

How are search results ordered in the new UCAS search tool?

Results are returned **based on relevance** in the same way as a Google search. To begin with, we are searching three fields:

- course title
- provider name
- subject

The more matches there are for search words across those fields, the more relevant a course will be.

Mapping results to search terms

All words entered in the search bar must be matched in at least one of the three fields for a course to be considered a match. For example, a search for 'Mathematics Oxford' will only return mathematics courses at Oxford providers (assuming there are no course titles or subjects containing the word 'Oxford') rather than all mathematics courses and all Oxford courses.

The more matches there are for search words across those three fields, the more relevant a course will be. A course which has a match against all three fields is therefore likely to appear towards the top of the results, while a course which only has a match on subject is likely to appear towards the bottom of the results. For example, the top result for a postgraduate 'Law' search is a course at CILEx Law School, and for an undergraduate 'Law' search the top result is a course at The University of Law (including De Broc School of Business). This is because, in both cases, **'Law' appears in the course title and provider name, and is also one of the subjects associated with the course.** The last result will be the weakest match, because it will only have a match on subject.

The relevance of a course is also based on the **ratio of search words matched to the number of words in the field which has been searched.** For example, given three courses of 'Business, Law and Social Sciences', 'Law', and 'Business, Human Rights Law and Corporate Social Responsibility', the courses would be returned in the following order:

- Law
- Business, Law and Social Sciences
- Business, Human Rights Law and Corporate Social Responsibility

That's because the 'Law' search matches 100% of the words in the 'Law' course title, 20% of the words in 'Business, Law and Social Sciences', and only 12.5% of the words in 'Business, Human Rights Law and Corporate Social Responsibility'.

Stop words

We also have 'stop words' built into the search tool, which effectively removes trivial words from the search. In the second and third examples above, the word 'and' wouldn't actually be part of the course title **as far as the search algorithm is concerned** (it would still be displayed in your search).

When all the above factors are taken into consideration, if a number of courses are determined to have the same relevance they are ordered alphabetically, first by course title and then by provider.

Example: why, when you type in 'Kingston', does Kingston University appear above Kingston College and Kingston Maurward?

If you type in 'Kingston', you get the results in this way because the word 'University' is a stop word. This means the search tool doesn't take it into account when it is considering the relevance of the search term. However, it will consider 'College' and 'Maurward'. The search tool will therefore place Kingston University at the top, as it is the closest match to 'Kingston'. The remaining results are presented in alphabetical order of the next word, with 'College' coming before 'Maurward'.

Can providers influence the order in which their courses display?

No – results are returned based on relevance, as the service has been developed with user experience at its heart.

If you have any feedback about the search tool, please continue to provide it by using the feedback tab – this is available on every page of the search tool.