

Department of Computer Science

Guidance on Reference Letters (Letters of Recommendation) for Postgraduate Study

This document is for current undergraduate students who are applying for postgraduate courses. If you've already graduated, or you need a reference for employment, see the end of this guide.

! Please follow the guidance in this document carefully. If you don't follow these steps, you might have difficulty obtaining letters, or your requests might be rejected.

When you apply to another university for postgraduate study, they will ask you to supply the contact details for your referees. Most UK universities ask for two referees, but some only ask for one. Universities in the USA usually ask for three referees.

i Don't ask for references until you've started your final year project. It's best to wait until your detailed proposal has been marked so this can be included in the letter.

If you only need one referee, you can choose your academic advisor or your project supervisor. If your academic advisor is also your project supervisor, you'll need to ask another person to be your second referee. If you need another referee, choose someone who has taught you and knows about you. Make sure you ask them in advance, otherwise they might reject your request.

i Speak to your referees in advance of submitting applications to other universities. Your academic advisor can help you to select and target suitable programmes.

You should not apply to programmes for which you do not meet the entry requirements. Popular universities receive many applications and are very selective, so you would almost certainly be rejected. Your referees can include text in their letters to support your application if they know about your motivations, experience, background, and so on. If you don't discuss your applications in advance, your referee will generate a standard template letter without any personal detail, which will not look as good and might be rejected.

! Submit your reference request via SAM before you submit your application. Academic staff are advised to reject requests from universities that are not recorded on SAM.

Request your reference letters from SAM here: https://sam.csc.liv.ac.uk/COMP/Ref_Requests.pl

The screenshot shows the SAM interface for requesting reference letters. It features a teal background with white text and input fields. At the top, it says "Please select the name of the institution/organisation requiring the reference (use the search text box to filter the list):". Below this is a dropdown menu labeled "Select..." and a search box. The next section says "Please enter name/description of course, position, or job title being applied for, e.g. MSc. Advanced Computer Science:" followed by a text input field containing the placeholder "<please enter name/description of course/position...>". At the bottom, there are three dropdown menus for "1st Ref (AA)", "2nd Ref (FYP)", and "3rd Ref:", each with "[none]" selected. A green "Submit Request" button is located to the right of these dropdowns.

- 1) Select the name of the university to which you are applying
- 2) Type in the name of the programme

- 3) Your academic advisor and project supervisor names should already be filled in, but select them if they are missing
- 4) If you need a third referee, select them in the third drop-down box

6 You are limited to six application requests during semester one. When you have submitted six requests, you won't be able to ask for more, so target your applications carefully.

It is much better to target two or three universities and put effort into writing a tailored application for each one. Students who send many applications are less likely to be accepted.

4 If you want to send more applications, you must wait until semester two when the SAM system will allow you to submit a further four requests.

You cannot make more than ten requests in total, so it's important to engage with your academic advisor before you start. They can help you to decide which universities to apply to, considering your current grades and second year average.

! Remember to request your references via SAM before you submit your applications to your target universities.

Universities usually send out automated emails as soon as you submit your application, with a link for the referee to upload their letter or decline the reference. When these emails are received, we check to see if a corresponding request exists on SAM. If it doesn't, we will decline the reference.

! Include all your referees in one application request. Don't submit multiple requests to different referees for the same application.

If one of your referees declines or rejects your request, you can approach another academic member of staff. In this case, **delete the existing request** and resubmit it with the correct referees. Remember that staff might decline your request if you haven't discussed it with them in advance.

i Update the status of your requests in SAM when you're accepted or rejected. This helps us to identify which universities are more selective, so we can better advise other students.

If you've already graduated, you won't be able to access the SAM system. Contact your old academic advisor and project supervisor by email to make sure they're still happy to provide references.

Employers rarely ask for academic references. If they do, you can ask your academic advisor and/or project supervisor. Employment references usually just ask for confirmation of your study dates and degree classification. Sometimes they send a custom form to be filled in. Always get the agreement of staff before putting their details into employment applications.

Emails from Gmail, Outlook, and other external providers might get lost in junk folders. If you don't get a reply, try to email the Student Experience Team, who will be able to pass on your request to the relevant people.