



Case Study

Student: Scott Thomson

Advanced Highers: Applied Maths, Maths, Physics, Music and Computing

Home Town: Hawick

University: St Andrews — School of Physics and Astronomy

Degree: Masters in Maths and Theoretical Physics

Scott left Hawick High School aged 18, but it was a summer school the year before which led to him studying at the University of St Andrews. Through the Sutton Trust, Scott, the first in his family to study at university, attended the summer school at St Andrews. He was so impressed that he chose to study there, out of the three universities he had applied to, although his five 'A' grade Advanced Highers made him acceptable to all three. His choice of degree was influenced by an enjoyment of Applied Maths at school.

Whilst not recalling any specific information about direct entry to second year at school, Scott read about the possibility in university prospectuses and thought it sounded like a sensible option for him. The option was not too obscure on the UCAS application form, where it was easy to indicate that his application was for second year entry.

In his second year at university Scott continues to live in halls (a very high proportion of students across years live in university accommodation at St Andrews). He has made lots of friends through the university Physics Society and through music, as he is also an organ scholar. Although the work pressure is higher coming directly into second year, Scott reckons that students don't need to miss out on social life if they are organised.

Scott is glad he came direct into second year, as it is always new and challenging. Friends in first year are finding it straightforward. The good match between Advanced Higher Maths and Physics and the first year syllabus of his Course means that Scott has not experienced any major gap problem. However direct second year entrants on his Course also do some first year maths modules to ensure that everyone is up to speed.

Based on his friends' experience, Scott feels that he might have found first year boring and he has no doubt that he made the right decision. That said, he made extremely good use of his sixth year at school — he feels some people see it as an

easy year and don't take full advantage of it. He is saving a year of his Course with the related financial savings, plus he is enjoying challenging work that counts from the beginning. However coming straight into second year means there is no time to experiment with other subjects, the focus has to be on subjects required for your degree.

For anyone considering second year entry to a similar degree, Scott advises them to do as much Maths as they can at school and to do Advanced Highers in their subjects. He found the Mechanics Units from Advanced Higher Applied Maths a good basis for Physics. Scott also feel parents should be relaxed about their son or daughter going for direct second year entry provided they are capable. He also thinks parents need to know that their son or daughter will not be alone: there are quite a number of students on his Course who have come directly into second year.

For Guidance and Career Scotland staff, Scott suggests that they can help pupils at school better understand the relationship between Highers, Advanced Highers and A levels etc, because this would help understanding of the different entry requirements specified by different universities. They should also support and encourage able, confident pupils committed to a particular degree to apply for direct second year entry.