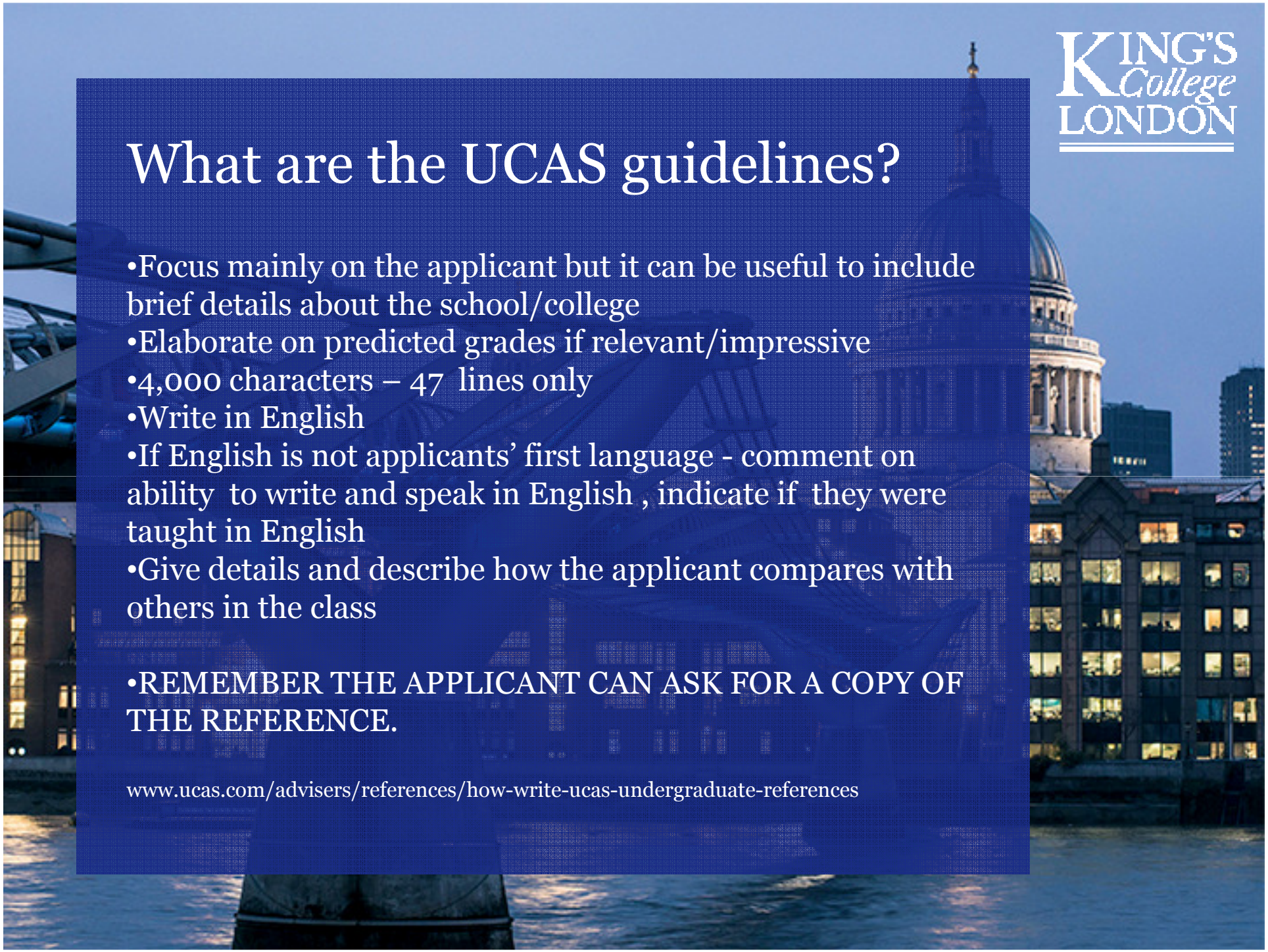
What admissions Staff say

"The reference is the first thing I look at…"

"Extremely important to assess whether an applicant has what it takes to succeed on my course"

"useful if academic skills are described"

"very useful if it is not a 'standard' applicant or there is an odd choice of A-levels such as 'false start' "



What are the UCAS guidelines?

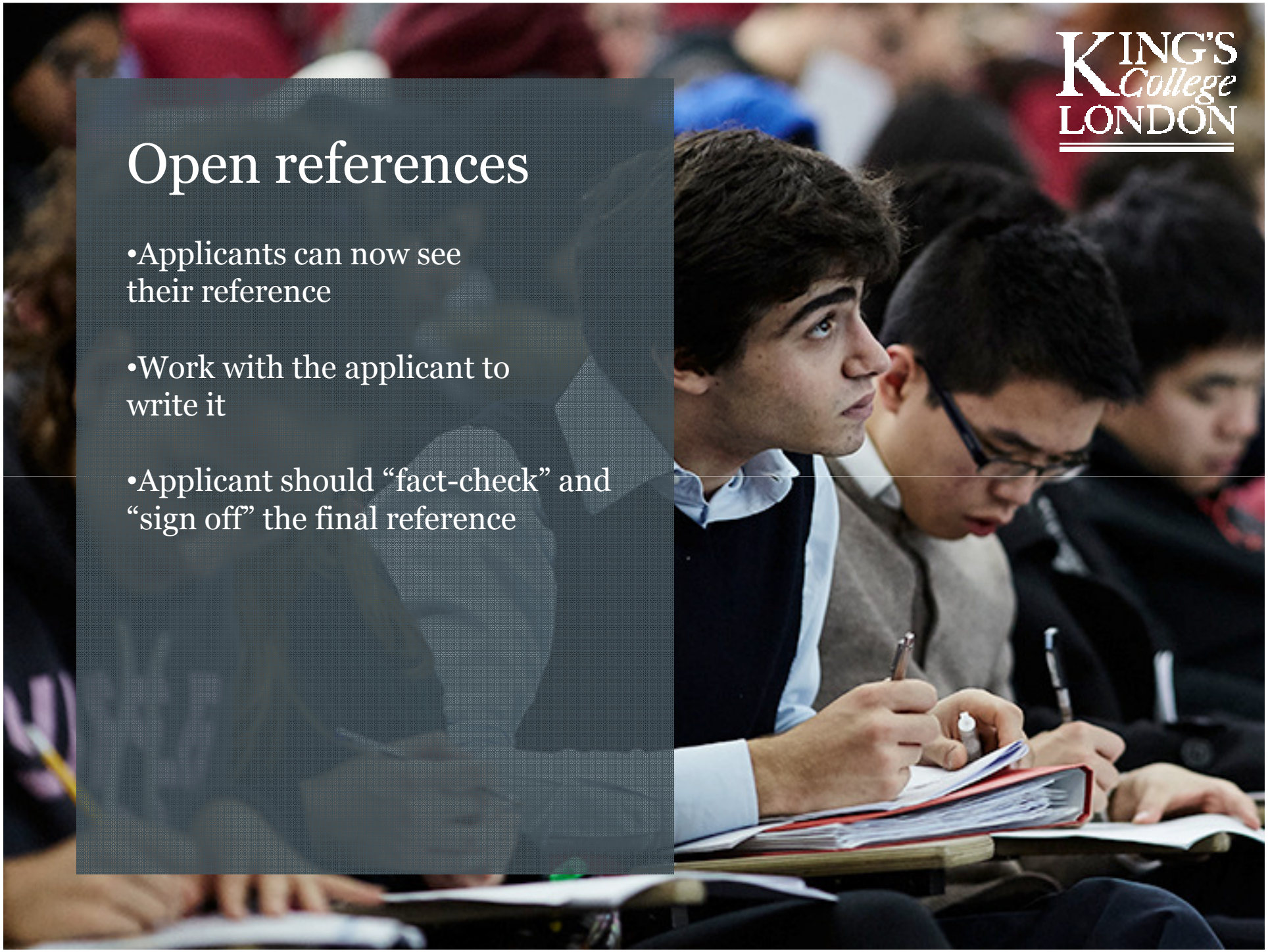
- Focus mainly on the applicant but it can be useful to include brief details about the school/college
- Elaborate on predicted grades if relevant/impressive
- 4,000 characters – 47 lines only
- Write in English
- If English is not applicants' first language - comment on ability to write and speak in English , indicate if they were taught in English
- Give details and describe how the applicant compares with others in the class

- REMEMBER THE APPLICANT CAN ASK FOR A COPY OF THE REFERENCE.

www.ucas.com/advisers/references/how-write-ucas-undergraduate-references

What does King's look for?

- A team effort
  - Knows the student best
  - An editor to pull it together
- Linked with the personal statement
- Specific to the course and subject being applied for
- Same rules as personal statement
  - Content
  - Detail
  - Evidence

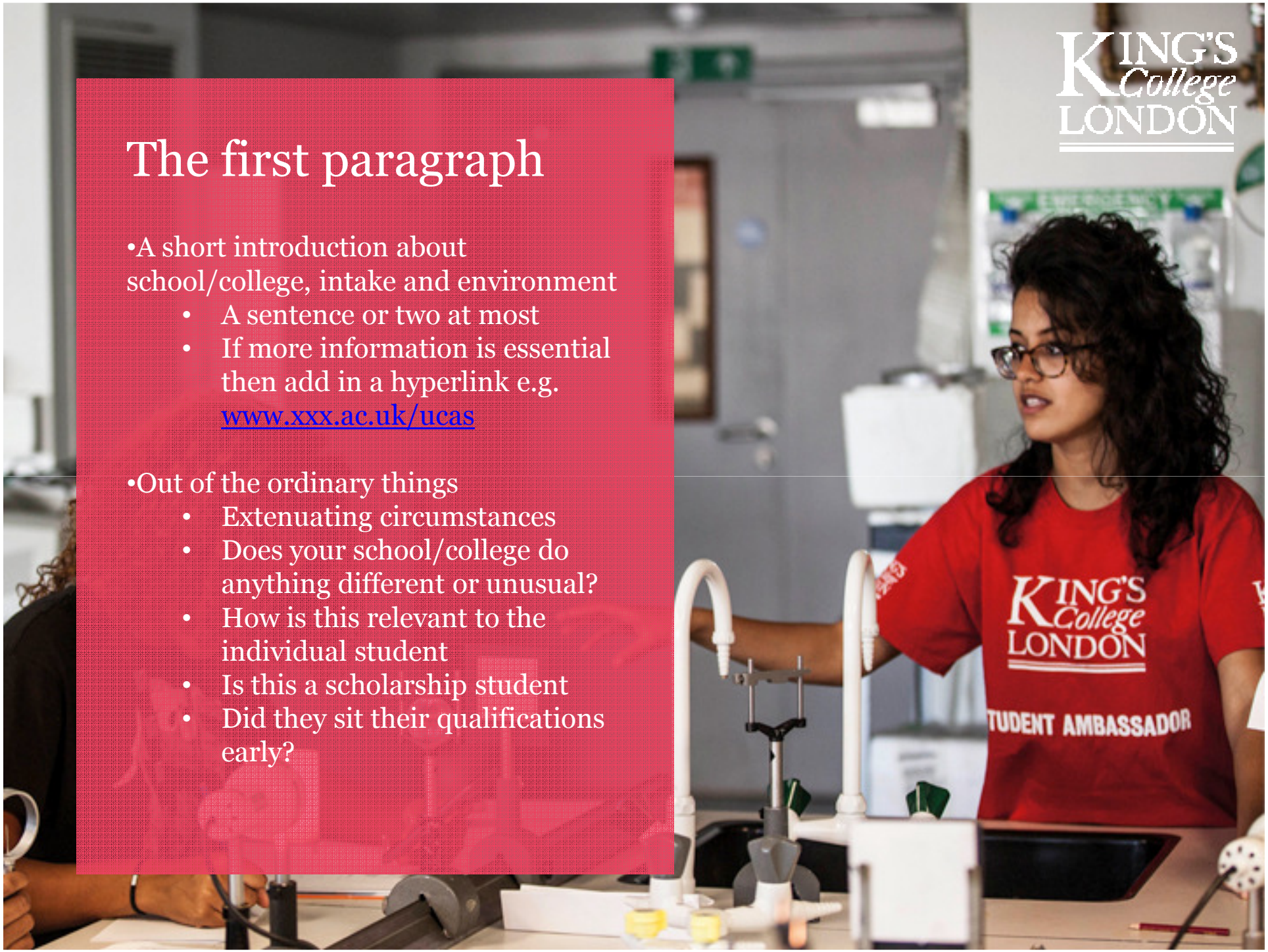


Open references

- Applicants can now see their reference
- Work with the applicant to write it
- Applicant should “fact-check” and “sign off” the final reference

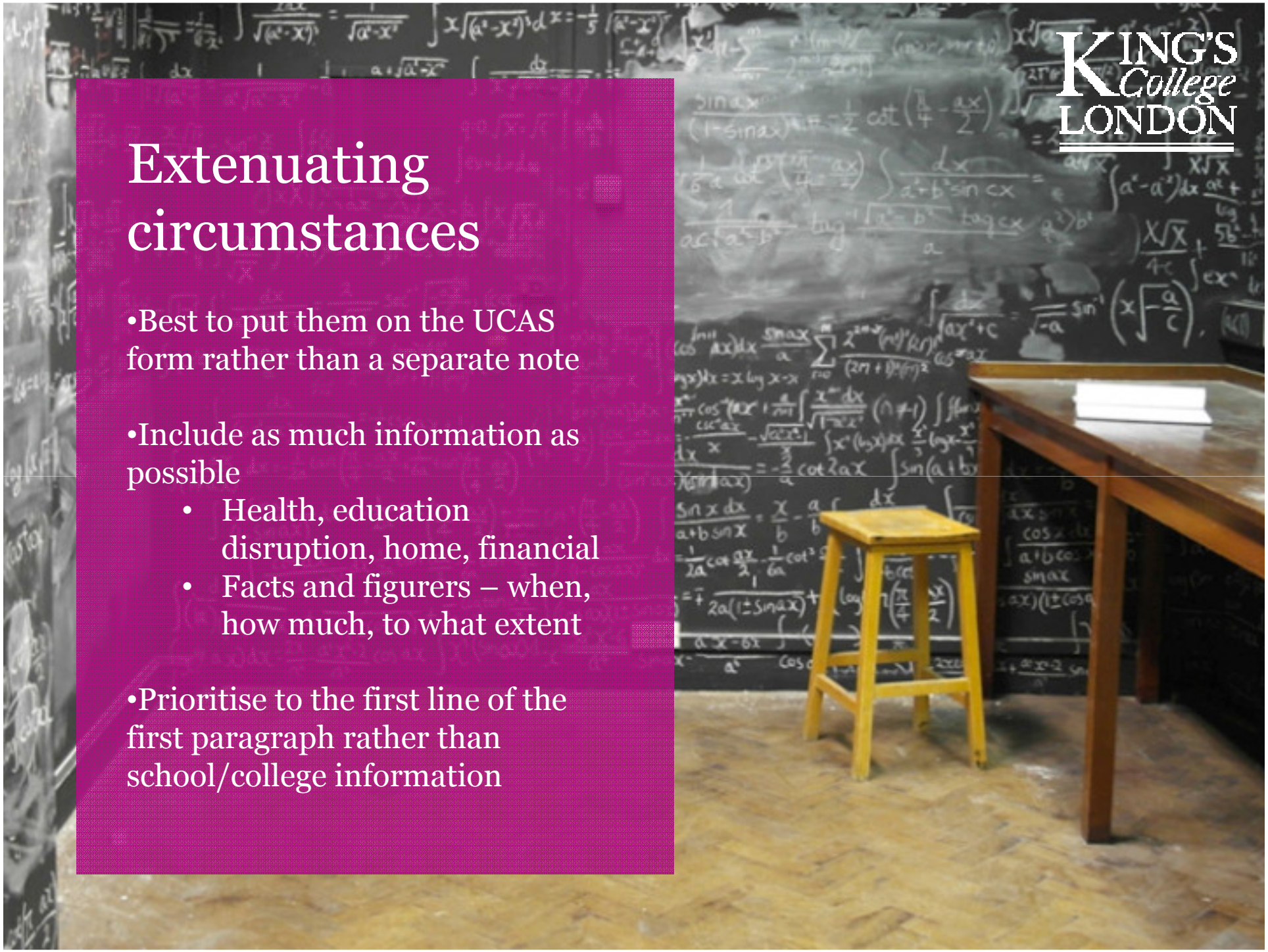
What to include

- Context
  - School/college information
  - Extenuating circumstances
- Academic skill and potential
- Suitability and interest in the course
- Non-academic (activities/interests)



The first paragraph

- A short introduction about school/college, intake and environment
  - A sentence or two at most
  - If more information is essential then add in a hyperlink e.g. www.xxx.ac.uk/ucas
- Out of the ordinary things
  - Extenuating circumstances
  - Does your school/college do anything different or unusual?
  - How is this relevant to the individual student
  - Is this a scholarship student
  - Did they sit their qualifications early?



Extenuating circumstances

- Best to put them on the UCAS form rather than a separate note

- Include as much information as possible
  - Health, education disruption, home, financial
  - Facts and figurers – when, how much, to what extent

- Prioritise to the first line of the first paragraph rather than school/college information

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Academic skill and potential

- Accounts for 60-80% of the reference
- Teachers: write twice as much to give editor more to work with and cut down
- Editor: place the most relevant subject first, with less detail on the less relevant subjects

Academic skill and potential

- Predicted grades
  - End of year exams?
  - How good is the school at predicting grades?

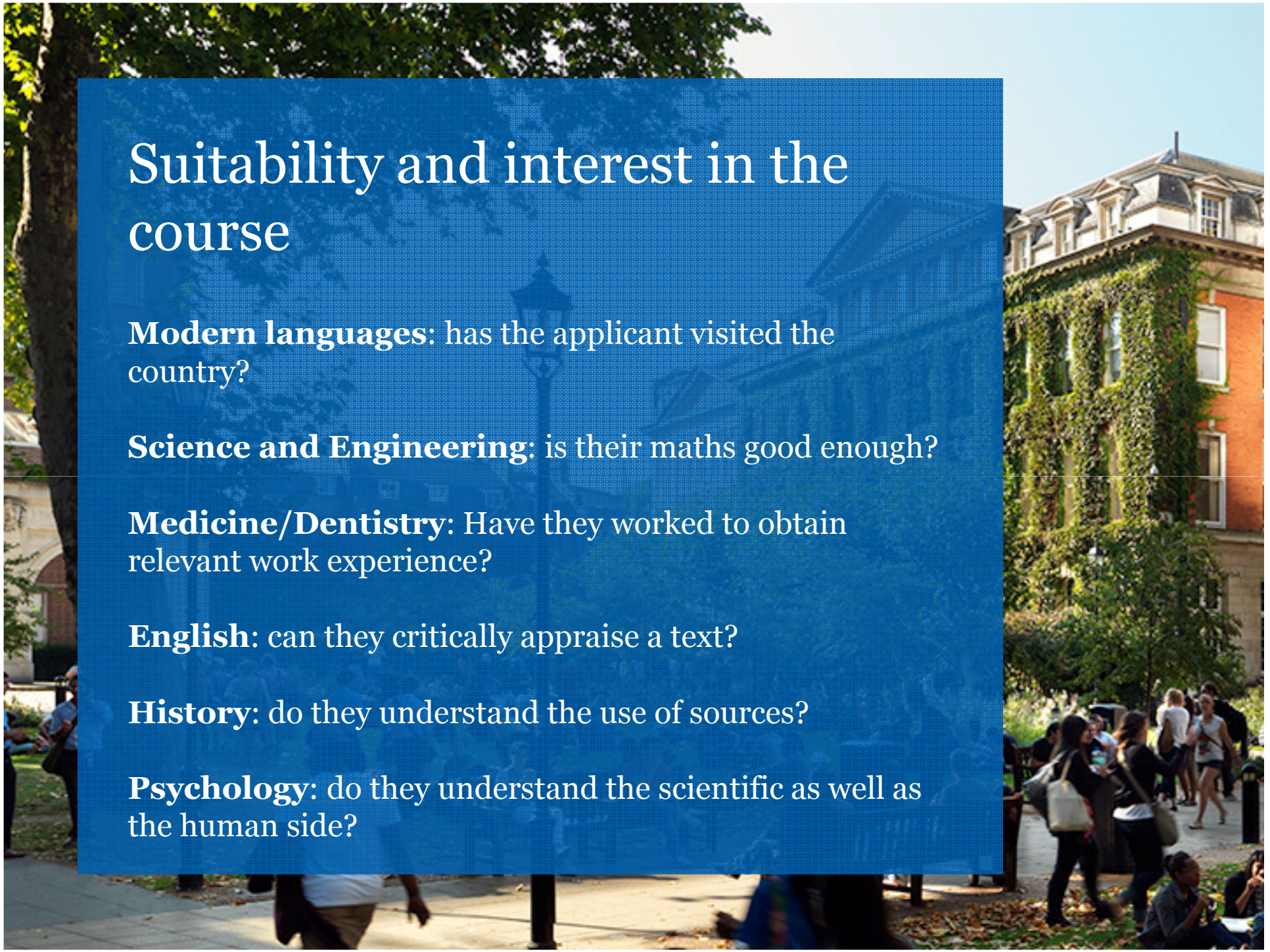
- Does the applicants' attainment reflect their ability

- How do they compare? – if not within the year, then previous years

Academic skill and potential

An indication of their potential to study at that level at that university

- Are they motivated to learn?
- Are they capable of independent study?
- Do they have an enquiring mind?
- Are they able to present an argument?
- Can they talk and discuss confidently in class?
- Are they good at problem solving?
- Have they improved?



Suitability and interest in the course

Modern languages: has the applicant visited the country?

Science and Engineering: is their maths good enough?

Medicine/Dentistry: Have they worked to obtain relevant work experience?

English: can they critically appraise a text?

History: do they understand the use of sources?

Psychology: do they understand the scientific as well as the human side?

Non-academic information

- Interpersonal and other relevant skills/qualities that may be important for the course
- Important positions of responsibility
- Career aspirations
- Anything else relevant to the course

Assessing a reference

You work in admissions at King's…

Read the references and identify in each:

- **three great things**

and

- **three things to be improved**

Top three tips for subject teachers

1. Write twice as much

2. Content, detail, evidence

3. Focus on the course and subject that's being applied to

Top three tips for editors

1.Place the most relevant information and subjects first and weight accordingly

2.Avoid filling word limit with unnecessary statements or information already on the form

3.Get applicant to fact check and sign off the final reference