Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, we do. We do need that as well. Yeah. [00:14:25][5.9]

Speaker 1: [00:14:28] And what happens if an applicant is given a conditional offer? What does that mean for the student? [00:14:33][4.9]

Speaker 4: [00:14:36] That means that we want you and if you'd like to come. But you just haven't quite got the qualifications that we need. Okay, if you get ABCD at those grades, then that's good and that's what we mean by a conditional offer. But really the fact that you got the offer is excellent. But now you just need to go and get those grades for the exams or you need to go into your English language and get your English language so that's what it means by a conditional offer. And then once you send in us the results and if you if you get the grades that we've asked for, for a conditional offer, then you'll automatically be given an unconditional offer. And then you get sent all your student documentation and then you can start booking accommodation. But we do need you to Send us the results as well. Yes. So that's what we do and that's what the conditional offer is and then that's what an unconditional means, it means that you've not got any restrictions. And we can offer you that. You send in as soon as you have it and we'll go from there.. [00:16:35][119.0]

Speaker 3: [00:16:35] It does answer my question. Thank you. I have another question regarding the duration for undergraduate studies in Scotland. I'm sure we're all aware it would be helpful for some prospective students to know that some undergraduate studies in Scotland is for four years. Yes, as against three years in universities in England. Why is it 4 years? [00:16:59][23.2]

Speaker 4: [00:17:00] It's historical. All right. We have got very old universities and Aberdeen is one of them. That is what we call an ancient university. So it's been around since 1495. And when it was done back then, when universities were done in Scotland and, you know, in Scotland, three of the five oldest universities in the UK are in Scotland. And at that point, you know, it was first the church and then it was politics and they really believed in education from the very beginning. And they built that traditional degree standard that we have. And they used to teach slightly longer back in those days, but it's now down to four years and we've kept that. And the beauty about it is that in science you go into more depth. There's two things that you can do that is good about it, you've got a broader education and that's the Scottish education, it is a broader education. So you don't get trapped in that subject in Scotland because you study

three or four subjects in the first two years. You can change your mind and that is such a bonus in Scottish education system, of course for medicine that's not the case. You're kind of stuck into medicine once you get into medicine. But the majority of courses, you know, so if you don't know in business, if you don't know whether it's business, you want marketing, you want human resources, that doesn't matter. You can change your mind if you think don't want to do history, you do want to do politics, that's fine. Change your mind in the first two years. So that's one beauty about the Scottish education system and because it's four years, you've got that flexibility to do it. And the other one is that as well, because it's four years, really basically most degrees you do you do a dissertation in the final year which is a research based and programme that you do so that you have to do your own research invaluable again for getting job experience in the end and it's self-study and it does that and that you have to do that and that is a good thing as well. And again, in England they haven't got that opportunity because they're trying to get all this in three years. So that is why we do the four years and why we think that it's a really good thing to do four years. [00:20:21][201.6]

Speaker 3: [00:20:23] Oh, that's wonderful. [00:20:23][0.4]

Speaker 4: [00:20:24] Thank you. [00:20:25][0.4]

Speaker 1: [00:20:26] Ron. Do you have anything you want to ask? [00:20:28][1.6]

Speaker 2: [00:20:30] Thanks, Emily. I would like to ask about different options available for an applicant. Okay. How many times can they defer? [00:20:38][8.2]

Speaker 4: [00:20:40] All right. Okay. They can defer for one year. So if you don't want to now, that doesn't mean to say that you defer. You know, you want to come in 23, but you defer to 24 and then something happens and you can't come. And although we can't defer you yet again, you have to put in another you application. The university is going to look at you again. It's not that we say, well, they haven't come for us for two years. We're not looking at them again. But it's just that you need to submit a new application. [00:21:14][34.2]

Speaker 3: [00:21:15] So I have a question, Kate. For the undergraduate programmes, are work placements included in the academic structure? [00:21:23][7.1]

Speaker 4: [00:21:24] No, not at the University of Aberdeen. We do have connections with businesses so that very often

visiting lecturers come in, they tell you about the business. You can sometimes go and do the work placement during the summer time businesses, but it's not part of the degree as some universities do. And again, that's because it's an ancient and a traditional university that we've done that. And that's the way that the degree structures have been structured, is that that is just is not such a practical course. But, you know, our links with businesses, I have to say, are excellent So, you know, you can do it.
[00:22:42][78.2]

Speaker 3: [00:22:44] And so what about the exchange programmes? Is that still in place. [00:22:46][2.8]

Speaker 3: [00:22:49] The exchange programmes. [00:22:51][1.8]

Speaker 4: [00:22:51] Yes, we you can still do exchanges. And normally in third year, second or third year that you go away for a semester and or a year mostly is just a semester and it varies each, each programme has got different partner universities it's a brilliant thing to do if you can do it. We always come back and see the confidence that has grown in the student if they've been for another semester in another country/university. Amazing. So it's something that we do recommend and we do wish to support but it's not for everyone.
[00:23:42][50.0]

Speaker 1: [00:23:43] And when a student submits their application, at what point through the academic year would we get in touch with them about their application? Or should they expect for there to be like silence until a certain point?
[00:23:56][13.1]

Speaker 4: [00:23:59] I think, as I say, depending on when you apply, don't worry, if you apply in December, you're not going to be here till February at least, because that's when 95% of our applications come in. And we are talking about sort of 20,000 applications that come in. And what you might hear about beforehand is that we do look at them. So if we feel that we need more information and we sometimes can do that before a decision is made, because what happens, it comes into our central admissions and then our admissions assistants look at it. Then once we get your transcripts and once we get everything and we do need to also send it to the selector too, to see it's fine if, If it is complicated We absolutely need the full transcript and the full curriculum that you have that you're studying, because obviously we have to make sure that they've matched. So what you've done in first and second year so that we can perhaps give you 3rd year entry, you know or anything like that. So that's what then takes the time because

it has to go into the academic selection and so a bit more. So that might take time. [00:25:55][116.1]

Speaker 1: [00:25:58] A we do have quite a rigorous protocol of of different offices that will touch the application. So maybe it would be helpful for the applicant to know the journey that the application takes? [00:26:15][17.0]

Speaker 4: [00:26:15] very often applicants say, why do you take such a long time? So it comes into the general admissions office, as I said, and that's then the admissions assistants have a glance, if there's a query about your fee status or anything like that, then then we do that as well. We have to look at it to make sure that you're going to be eligible or what your fees are going to be. So that might take a little while and that would be me that you'd hear from that point if that's the case. Then it goes to the selector, Can you just cast your eye over it to make sure that it's all there? But we have rigorously looked at it. We also look at it from terms of you've got a disability. So all the time that we're doing this, we're just making sure that everything's right. Because, again, the idea is when you come, we want you to be absolutely set up. And if you need extra support, we will know that you need extra support. So you're already in the system to say, okay, we need to get in touch with this person to get that extra support, you know, to ask for what that extra support that's required. So that's all done, which is why it sometimes looks as if the application goes into black hole, but it's not. I mean, you will get acknowledgement, you know, you'll get an announcement from us to say We've got it. Thank you very much. sometimes it just takes longer. [00:28:33][138.1]

Speaker 3: [00:28:41] So, kate, I have a question about the clearing season. Could you tell us more about Clearing? Yes, please. [00:28:49][7.8]

Speaker 4: [00:28:52] If a student has applied five times during what we call the main cycle, and they've got rejected from all five universities, then there's something called clearing they can use. If the university looks as if it's got places left after the main scheme, then it opens up these courses for extra spaces and students can one at a time apply for university. The university looks at it. If it says no, then you're back into clearing and you can put in another application. Most of them it's immediately you contact us for a chat, live chat and email us and then then you get pretty much an instant answer and say, yes, we can accept you or we can't. You will then find out a bit more about the course, the university, because again we don't want you to rush and think, oh, you know, I do/ don't want to go there. So we want you to

have choices and take your time to say yes to the correct one in Clearing for you. [00:32:07][195.3]

Speaker 3: [00:32:09] Yes. [00:32:09][0.0]

Speaker 4: [00:32:12] We do give you time and some universities pressurise you more. And what I would say is, if a university is pressurising you to say yes instantly, then that's not good. Because, again, from the student's point of view, we want you to enjoy and make sure that you're making that right decisions. I think it's a big choice, a big decision and lots of money. So we want you to get it right. So we give you that time. [00:32:39][27.6]

Speaker 3: [00:32:40] Just to reconfirm, clearing students apply direct or does it still have to go through the UCAS? [00:32:47][7.3]

Speaker 4: [00:32:50] Right. It will have to go through UCAS. But you contact the university directly and to see that and then you get the verbal offer of a place. Then you go on to you can single click. I want to choose that university. That university and that choice, of course. But yes, if you haven't applied to UCAS before, you'll have to apply through UCAS. You know, so you still do have to go there in the end. But you can contact them at clearing to see if you got a place. And do you want me? And they say yes. And then you, you or the applicant has to click that button to say yes. I want to accept that, not that place. But we've done the offer you'll have had at Aberdeen. You will already have had an email sent to you with the offer of the place. So you do know that you've got that place and instantly with the Aberdeen you will get that within 24 hours. [00:34:00][70.6]

Speaker 1: [00:34:02] Amazing. Thank you so much, Kate, for taking time out of your day to answer all of our questions. [00:34:06][4.1]

Speaker 4: [00:34:07] No problem. Hope it's useful. [00:34:09][1.3]

Speaker 1: [00:34:09] Useful? Oh, we've managed to answer all of the burning questions that our West African undergrad students have. And if not, then they always know they can contact their admissions team via email or get in touch with Blessing, Ron or myself. So just on behalf of all of us, thank you. [00:34:27][17.8]

Speaker 4: [00:34:30] My pleasure. Good luck. [00:34:31][1.0]

Speaker 3: [00:34:33] Thank you. Thank you. Bye bye now.
[00:34:36][2.7]

Speaker 1: [00:34:37] Thank you. [00:34:37][0.0]

[1990.5]