



Hawar
International
School

UNIVERSITY PLANNING HANDBOOK

2025 / 2026



Welcome to Hawar International School and the University Planning Handbook

At our school, we are committed to supporting our students and parents by providing essential information to help them find the pathways that best fit their goals and aspirations.

This handbook is designed as a starter guide to careers and university planning. Remember that each student's pathway is unique, and university admissions requirements and courses continue to evolve. For the most accurate and up-to-date details, always check the university's official website or contact the institution directly.

The HIS Career Counselor provides:

- Personalized advice on choosing and applying for higher education courses in the UK, EU, USA, Bahrain, the Middle East, and beyond.
- Specialized guidance for Oxbridge, Russell Group, and Ivy League applications, supported by a former Russell Group Admissions Advisor and external educational partners.
- Support with completing online applications, writing strong personal statements, listing extracurricular activities, and preparing university-specific supplemental essays.
- Mock interviews to help students prepare for university admission (where applicable).
- Strategies for subject-specific entry tests to top universities – such as Law and Medicine (UCAT, BMAT, LNAT, etc.) – as well as preparation for general standardized assessments like the SAT, ACT, TOEFL, and IELTS.
- Access to admissions representatives from a wide range of universities, offering direct insight into the application process and what institutions look for during visits to HIS.
- Sessions from university lecturers on specific subject areas, including portfolio creation and development for students applying to arts-based programs.
- Connections with notable alumni who provide real-world perspectives on different career fields.
- Career exploration tools such as the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator (MBTI) and Holland Code to help students identify their strengths, preferences, and realistic career pathways.

Introduction

This handbook is designed as a resource to answer common questions about the university application process. We believe two key principles guide this journey:

- A student's best interests are served through clear communication among all four parties involved: the student, the school, the parents, and the colleges/universities.
- Colleges and universities base their decisions on the whole applicant profile. This includes the student's complete high school record, personal academic and professional goals, extracurricular and super-curricular activities, recommendations (from counselors, teachers, and others), personal essays, demonstrated interest (such as campus visits, virtual open days, and interviews), and standardized test scores when required (SAT, ACT, IELTS, TOEFL, etc.).

At HIS, we help students identify colleges and universities where they can pursue the best education for their goals, achieve success, and graduate prepared to lead productive, fulfilling lives. With thousands of options worldwide, many institutions can be a strong match. Our role is to guide students and families in making well-informed decisions about applications and choices.

We believe that knowledge empowers better decision-making. For this reason, researching colleges and universities is an essential step in finding the best match. The research process requires the following elements:

Reading About Various Colleges and Universities

- Speak with people who have direct knowledge of the institution – such as counselors, current or former students, and professors. Take advantage of university visits to the school, e-visits, virtual events, and online taster lectures.
- Visit institutions in person and, if possible, schedule interviews. If traveling is not an option, make use of virtual visits, as these can be just as valuable in finding your best-fit match.

How Do I Find the Best Course for Me?

The best way to know if you are suited to a course is to carefully read the university's website entry requirements and course pages. Once you narrow down your options, it is essential to attend as many university visits as possible – whether at school, around Bahrain, or directly at the universities themselves.

If you can, try to visit during school holidays. Many universities offer guided campus tours throughout the year, advertised on their websites. While these tours provide a general overview, they still give you that all-important “feel” of the university, which is often crucial in the decision-making process. In addition, many universities provide self-guided walking tours. If you contact the department you are applying to, they can often arrange meetings with staff or current students. Universities are eager to attract strong applicants and will usually do their best to accommodate such requests. Remember, demonstrating genuine interest is important – many universities now use specific tools and criteria to measure it.

For parents: Visits are not only important for students, but also helpful for families. Even if a student prefers to go alone, parents benefit from seeing where their child might spend several years. Many universities host information sessions tailored to parents’ questions. While the ultimate decision rests with the student, it is valuable for the whole family to have access to accurate information. Increasingly, universities also hold virtual open days – often on weekends – to make it easier for parents to attend.

Talk About It!

Have open discussions with friends, relatives, teachers, and the career counselor to explore ideas and gather information. However, remember that what suits one person may not necessarily suit another. Take advice on board, but always cross-check with career counselors and the universities themselves for the most accurate and up-to-date guidance.

How Can the Careers Counselor Help You?

The Careers Counselor is here to:

- Build and maintain a reliable reference base of up-to-date information on educational opportunities worldwide.
- Provide guidance on subject choices for the IBDP and IBCP, in collaboration with the IB Coordinators.
- Lead Careers Exploration Sessions and College Readiness Sessions to prepare students for their next steps.
- Organize University Fairs for parents and students in Grades 11 and 12.
- Introduce and explain the college and university application process for different countries.
- Offer individual meetings to support personalized university and career planning.

Getting Into College/University

Ultimately, admission to college or university depends on the student. Institutions carefully review a student's IB results (MYP, IBCP, or IBDP), along with their overall high school record. Grades from Grades 9 to 12, listed on the school transcript, are evaluated as a four-year reflection of performance.

If a student has struggled in one course or during a particular year, there is no need to be discouraged – universities often view upward improvement very positively.

Predicted grades, current grades, and standardized test results (alongside any country-, region-, institution-, or subject-specific entrance exams) are all vital, as admission decisions are based heavily on these. In the UK, Europe, and Australia, offers are often conditional until final IB results are released in July.

In addition to grades and test scores, universities and colleges also consider a range of other factors when making admissions decisions. Each institution may weigh these elements differently.

- SAT/ACT scores – preferred by competitive universities (primarily American institutions, but also considered in some other countries).
- Other entrance test scores – such as BMAT, UCAT, LNAT, TSA, IELTS, or TOEFL.
- Teacher and University Counselor recommendations.
- Co-curricular achievements and awards.
- Extracurricular activities – demonstrating commitment to a specific field such as Medicine, Engineering, Arts, or Law. (Using the MYP Personal Project or CAS to explore career interests is a strong advantage.)
- Academic awards and recognitions.
- Personal essays, personal statements, and university-specific supplemental essays.
- Portfolio submissions – required for Art and Design programs.
- Interviews – when required by the institution.

Applying Electronically via Online Application Portals

Most colleges and universities require students to apply through online application portals or directly to the institution. Applicants must complete and submit their applications online. Test scores can be sent directly by the testing body upon the student's request at the time of testing. Application fees are also paid online through these portals.

For the UK, nearly all university applications are processed through UCAS (www.ucas.com) – a one-stop platform for researching, applying, and tracking applications.

For the US, the process is similar through the Common App (www.commonapp.org). Please note that some universities may also accept direct applications. Students should always confirm the exact procedure by checking the institution's website or contacting the admissions office.

What Should I Consider When Researching Colleges?

What Should I Consider When Researching Colleges?

- Location**
Europe, UK, USA, Canada, Japan Hong, India, South Africa. Australia, UAE; an other destinations.
- Type**
Compus, city, rural, urban, private, or pulc; institutions
- Costs**
Tuition fees. sttudents), medium (5.000–10.000 students), or small (<1.000 students).
- Size**
Large (5 00.00-stuc.), medium (5.000–10.000 students) or small
- Housing**
Dormitories: apartments: or private lodngs
- Sports**
Facilities, teams, affiliations and prgrams
- Course requirements**
SAT, ACT, TOEFL, IELTS, entrance exants, IB Diploma Higher Level subject requirements and specialist activities
- Opportunities**
Summer jobs, internships, co-op placements, or international exchange programs
- Faculty**
Professor to-student ratio and class sizes. especially for freshmen
- Postgraduate pathways**
Research opportunities, OPT/CPT postgraduate study, or work visa op-
- Special programs**
Double majors, Interdisciplinary majors, study-abroad opoo-tunities, work-study pr

Questions to Help You Choose Wisely

- Do I want a three-year or four-year course?
- Do I prefer a program that includes practical work experience?
- Would I thrive in a culturally diverse student body?
- How far from my family am I comfortable living?
- What lifestyle suits me best?
- Do I need financial support such as grants, scholarships, or loans?
- What sports or arts activities are available?
- Does the university have a religious affiliation I should consider?
- What cultural activities or societies are offered?
- Are part-time jobs, internships, or co-op opportunities available?
- What type of campus environment do I prefer?
- Do I want to live in a city or a more rural setting?

Selecting Your Colleges/Universities

- Attend college fairs and visits, including e-visits and virtual fairs.
- Visit campuses during vacations or join online open days.
- Explore official college and university websites.
- Review information displayed on university noticeboards.
- Read online brochures and prospectuses.
- Research entrance requirements, application procedures, and deadlines.
- Contact the institutions of your choice directly for clarification.

Preparing for Application Procedures in Grade 11

- Check the information provided on each institution's official website.
- Review the application deadlines listed in this handbook.
- Ask your teachers, University Guidance Counselor, or Diploma Coordinator for references/recommendations.
- Draft your personal statement and college essay early to receive feedback before Grade 12. Universities often keep the same prompts for several years, so preparing in advance gives you a valuable head start.
- Begin drafting your shortlist of universities and share it with your university counselor.
- Register for standardized tests (SAT, ACT, TOEFL, IELTS, or entrance exams) and aim to complete them before the end of Grade 12, if applicable.
- Begin completing your UCAS and Common App details.

Personal Essays, Personal Statements, College Essays, and Recommendation Letters

Most applications require a personal statement, essay, or recommendation letter. These are opportunities for students to showcase their skills, experiences, and goals to admissions officers.

- Draft one or more personal statements/essays before the end of Grade 11. The final version will be due in Semester 1 of Grade 12.
- Refer to resources on the College Board, the Common Application, UCAS, and EU application portals for guidance on writing.

Recommendations

Recommendations are an important part of your application.

- Approach your teachers no later than June of Grade 11, as some may leave the school.
- Provide each teacher with a copy of your CV to help them highlight your strengths and experiences in their letters.

Transcripts and Predicted Grades

Your transcript is one of the most important parts of your application. The school will produce it for you to upload online or send directly to universities.

- The transcript includes:
 - Grades 9–11 end-of-year results
 - Grade 11 end-of-year predictions
 - First data capture of Grade 12, Semester 1 (IB predicted grades)
- Predicted grades will be ready:
 - By October for early applicants.
 - By late November for regular application deadlines.

It is your responsibility to inform the counselor of your deadlines so transcripts can be prepared and submitted on time.

Mid-Year Report (North America Applicants Only)

Applicants to North American universities must also submit a Mid-Year Report in February of Grade 12. This report includes:

- Grade 11 end-of-year grades
- Updated Grade 12 predictions
- Current Grade 12 results

What Entrance Tests Do Students Need to Take to Enter College?

The tests required depend on the institution, the country of study, and the subject applied for. Students must always check the specific application requirements of their chosen universities to plan appropriately.

SAT I, SAT II, ACT, or EMSAT (and Test-Optional Policies)

- Many U.S. colleges and universities – and some in other countries – prefer SAT or ACT scores (sometimes with the writing component).
- These tests can be taken multiple times, but it is recommended to sit for them two to three times to achieve your best score.
- Some universities now follow a test-optional policy, meaning scores are not required but can strengthen an application.

PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test)

- Administered every year in October.
- Serves as excellent practice for the SAT I.
- Not required for college admission, but a valuable assessment tool for planning and scholarship opportunities.

IELTS, TOEFL, or Duolingo English Test (for some U.S. universities only)

- Required if you need to prove English language proficiency.
- Can be taken online or through the British Council ([details here](#)).
- Exemption: If applying to the UK, students studying IB English A with a predicted score of 5 or above are typically exempt.

BMAT, UCAT, MCAT, UMAT

- BMAT & UCAT: Required for entry into undergraduate medical courses in the UK.
- UMAT: For undergraduate medical courses in Australia.
- MCAT: For graduate medical courses in Australia, Canada, and the U.S.

It is the student's responsibility to:

- Register for entrance exams on time.
- Ensure that test scores are sent directly to the institutions.

Delayed test scores can hold up applications and may even result in the denial of admission.

How Do I Finance My Education?

Cost is a very important factor when choosing where to study.

Higher education abroad can be expensive once tuition fees and living expenses are considered. However, opportunities for financial aid, scholarships, grants, and loans are available. The process requires research by both students and parents, and it is the student's responsibility to apply. Begin researching and applying for aid early in the application process.

Resources for Financial Support

- Check individual college/university websites.
- Refer to the websites listed in this handbook.
- Contact local embassies or consulates for available opportunities.
- Ask parents to check whether their employers offer educational benefits.
- Speak to the university counselor about possible scholarship or full-ride options.

For international students seeking need-based aid, university websites are the best source of accurate information. Some U.S. universities offer need-based aid to international applicants, while many institutions worldwide provide merit-based scholarships for strong academic achievement.

Visa Requirements

Obtaining a student visa depends on the student's circumstances and the requirements of the country of study. In most cases, the process is straightforward if you meet the necessary conditions.

- UK: You must provide a letter of admission from an accredited institution along with a CAS (Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies) reference number.
- USA: You will need an F-1 Visa once you receive your I-20 document, issued after submitting proof of finances (such as bank statements) covering at least one year of study.
- You must be enrolled as a full-time student in a degree program.
- You must prove you can finance the cost of your course either independently or through financial awards.
- Contact the consulates of your chosen study country for tailored advice and support with the visa process.

College Planning Calendar

Application Deadlines per Country/Region:

Deadline (Grade 12)	Country
Oct 2015	Oxford & Cambridge, all UK Medical /Veterinary/ Dentistry
November	US Early Action/Decision (November 1). Canada early applications, University of California system (30th)
December	USA, CAN, and some EU institutions that have Numerus Fixus (limited enrollment capacity)
January 1st/2nd	USA
January 15th January/Feb/March March/April/May/June	UK & some EU institutions and some CAN institutions Canada, EU countries EU countries and Australia's early applications
July/August/September	Australia, New Zealand & other southern
	hemisphere countries.

All Applications must be completed by the following deadlines:

October 7th	Oxford, Cambridge, UK Medical/Veterinary courses & some USA
October 24th	USA Early Decision candidates
November 5th	All University of California Applications and All Canadian early applications.
December 2nd	All USA and All UK regular applications as well as EU and Canadian early applications
January 15th	Late US & Canada and EU applications

Considerations

Grade 9

This is the time to get serious about your learning. Every subject and every grade matters – especially if you plan to apply to selective universities. Take advantage of opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

- Get involved in your school community through sports, community service, drama, concerts, or clubs.
- Expand your extracurricular activities to explore new interests.
- Use your summer wisely – take a job, enroll in an online course, join a language class, conduct research, or pursue anything that enriches your learning and experiences.

Grade 10

Continue building strong academic performance while staying active in extracurricular activities. Begin to think carefully about your subject choices for future studies, and whether you prefer the IBDP (academic pathway) or the IBCP (practical pathway).

- Speak with Grade 11 and 12 students about their subject choices, course content, and workload.
- Research what your “dream colleges” prefer – IBDP or IBCP – to guide your decision-making.
- Take career surveys and explore resources in the careers library.
- Develop transferable skills and investigate work experience opportunities.
- Attend college exploration sessions with your Career Counselor.
- Begin drafting your CV and, if applying for art-related programs, start compiling your portfolio.
- Explore summer pre-college programs around the world to gain exposure to your future field of study.

Grade 11

August / September

- Sign up for PSAT, ACT, SAT, TOEFL, or IELTS if applicable. Aim to complete the SAT and ACT two to three times before finishing Grade 11.
- Stay active in extracurricular activities and keep your CAS file up to date.

- Extracurricular involvement is especially important for showing strong interest in your future field of study.
- Begin developing your Art portfolio (online and/or on paper), if relevant.
- Meet with your Career Counselor at least once to discuss your future plans.
- Attend virtual university visits and online events.

October

- Sit for the PSAT (if applicable).
- Take the ACT (if applicable).
- Register for the December SAT (if applicable).

November / December

- Review PSAT/SAT/ACT results with your Career Counselor.
- Sit for the SAT (if applicable).
- Register for the January SAT (if applicable).
- Track all deadlines carefully – use the University Application Tracking Spreadsheet.

January

- Assess your academic and extracurricular progress.
- Book an appointment with your Career Counselor.
- Review your CAS hours and credits to date.
- Sit for SATs (first round for Grade 12s, if applicable).
- Start planning for summer programs.
- Polish your CV.

February / March

- Meet with your Career Counselor to discuss your academic schedule.
- Begin drafting a college/university list and create a shortlist.
- Register for the May SAT (if applicable).
- Apply for summer programs, online courses, or internships.

April

- Take the ACT exam (first round).
- Register for the June SAT (if applicable).
- Discuss financial aid and scholarship options with your parents.
- Finalize your summer plans (camps, work experience, college tours – all of which strengthen your application).
- Revise for mock exams.

May / June

- Meet with your Career Counselor to review progress.
- Ask teachers who may be leaving to prepare recommendation letters (if needed).
- Begin drafting your personal statement and essays.
- Sit for mock exams.

Summer

- Do something significant: volunteer, complete an internship, attend a pre-college program, or take language courses.
- Consider an IB Summer School (online or onsite in the UK, USA, Canada, or EU).
- Visit colleges/universities virtually or in person; schedule interviews where possible.
- Narrow your college/university list to a maximum of 12 (Target, Match, and Reach schools).
- Research universities in Australia, New Zealand, and the Southern Hemisphere.
- IB Diploma students: Complete your Extended Essay draft.
- Continue refining your college essays and personal statements.
- If applying to the USA, open your Common App portal on August 1.

Grade 12

August / September

- Finalize your college application list (maximum of 12 institutions) and submit your shortlist via the Google Form shared by your Career Counselor.
- Use the Career Counseling Handbook to track deadlines.

- Provide your Career Counselor with a list of colleges and “due by” dates.
- Sign Early Application Agreements if applying early.
- October 7: Internal deadline for Oxford, Cambridge, and UK Medical/Veterinary/Dentistry applications.

October

- Continue regular meetings with your Career Counselor.
- Sit for SAT/ACT (if applicable).
- Arrange for test scores to be sent directly from the testing center to your university.
- Submit early U.S. applications.
- October 24: Deadline for U.S. Early Decision candidates.

November

- Continue meetings with your Career Counselor.
- November 15: Deadline for University of California applications and Canada’s early applications (submit early if possible).
- November 30: Final UC deadline.

December

- December 2: Internal deadline for all applications due in January (all countries).
- By December 15: U.S. references and transcripts submitted via the Common App.
- U.S. applicants: Expect Early Action/Decision replies.
 - Accepted? Send a deposit and withdraw from other applications.
 - Deferred? Stay positive; you may be reconsidered during Regular Decision.
 - Denied? Don’t lose heart; continue with other applications.
- UK applicants: Replies may begin arriving.
- Revise for mock exams.

January

- Offers may start arriving – share copies with your Career Counselor.
- January 1–15: Regular U.S. applications and some EU applications due.

- January 30: Final deadline for late U.S. and Canadian applications.
- Sit for mock exams.

February

- Track your application status on UCAS, Common App, EU portals, and others.
- Share offers received with your Career Counselor.
- Begin checking visa requirements if planning to study abroad.
- Mid-Year Reports are sent to U.S. colleges in the first week of February.
- Submit EU applications (many are rolling admissions).

March / April

- Most colleges/universities release decisions during these months.
- Meet with your Career Counselor to finalize firm and safety choices, or apply for additional options (UK Extra or worldwide).
- If waitlisted, contact the institution to express continued interest.
- Submit the Results Distribution Form to your IB Coordinator and Career Counselor so final IB results are sent to universities.

May

- Sit for IB Examinations.
- Notify your Career Counselor and all universities of your final decision.
- If you have not secured a place, speak to your Career Counselor – many U.S. and UK institutions still have places available.

June / July

- Apply for housing and complete enrollment steps.
- Request your official final transcript from the Head of School's Secretary.
- Complete the mandatory exit survey.
- Once IB results are released, coordinate with your counselor for UK Clearing and Adjustment if needed.
- Provide your counselor with supporting document requests at least 10 days in advance of deadlines.

Roles Distribution

Who Does What in the University Application Process?

It is essential to understand the responsibilities of each person involved in the university application journey.

Career Counselor's Role

The Career Counselor will provide the following support throughout the university search and application process:

- Introduce students to international university admissions processes through online and on-site sessions.
- Meet with students and parents to discuss academic concerns, career options, and higher education pathways.
- Facilitate university exploration and research.
- Advise students on identifying their “best-fit” institutions.
- Coordinate visits from university representatives, both onsite at HIS and virtually.
- Provide guidance and support with application processes across different countries.
- Connect students with local university admissions agencies when needed.
- Oversee and submit recommendations required by universities.
- Offer guidance on writing essays, personal statements, and motivational letters.
- Prepare students for university admission interviews.
- Assist with financial aid and scholarship applications.
- Advice on university admissions tests.
- Provide information on transitioning to university for both students and parents.
- Support students who are considering a GAP year.

What the Career Counselor Does Not Do

- Select universities or degree programs for the student.
- Complete applications on behalf of the student.
- Write or finalize college essays, personal statements, or motivational letters.
- Track or meet university-specific deadlines.

Important: Students are responsible for staying informed of all deadlines and for communicating with the Counseling Office to ensure requirements are met on time.

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