

THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO University

2025-2026



www.theparentsguideto.co.uk

THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO University

2025 - 2026

Terms of use

If you've downloaded this guide on our website, thank you and we hope you'll love it. It's for your personal use on any of your own devices. Sharing with others breaches the copyright terms.

[Details and our full terms are here.](#)

If you're a school or college and would like to share our guides with your parents free of charge we offer school licences.

[Details about purchasing a school licence can be found here.](#)

Follow us on:



Click to stay in
the loop

Chapters



Jump to any section.
Just click



All the information you need

The selection and application process can seem complicated, especially if you have not been to university yourself. If you have, that may have been some time ago and things have probably changed. There's plenty of great information online for students, but very little designed specifically for parents, so it can be quite complicated to track down the exact information you need.

That's why we've created this straightforward guide covering the application process, starting from what your teen should consider in making good choices to what happens on results day once they've completed sixth form - and everything in between.

This includes step-by-step information on:

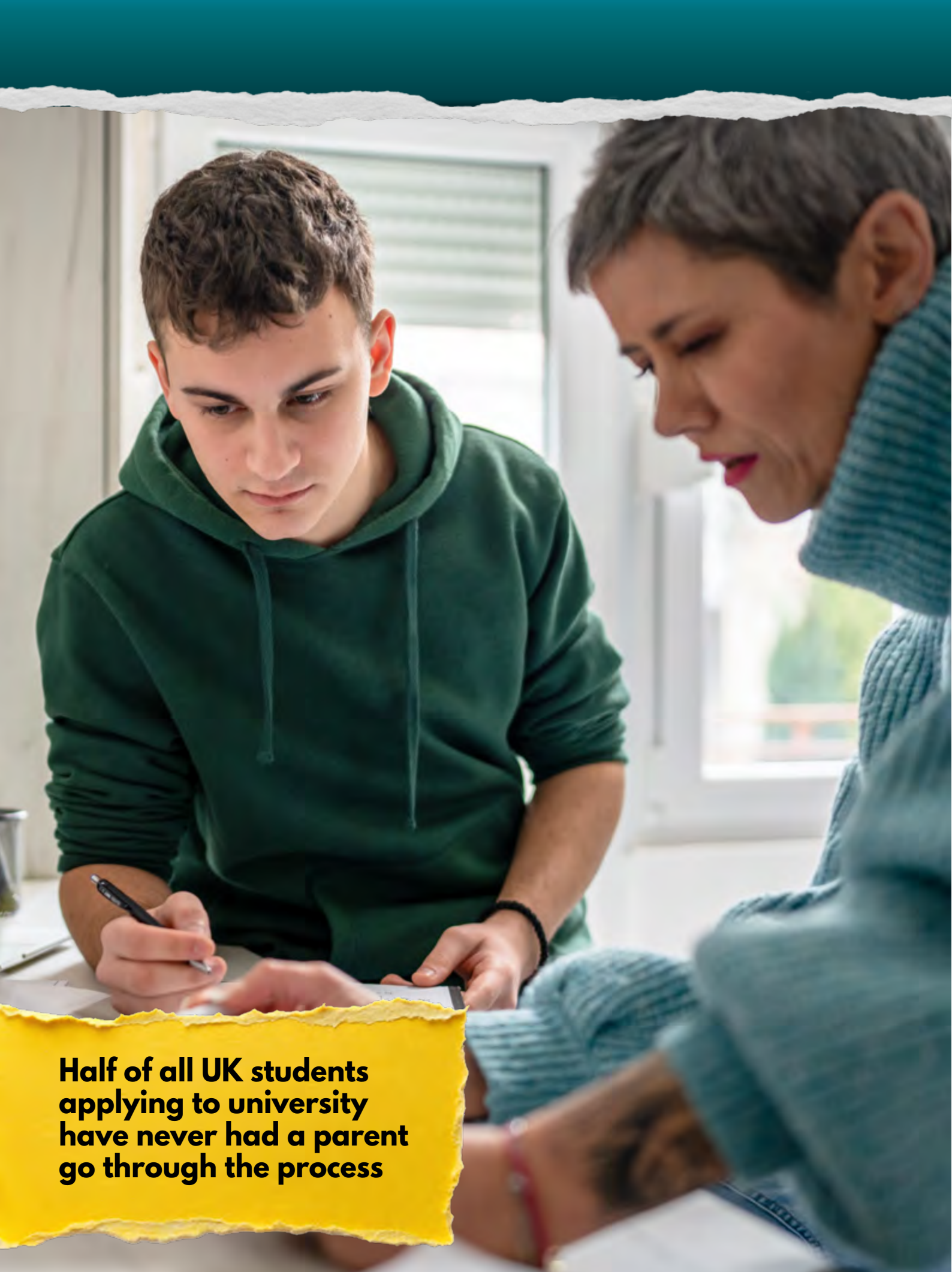
- What to look out for when considering different universities and courses;
- The UCAS application process;
- What to do on results day, whether predicted grades have been matched, surpassed or missed.

With so much depending on it, the thought of applying to university can be stressful for parents and teens alike. We believe that once you understand the process and timelines, this will eliminate much of the stress for you (and, in turn, your teen) ensuring energy is focused in the most constructive way to get the best possible outcomes.

Our aim is to help you provide calm and informed support, with the ultimate goal of helping your teen create a future to fulfil their potential. This will empower you to offer more helpful guidance to your teen, with the ultimate goal of helping them create a future to fulfil their potential and make themselves (and you!) happy.

Researching universities and courses should be an enjoyable experience, not a headache. Don't forget: your teen has as much choice and influence in selecting the right university as the university has in selecting the right students.





Half of all UK students applying to university have never had a parent go through the process

Introduction

The prospect of your teen going to university is incredibly exciting. It offers them a strong foundation for future success and happiness - not only through gaining further qualifications, but also by providing a protected environment to transition from teenager to young adult.

It can be a daunting time as well. There is pressure to make the right choices, a myriad of options available and the prospect of a different way of life, not only for them, but for you too. Selecting the right university will be one of the most important decisions your teen faces and you will want to help them every step of the way. The “right” university means the right university for them: one which offers courses they’d like to study; where they will fit

in and feel comfortable; one that will stretch their abilities without breaking them; and one where they will feel safe and happy. The “right” university for one student may not be the same for another – even within the same family. So how do you decide what is right? We’ll guide you.

Of course, whilst going to university is first and foremost about getting a higher-level qualification, it offers much more than that. It’s about learning to research independently, create professional relationships, develop lasting friendships, live without parental supervision, take up lifelong hobbies and interests. It’s learning to be a grown-up: self-reliant, resourceful and confident. It’s a time when you’ll get to watch your teen become an adult.

Join our Parent Club!

We’re here for you

Everything you need to help your teen get the best out of GCSE and sixth-form

- **Advice** when you need it
- **Actions** you can take at home -starting today
- **Live calls** with us so you can ask questions

Discover more





I had a preferred university when I was researching potential courses, but I changed my mind after visiting.

Choosing the Right University

*Interested in a particular topic?
Click on the heading to go straight there.*

What are the different categories and do they mean anything?

Explaining the Russell Group and how to decide if it's right for your teen.

What to look for when comparing universities.

What to expect when visiting universities and how to plan ahead.



Types of Universities

Don't get too caught up by university types and reputation. What matters is your teen finds a university with a degree they're interested in and an atmosphere

where they'll feel settled and comfortable.

Broadly speaking, the categories of university relate to the time at which they were established.

Ancient Universities

The original seven "ancient" universities were established before 1600: Oxford, Cambridge, St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Dublin.



Pre 1600s

1800s

1960s

1992 onwards

Red Brick Universities

Established during the industrial revolution of the 1800s, they got their name because of their iconic red brick. The original six members (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield) specialised in much needed vocational skills such as medicine and engineering. Some universities established later, but before 1960s "civic universities", are included in this category (such as Nottingham and Reading).



Plate Glass Universities

Established during the 1960s and, like red brick, take their name from the construction materials of the buildings – typically plate glass in concrete frames which was popular at the time. Plate Glass Universities were the next batch of universities to be given royal charter between 1963 and 1992. Some universities established later, but before 1960s "civic universities", are included in this category (such as Nottingham and Reading).



New Universities

"New" universities generally refer to institutions that were formerly known as polytechnics before gaining university status in 1992. These universities were traditionally more vocational in focus, offering practical, career-oriented courses alongside academic study. While they may not have the same historical prestige as older institutions, many "new" universities are highly regarded for teaching quality, student satisfaction, and employability outcomes.



Russell Group Universities

Some universities belong to the “Russell” Group. The name originates from informal meetings held in the Russell Hotel of 17 university heads who were keen to ensure their interests were represented to government.

There are currently 24 Russell universities, all of which have an excellent reputation for research, teaching and industry sector links. They benefit from high levels of funding and, given their strong reputation, entry requirements are likely to be high.

While they’re often seen as “top” universities, they’re not

automatically the best fit for every student. Many other universities across the UK offer exceptional teaching, high levels of student satisfaction, and strong graduate prospects. Some may focus more on teaching than research, have smaller class sizes, or offer a more supportive environment - all of which can be key to helping your teen succeed.

The most important thing is to help your teen choose a university that suits their personality, interests, and learning style - somewhere they’ll feel confident, supported, and motivated to do their best.

**Cardiff University,
Russell Group University**



Russell Group Universities – Full List

London

- *Imperial College London*
- *King’s College London*
- *London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)*
- *Queen Mary University of London*
- *University College London*

Midlands

- *University of Birmingham*
- *University of Nottingham*
- *University of Warwick*

North of England

- *University of Leeds*
- *University of Liverpool*
- *University of Manchester*
- *Newcastle University*
- *University of Sheffield*
- *University of York*
- *University of Durham*

South of England

- *University of Oxford*
- *University of Cambridge*
- *University of Southampton*
- *University of Exeter*
- *University of Bristol*

Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland

- *University of Edinburgh*
- *University of Glasgow*
- *Cardiff University*
- *Queen’s University Belfast*

Important Factors to Consider

Teaching and learning

How your teen learns best is important to consider when choosing a university. If they prefer lots of direction from teachers, a more traditional learning environment (an older university) might help them achieve better results and vice-versa if they work better when left largely to their own devices.

Industry links

Try to find out about the university and its industry links. Strong ties with industry often indicate excellent internship and placement opportunities which is very attractive for post degree employment prospects, especially important if you do not have these links within your own families and contacts.

University size

Like secondary schools, universities can vary enormously in size. Large universities offer a much wider subject choice, alongside greater social opportunities with an astonishing array of clubs that could give your teen the chance to learn a wonderful new hobby that lasts a lifetime. Smaller universities cannot compete with this (especially specialist establishments); however, they may offer a great-er sense of community and belonging.

Campus or city

The great advantage of campus universities is that everything is in one place – lectures, accommodation, clubs, laundries, shops etc. They are usually situated just outside or on the borders of larger towns – “a town within a town”. The impression can be that they are safer, offer less distractions and provide a stronger sense of community because, in the main, students tend to stay campus based.



City universities offer the same facilities, but they are split up across the town so travelling from one place to another is part and parcel of the package. This provides a closer experience to life at work, but getting from one place to another can take a chunk out of the day.

However, unlike campus universities, city universities do give students a chance to become fully immersed in the city itself. Whilst approved accommodation may be offered in the first year or two, later in their degree students are often required to find their own accommodation independently.

**Nottingham University
Innovation Park**



Proximity to home

Flying the nest is more appealing to some than others! This is an important consideration. Attending university is, for most students, the first time they've lived away from home. For some, this is exciting and appealing, for others it's traumatic and challenging. Is it important to your teen that they can easily pop home at weekends or will they be happy only returning during holiday periods?

In some cases, universities won't offer accommodation in halls if the family home is within a certain mileage, so it's worth checking the university website. Living at home avoids accommodation costs, although it can dilute the university experience. This can be combatted by signing up to plenty of clubs and socials. Don't forget, as parents it will be different for you too! Your lifestyle will change if your child continues to live at home as an adult attending university rather than school.

Rural or city based

A university's location could drive many of the social activities they offer, so if your teen is happiest immersed in the countryside and loves trekking, mountain-climbing and cross-country, they could feel short-changed by being plunged into an urban setting and vice-versa. If they have a particular passion, it's worth checking out whether the university already has a group focused around this hobby or, if not, how easy it would be to set up. Don't consider it trivial to focus on pastimes, happiness is a primary driver for success, and a university's environment can contribute hugely.

It's tough putting aside your preferences and supporting your teen in their choices, particularly if they are polar opposites to your own. It's natural to feel protective, but university provides a good opportunity for them to fly the nest in a protected environment.

**Queen Mary University
of London**



Open Days

Most universities offer an “open day” for prospective students, including lectures and talks, as well as existing staff and students on hand to answer questions. Websites, literature and videos can all give an excellent sense of the university, but nothing beats a personal visit.

If you can, join your teen on visits without taking control; go with them on open days to give them support and guidance (it can be daunting visiting a new place, much more so when you think it could hold the key to your future happiness) but give them some time alone if they need it.

Think beyond academics

Don't focus solely on the academic elements of the university. Check out halls of residence, social centres and sports facilities. If the university is town-based, spend time in the local area and give some thought to how it would feel living there for the next few years. It's not a lifelong commitment, but three-to-five years, especially for a late teenager, seems a long time.

From a practical viewpoint, what looks like a hop, skip and a jump on the map could prove a deal-breaker when thinking of the practicalities of living in one part of town but learning in another.

Plan ahead

It is vital your teen arrives prepared to get plenty of answers to whether the university can meet their needs. Ideally, being armed with lots of questions to ask during a visit gives a good basis for conversation and interaction on the day, which could help them stand out.

However, if your teen hasn't yet gained the confidence to do this, then they could contact a student representative ahead of the visit and get answers by email or set up a chat with a student while they're there. What's important is to get a good sense of the comprehensive opportunities available and whether they are offered in an environment that suits your teen's personality to make the most of them.

Trust your teen's instincts

No matter how appealing a course might be, if your teen hates the feel of the university the minute they step in the door, it's highly unlikely that they will get either the qualifications or experience they deserve. What looks good in theory doesn't always match up in reality. Pay heed if they take an instant dislike to a place.

Make the most of any offers

Remember to check the university websites. Some offer vouchers towards the cost of travel to open days.

Virtual Open Days

Some universities offer “virtual open days”. These may include video tours, online seminars and chats

with students and lecturers. Whilst virtual open days do not provide the same insights as making a personal visit, do get your teen to make the best out of them where physical visits are not possible. Without the need to travel, they may even be able to attend more open days, giving them a broader perspective on what's on offer and how universities differ.



Preparing for an open day

To get the best value out of university open days, it's advisable to prepare in advance. Open days often include a variety of lectures, walking tours and presentations, so your teen should check what's on offer and plan accordingly.

Can't attend? Don't worry

Call the admissions team to make a private viewing. You'll still be able to look around and speak to staff from the relevant faculty. There may also be virtual open days and virtual tours available online.



Prepare Questions

Open days are a great opportunity to get honest, up-to-date answers that may not be available online — and some responses might differ from previous years, such as whether they'd consider applicants who just miss the entry requirements. Encourage your teen (and yourself!) to prepare a few questions in advance. This not only helps make the most of the visit, but also makes it easier to compare different universities afterwards.



Speak with Students

Whilst open days provide an opportunity to receive information on the degree course and the university itself, nothing beats hearing from someone with first-hand experience of what it is like to study there. It's a good idea for both of you to speak to current undergraduate students if the opportunity arises - ask them questions about teaching quality, societies, accommodation and the local area.



Walk and Observe

Walk around the campus and university town or city. Try to encourage your teen to get a good feel for the environment. Can they imagine themselves living there? Do the students look happy? Is it a friendly place to be?



The Art of Seduction

Universities take the opportunity of open days to showcase their most impressive facilities. Be mindful, what you are being shown likely represents the very best they have to offer. Don't let your teen be totally seduced by this, they must make their decision based on plenty of other research too.

UCAS – The official site for UK university applications, with a comprehensive open day calendar

The Uni Guide -User-friendly search tool with student reviews and comparison features

WhatUni - Browse open days by location, course, or university name

Tip: Many open days require booking in advance, and places can fill quickly especially in the summer term of Year 12 and autumn term of Year 13.

Possible Open Day Questions for Your Teen

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



- Will I still be considered if I do not meet my predicted grades or if I do not have the GCSE entry requirements stated on your website?
- Will you consider other qualifications when making an offer (e.g. music, EPQ, additional courses)?

THE APPLICATION PROCESS



- What is the university looking for in a student's application / personal statement - is there anything I can do to increase my chances of being offered a place?
- Can you recommend any reading or activities to inform my personal statement?
- How do you feel about gap years and deferred entry applications?
- Do you hold interviews?

ACCOMMODATION



- Is a place in halls of residence guaranteed?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of living on or off campus?

THE COURSE



- How will the course be assessed? Will it consist mostly of coursework or exams?
- How many students will be on the course?
- How many hours of timetabled teaching does the university provide and what is the ratio between lecture and seminar teaching?
- What support do you provide for pupils with specific learning needs e.g. dyslexia

THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE



- Can a student take on part-time employment whilst studying?
- Does the university provide opportunities to study abroad / work in industry?
- Can you tell me more about the student union and what opportunities there are for students to get involved?
- What sports and student clubs can I get involved with?

CAREER PROSPECTS



- What type of careers / jobs do students go on to have after graduating?

Choosing the Right Course

*Interested in a particular topic?
Click on the heading to go straight there.*

A quick guide to single, joint and combined honours degrees, and what they mean for your teen.

Do rankings really matter, and what else should you think about when choosing a university?

What A level grades, UCAS points and subject choices mean for your teen's application.

What parents need to know about tuition fees, student loans and their teen's living costs.

After a lot of research, I decided to do a degree course in Space Science and Robotics. I may never be an astronaut, but I could develop equipment that gets used in space.

Types of Courses

Most university courses offer a three-year undergraduate programme, but some offer “sandwich” courses which last four years, one of which is spent in the workplace (which could be overseas). There’s also the opportunity to obtain certificates of education, diplomas, higher national diplomas and foundation degrees.

Bachelors

Usually three or four years long, these can be single subject, dual subject (dual or joint honours) or several subjects (combined honours). Typically there’s a quantity that everyone studies – the core – and then options to specialise by taking different modules. Some bachelors offer sandwich courses, which means an additional year in a work placement as part of the degree. In some cases there’s the option to convert the bachelors to masters by studying for an additional year.

Bachelor of Arts or Science?

The major difference between a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and a Bachelors of Science degree (BS or BSc) lies in the subject chosen for study (i.e. more science focused or arts focused). For some subjects, this classification may differ between universities, such as economics and psychology. In this case, a BSc in economics or

psychology is normally more suitable for students with an aptitude for maths and scientific study compared to their BA equivalents.

Foundation years

This is a one-year study period that can count as the first year towards a degree or as a standalone course. Foundation years are designed to increase knowledge in specialised subjects required for a degree course and are usually taken if students didn’t meet the entry requirements of the university either because of poor grades or different subject combinations.

Diploma in Foundation Studies (art and design)

A route towards art and design courses allowing specialisation in a student’s specific area of art or design.

Foundation degrees

Not to be confused with foundation years, foundation degrees last two years and offer an alternative if a pupil hasn’t reached the grade for a degree course, doesn’t want to commit to three or more years at university, or prefers more vocational study. They can be “topped up” with a final year to equate to a bachelors degree.

Degree of bachelor level apprenticeship

This is a comparatively new university offering, allowing students taking an apprenticeship to gain a bachelors (or masters) qualification by both working and studying at university part time.

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) or Diploma (HNDs)

The Certificate takes one year and is equivalent to a first year degree course, whilst the diploma takes two years and is equivalent to the first two years of a degree course. Both can be topped up to a full degree by extending the course or joining a degree course at a later stage. The benefit here is to be able to study for a degree in stages.





Choosing the right course is more important than the university type

Researching the Right Course

There are over **35,000 undergraduate courses** available in the UK, so the right course is out there – it just might be tricky to find it! There's plenty of information about university courses available so your teen should research diligently before making choices, rather than relying on "my teacher recommends it", "my parents took it", or "I like the university because my friends are going".

When to step back

This research is something that your teen should undertake – not you on their behalf. Avoid the temptation to use this as an opportunity to investigate options you would have liked to take given the chance. It may be tough with the benefit of hindsight and experience, but try not to forget it's your teen's life and their choices, not yours.

Finding focus

Thinking of favourite subject choices is a good way to narrow focus, but don't forget many of the subjects offered

Discover more

- [UCAS course search](#)
- [Uni Guide search](#)

at degree level aren't covered in sixth form options, so don't let your teen restrict themselves to only considering topics they've already studied. Of course, if they are already set on a certain career path, their choice of degree may be obvious, which can be helpful. If not, some thought and reflection on things they enjoy that might apply to the workplace can give direction so some research on jobs might help streamline options by providing guidance on routes into industry.

Too much choice?

If they are struggling with a starting point, investigating what's of interest to them is a good place to start. You think they spend too much time playing games? How about a BA in Computer Games Design – it can be a lucrative business post-graduation. Not academic but loves sports? BA in Sports Management. A passion for understanding how things work? How about MEng in Product Design? Always reading crime thrillers? Perhaps they'd enjoy a BA in Criminology.

Predicted grades

Your teen should research courses with entry requirements that are closely aligned to their predicted grades, allowing for some aspirational and safe choices either side.



Suggested Starting Points

There is plenty of information about university courses available, and whilst it's up to your teen to do the research, as parents you can help guide them by checking that the courses they shortlist fit their personality.

For example, a teen that likes to be active and enjoys practical studies

and getting involved is likely to do better on a course that has plenty of experiential learning rather than one that is largely based around lectures and seminars.

On the next page there are some suggestions for things to consider when deciding whether a course meets your teen's needs.



Is your teen academic or practical?

- Do they enjoy being in the classroom?
- Do they enjoy learning in a studio or outside?
- Do they enjoy writing essays and researching topics or prefer to make and produce things?

Which school subjects do they enjoy?

- Is there a particular part of a subject they have liked?
- Do they have a natural flair for a subject?
- If they enjoy more than one subject, are there any common themes?

What are your teen's hobbies?

- Is your teen particularly passionate about any music, sport or art related activities?
- Think about your teen's personality traits
- Try to think outside the box - do they have a particular interest in current affairs? Gaming? Helping others?

Has your teen expressed interest in a career?

- Try to think of subjects that will help them pursue this career without narrowing their options too much if they change their mind later

League Tables

League tables can be a useful guide in assessing a university's suitability for your teen when used in conjunction with other considerations. However, one league table may not show the whole picture, so review different types of league tables together.

National league tables

National league tables are published annually by the Complete University Guide, The Guardian and The Times / Sunday Times. They focus on full-time student experience and cover a range of factors including student satisfaction, entry standards, facilities and academic services. Well established universities have had a long time to hone their subject offerings and know how to perform well in league tables.

By contrast, new universities do not have this advantage and whilst they may not appear high-up on the rankings, they may offer new, innovative subjects which can prove more relevant to today's working environment.

A variance of 20-30 places on the league table could indicate as little as a couple of points difference, so bear this in mind when considering where a university is ranked.



Discover more

- [The Guardian 2025](#)
- [The Times 2025](#)
- [The TEF Ratings](#)

Subject specific league tables

Don't miss out on considering subject league tables to see how a university delivers in the specific subject area of interest. This is different from national league tables, which shows how a university performs overall. It's possible a university may rank low on overall league tables, but be very strong and well-respected in a particular area of study (and vice versa).

If seeking out a professional degree, check for professional accreditation by approved membership bodies. This is a good indicator of whether the course is highly regarded within industry and whether it's equally valued both within the UK and internationally.



The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

A national scheme run by the Office for Students, the TEF rating is decided by an independent panel with expertise in teaching and learning, of which over a third are student members. Ratings awarded are gold, silver, bronze (or "requires improvement" for those not awarded a grade) in two categories: student experience and student outcomes. Participation is voluntary, so not all universities will have TEF ratings. The latest TEF results were released in 2023.

University Entry Requirements

Different universities have different entry requirements, so it's important to check the university's website for details. Entry requirements are set out by the university to assess whether your teen is suitable for a particular course.

Unis set their own standards

Subject combinations, types of qualification and subject grades needed for entry not only vary from university to university, but may also differ within the same university for different degrees. As a rule, universities are not flexible about their entry requirements (i.e. if they set minimum grades, your teen will have to reach those grades); however, there are sometimes exceptions to rules (if your teen can offer something special or if many students have failed to meet the entry requirements that year) so it's always worth speaking to admissions to see where they might flex requirements.

Discover more

- [Tariff calculator](#)

Not all sixth form qualifications are considered equal by some universities. For example, some do not accept BTEC or T Levels and others consider certain A Levels weightier than others.

Customised admissions tests

Some universities not only require a specified qualification grade at A Level (or minimum number of UCAS points) but they also have their own admissions tests / examinations to help them assess candidates like for like. Interviews may also form a critical part of the application process, but not for all universities. If applying for performing arts, auditions will also be likely to feature and other art subjects may require the development of a portfolio.

GCSEs could matter

Some universities may also specify certain GCSE results. With AS Levels no longer contributing to your teen's final A Level grade, universities are increasingly looking at GCSE performance as a formal indicator of your teen's academic ability.

It's worth checking

Always check with the university (by ringing the admissions tutor) if your teen's particular qualification is not listed on their website. Some universities are willing to be flexible for the right candidate.

UCAS points tariff

In order to compare students as fairly as possible, UCAS offers a tariff whereby each sixth form qualification is awarded a certain number of points (previously known as the "points system"). These points are allocated through a combination of the length of study and the grade achieved.

This tariff is recognised nationally across the UK and universities use it to gauge the standard of achievement for sixth form students. It enables them to make comparisons between students

who have studied different types of sixth form courses – i.e. National Highers, BTEC, A Levels etc.

Depending on the perceived course difficulty and the type of university, the minimum entry requirements will vary both from university to university and from course to course within the same university.

Not all post sixth form establishments cite a UCAS tariff, they might specify grade requirements (i.e. x3 A Levels, minimum ABB), but it is the same thing.

GCE Qualifications		EPQ	UCAS POINTS
A level	AS level		
A*			56
A			48
B			40
C			32
		A*	28
D		A	24
	A	B	20
E	B	C	16
	C	D	12
	D		10
		E	8
	E		6



The IB Diploma:

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE DIPLOMA				UCAS POINTS
IB DIPLOMA HIGHER LEVEL	IB DIPLOMA STANDARD LEVEL	IB EXTENDED ESSAY/ THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE	WELSH BACCALAUREATE SKILLS CHALLENGE	
H7			A*	56
H6			A	48
H5			B	40
H4	S7		C	32
H3	S6		D	24
	S5		E	16
	S4	A		12
	S3	B		10
		C		8
		D		6
		E		4

T Levels:

T Levels	UCAS POINTS
Distinction*	168
Distinction	144
Merit	120
Pass (C or above on the core)	96
Pass (D or E on the core)	72

BTEC Qualifications:

BTEC Qualification (QCF/RQF)				UCAS POINTS
Extended Certificate	Foundation Diploma	Diploma	Extended Diploma	
			D*D*D*	168
			D*D*D	160
			D*DD	152
			DDD	144
			DDM	128
		D*D*	DMM	112
		D*D		104
		DD	MMM	96
	D*D*			84
		DM	MMP	80
	D*D			78
	DD			72
		MM	MPP	64
	DM			60
D*				56
D	MM	MP	PPP	48
	MP			36
M		PP		32
	PP			24
P				16



University Websites

University websites may look different when comparing side by side, but the information they relay is similar and will definitely cover course content, information about the teaching style and entry requirements.

It's important to be aware that degree courses vary significantly between universities:- even when the degree title is the same! So make sure your teen pays close attention to understanding the differences in course modules, assessment methods, teaching styles and entry requirements between universities.

These differences could be deciding factors in which course (and university) is your teen's preferred option. For example, if there are two universities of similar rankings and style that they like almost equally, where one offers a course with a teaching style better suited to their personal learning preferences, or course content more closely matching their areas of interest - perhaps they are really keen to have overseas experience - this would be a significant contributor to their final decision.

Degree courses vary between universities and each degree may provide a very different experience for your teen. Thoroughly research the modules that each degree provides by comparing core modules (mandatory modules of study) and optional modules between each university degree.

Furthermore, some universities may provide additional options, such as a the possibility of studying abroad (usually in a partner university) or a year long work placement. These may be important considerations in giving your teen a particular advantage when entering their chosen career.

Things to consider:

- What are the core modules that must be studied in years 1, 2 and 3?
- Which optional modules are on offer?
- Is there an option to study abroad?
- Is there an option to spend one year in industry?
- Is there an option to combine this subject with another subject?

Not all students learn in the same way so it is important to research how each degree is delivered and assessed. If your teen is particularly anxious when it comes to examinations, then choosing a degree which is mainly assessed through coursework or presentations may increase your teen's chances of success.

Moreover, think carefully about your teen's learning needs. Will they thrive in small classroom based environments (seminars), lectures or more practical learning environments?

Things to consider:

- Does teaching mainly consist of lectures or seminars?
- Is the course largely exam based or coursework based?
- What are the facilities like?
- Is a dissertation in year 3 required?
- For practical subjects such as Media Studies, how much of the course is theoretical and how much is practical?

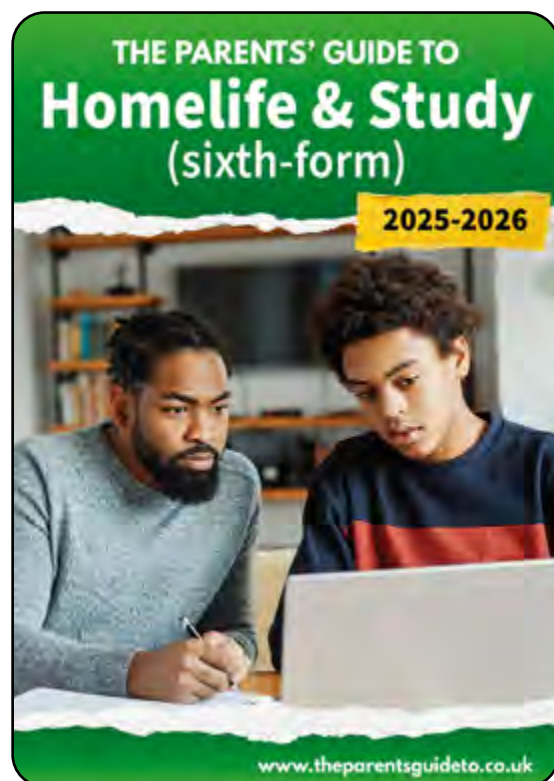
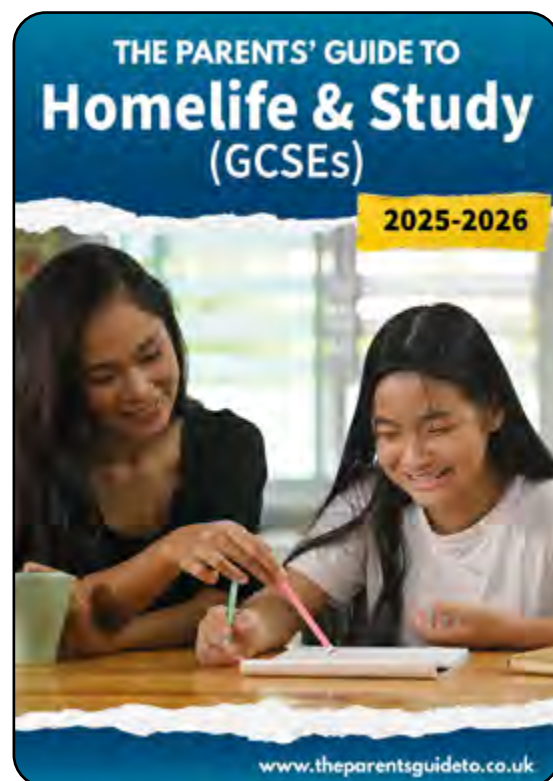
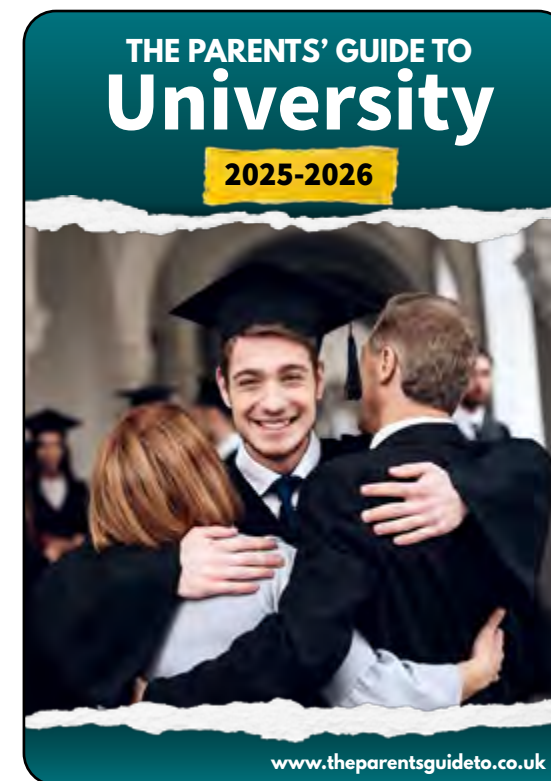
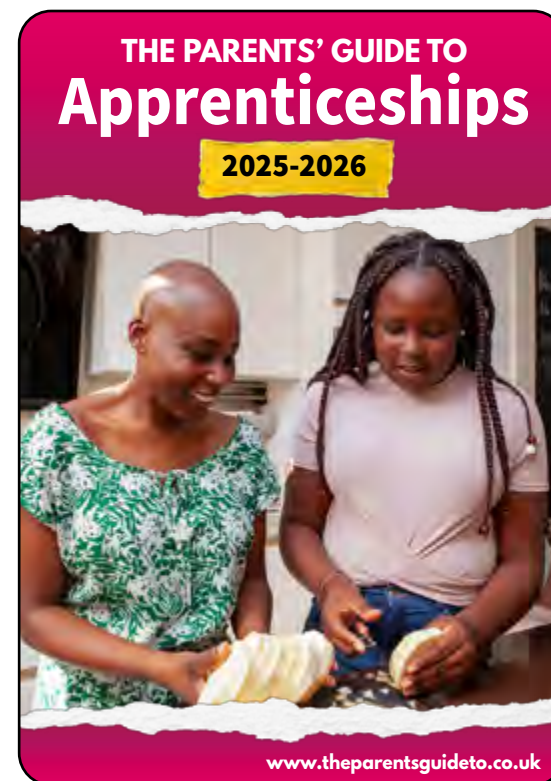
Each university sets its own entry requirements so make sure your teen is accessing courses based on their ability and potential. Entry requirements provide a good indication of the difficulty of each degree course and so it is important to be realistic in what your teen can access when moving into higher education.

Remember, your teen can only apply to a maximum of five universities through UCAS, so carefully note all the entry requirements for each university before applying to check whether your teen is likely to meet these.

Things to consider:

- What are the minimum entry requirements?
- Does the course require a grade in a particular subject?
- Will the course accept BTECs, T Levels or alternative qualifications to A Level?
- Do they require a minimum Level of Maths or English?
- Does the course require a portfolio or an interview prior to making an offer?

The Parents' Guide to:



Parent Guides:

Our range of interactive guides provide you with easy to follow advice, hyperlinks to reliable sources and the most up-to-date information.

Shop now





Understanding Uni Fees

With university fees at almost £10,000 per year plus living costs on top, the prospect of committing to three or four years studying can seem as if the financial burden outweighs the benefits. But graduates earn more than school leavers and payback terms are linked to earnings (as explained later) so it can be a worthwhile investment.

Loan applications

Loan applications are made to the country of home residence, not the destination university through Student Finance. So, if your teen lives in Scotland and is going to university in England, applications are made to Scotland. Student Finance is the organisation responsible for providing Tuition Fee Loans and Maintenance Loans to students at university. Applications must be made separately.

Tuition fee loan: the loan to cover the annual cost of the university degree

Maintenance loan: the loan to cover cost of living such as accommodation, food, course materials.

Timing

Applications for student finance can be made prior to receiving results and confirming a university offer. So, once application to UCAS has been completed, your teen can make a provisional application for student finance whilst waiting on results. Loan applications must be made at least eight weeks before the course commences, otherwise payment may be delayed: don't forget this covers both types of loan - tuition fees and maintenance loans. We recommend encouraging your teen to apply early to ensure loans are processed on time.

Tuition fees

The tuition fees (up to £9,535 per annum) are paid via Student Finance direct to the university (once the place has been accepted) and parental earnings do not impact this.

Maintenance loans

The maintenance loan is influenced by parental earnings. The higher your income, the less money will be awarded. Don't forget – any maintenance loan awarded is paid termly directly to the student, so make sure they know how to budget!



A Different Type of Loan

Divorced / separated Parents

Where parents are separated or divorced, income is assessed on the parent with whom the teen resides and (if applicable) their current partner (irrespective of whether or not that partner is responsible for the teen). Income for the other biological parent is not assessed.

Repayments

Repayments are collected via Student Loans Company, who work alongside HMRC to collect repayments in line with earnings after the degree is complete.

Repayment terms are generous, so avoid thinking that student loans are like conventional bank loans or even a mortgage.

Discover more

- [GOV UK](#)
- [The Student Loans Company](#)
- [Student Finance calculator](#)

Importantly, no money is taken until earnings reach a certain threshold, they are paused if earnings drop below that threshold (maternity or redundancy), they are not evaluated on partner earnings and they are wiped clean after 40 years after the first payment was due.

Other financing options

It's worth reviewing scholarships, grants and bursaries to see whether you teen might qualify for additional income, particularly if they are studying for specialist degrees such as medical, social work or teaching.

Prepayments

Be careful with making pre-payments. Many students never repay the full amount of their loans before the amount is wiped clear. Trying to save on interest fees can prove a false economy. However, if they are likely to have continued employment at a high salary, then it might be worth making a prepayment. There are online calculators to help work this out.

Be aware!

Even with the maximum maintenance allowance, it may be necessary to supplement living costs, either through you contributing directly or your teen getting work whilst studying:- or a combination of both!

Repayment terms are:

- ✓ No payments are made until the student is earning £25,000 in the April after graduation (or the April four years after their course starts if studying for more than four years)
- ✓ Once they qualify for payment, they repay only 9% on any amount earned over the threshold (so if they earned £26,000 in April after graduating, they would pay £7.50 a month)
- ✓ Repayments are docked directly at source and they cease if salary drops below the threshold
- ✓ Interest rates apply from when the loan is given (i.e. start of the degree)
- ✓ Any outstanding debt is wiped clear after 40 years



It can take 6-8 weeks to hear about support entitlement

Entitlements

For students with a learning need, mental health issue or disability, there's the option to apply for dedicated funding to help with extra costs associated with their condition. It's called Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs).

This is in addition to student finance and there is no need to repay the money awarded. It may cover specialist equipment (i.e. a computer, voice recognition software, dictaphone), non-medical helpers (i.e. proof reader, note taker, sign interpreter), extra travel (i.e. the cost of taxis if you teen can't take public transport) and / or accommodation contribution (i.e. if the bathroom needs to be adapted to meet your teen's needs). It is applied to costs incurred directly because of undertaking the course (rather than costs that would be accumulated anyway) and costs incurred over and above that of those made by any student without a similar disadvantage.

The allowance is assessed not by household income but individual needs and, upon eligible application,

it will be necessary to undergo a "study needs assessment" at an approved DSA centre (they will send you a link identifying local assessors). However, if a student is applying for both financial support and DSAs, they must complete their student loan application through Student Finance England first (as explained in Understanding Fees section) else they will not be able to make the online application.

Don't forget , if your teen has an education and healthcare plan ("EHCP") this will lapse on higher education, but support will be available through the DSA.

Whilst notification of eligibility can take place relatively quickly, it can take a long time to process and complete all stages of the application (up to fourteen weeks), so do apply early. To qualify for DSAs, a student must be an undergraduate and studying for at least one year (this can be part time, depending on the "course intensity") and have written evidence from a qualified specialist about their condition.



The maximum allowances can be found online, however, very few students are entitled to the full benefit and most receive much less. Money is usually paid to the organisation providing the service although in some cases it may be paid to the student's bank account. Refunds and reimbursements will not be given for any costs incurred prior to the appropriate application and approval systems. If awarded the cost of a new computer, it will be necessary to contribute £200 towards this.

It's not necessary to inform the college or university if your teen receives DSAs; however, it might be helpful for them to know to ensure your teen gets all the support available. In addition, colleges and universities will have a disability adviser who will be able to give you help and advice about your teen's entitlements.

Discover more

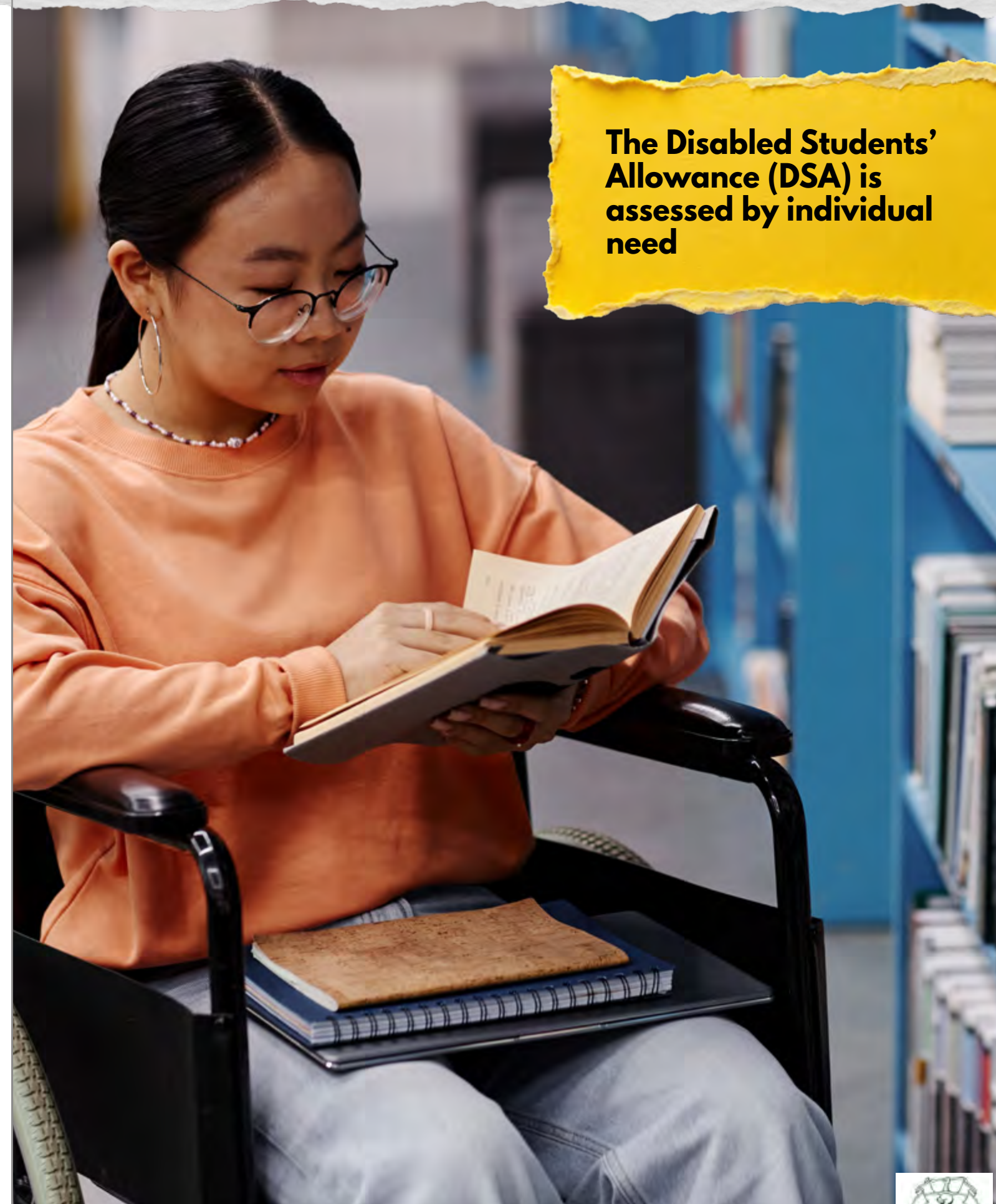
- [GOV UK - DSA](#)
- [UCAS - DSA](#)

Conditions that might qualify for DSA include:

- social, emotional and mental health difficulties (such as ADD, ADHD)
- sensory and / or physical needs (such as visual impairment or equipment to support a physical difficulty)
- cognition and learning difficulties (such as dyslexia or dyspraxia)
- communication and interaction needs (such as difficulties with speech / language, Asperger's Syndrome, autism)
- some long-term health conditions (such as HIV, cancer, chronic heart disease).

Keep Student Finance England updated about any changes in their condition because it may mean an entitlement to more allowance.

The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is assessed by individual need



The UCAS Process

*Interested in a particular topic?
Click on the heading to go straight there.*

*How the university application system works and
what your teen needs to do when.*

*What makes a strong personal statement and how
you can support them in writing it.*

*How your teen can keep track of offers and what
happens after they've applied.*

What to do if your teen doesn't receive any offers.

My school provided a lot of help
about how to fill in the UCAS
application, but I still needed to do
some research myself.

Understanding UCAS

All university applications are made through the University and Colleges Admissions Service (“UCAS”). There is a strict process and application procedure so it’s vital to know what information needs to be provided, in what format and when it needs to be submitted. Unlike schools that can sometimes flex deadlines for academic work, the UCAS deadlines are fixed and late applications may not be considered so it’s important to respect the timetable outlined.

1. Personal details
2. Additional information
3. Student finance
4. Choices
5. Education details
6. Personal statement
7. Employment

Plan ahead

The application process is straightforward but the information provided will need plenty of thought and preparation before submission. This is not something to leave until the last minute. Applications that have been rushed are obvious and a slap-dash approach could jeopardise opportunities and offers.

Nominated access

Whilst your teen needs to complete the application themselves, in the personal information section, there’s the option for them to add your name as “nominated access” which means that, with a few of their personal details, you will be able to track progress with their application directly either with UCAS or the universities they’ve applied to. This is very handy if they are travelling and out of contact, or not very good at keeping you updated on progress.

Facilitating information sharing

UCAS doesn’t make applications for finance, but giving permission for them to share details on the application could speed up fund applications for either tuition or maintenance fees.

University choices

Your teen can apply for five courses. This can be five courses at five different universities; five different courses at the same university or any combination of the above.

It rarely makes sense to apply to just one university:

1. Entry requirements are likely to be similar whatever the course, so if your teen doesn’t attain the minimum grades this could rule out all their five choices;

2. Some universities prefer applicants to be focused on one course; multiple applications to the same university could indicate a lack of focus;
3. In some cases, universities automatically offer similar alternatives if an applicant doesn’t make their preferred choice, so using applications for multiple variations of a similar degree is a wasted opportunity.

A scattergun approach may backfire

Applying for courses that are completely different – irrespective of university location – may mean your teen doesn’t know where their interest lies. If this happens, it might be better for them to go back to the drawing board and reconsider their course choices. Universities can see all application choices and a lack of focus can sometimes be looked upon unfavourably.



Maintain relevance

As only one application can be made across multiple courses it's important to ensure that the overall application is relevant to each course tutor reading it.

For example, if applying for economics and politics at one university, but economics and philosophy at another, it might be wise to focus subject (course) related discussion on economics (the common denominator in both cases) and use references in the personal statement to indicate suitability to study politics and philosophy. If all of the text in the course section relates to economics and politics, a tutor offering a place for economics and philosophy might interpret that this is not their preferred option and dismiss their application accordingly.

Discover more

- [UCAS Homepage](#)

Spreading risk

Try to encourage your teen to apply for a range of courses with different entry requirements in case academic expectations are surpassed or not met. It is usually advised to apply for a mix of aspirational, realistic and safe university options.

Education details

Full education details must be included, and this includes results of any examinations taken, including:

- Examinations taken and what grades were awarded;
- Examinations taken but ungraded;
- Examinations taken but where results are yet to be released;
- Courses undertaken, even if they were not completed (an explanation of why they weren't completed should also be provided).

Concealing information here could prove costly later down the line if it's discovered the application was not wholly truthful: it could, in fact, result in offers being withdrawn.

Employment experience

Any employment experience (paid or voluntary) should also be included. All the better if there's a direct link to the course application, but any experience is worthwhile and being able to distil and articulate why the experience was beneficial (in the personal statement) can make the difference between a typical application and a stand-out one.

Students applying directly will need to include details of references, but if applications are made via school or college, the educational institution will do this for them.

Email is the first choice of communications for most universities, so your teen should ensure their email accounts are set to receive bulk and / or large emails.

Don't forget to ensure that UCAS is notified straight away if personal details (address, email, telephone numbers) change during the application process. Forgetting to do this could mean important communications are missed.



Personal Statement

The UCAS “personal statement” is an important part of the university application process. It’s also the part many young people find hardest to complete. This year, UCAS has changed the format of personal statements to make them easier to complete. Let’s take a look at what should be included and how it should be structured. We’ve got plenty of suggestions of avenues to explore so you can encourage and guide your teen if they get stuck.

What is a personal statement?

As part of the university application, your child will need to submit a personal statement. This is like a short advert that lets your teen showcase why they would make a great student. It must not exceed 4,000 characters (which is about 500 words). Your teen can only submit one personal statement, even though they can apply to up to five different universities.

This means they need to be careful that they are making themselves attractive to all the universities and not just their favourite.

Why it’s important

Alongside your child’s predicted sixth form qualification grades and their teachers’ references, the UCAS personal statement will help university admission tutors decide on whether to offer your child a place to study with them. Not all universities conduct interviews, so the personal statement may be the only opportunity your child has to showcase their talents, accomplishments and interest in applying for the course. Universities also use the personal statement to choose between candidates whose academic experience is similar but there aren’t enough places to go round.

Why it’s good to start early

Content for a personal statement isn’t something that can be created overnight. It takes time to assimilate ideas and finesse them, so it’s good to encourage your child to start thinking about this well ahead of submission time. This doesn’t necessarily mean a heavy-handed desk bound session, but prompting them with questions on a regular basis to help them clarify why they like something or what makes an experience pleasant / unattractive for them will help them consolidate

their thoughts and prompt an understanding of ways to describe clearly what they like and dislike and why.

One advantage of drafting the personal statement early on is that there’s no need to panic if your teen’s personal statement is looking ‘thin’ – there are things they can do during evenings, weekends and school holidays to help them stand out. For inspiration, there’s plenty of ideas in The Parents’ Guide to Helping your teen stand out.



NEW FOR 2026 Entry - changes to personal statement format

The objectives and length of the personal statement remain the same, but the format has changed. Instead of writing one long essay, students now answer three specific questions, which can make it easier to understand what to include and where to start. The overall character limit is still 4,000 characters, but each response must be at least 350 characters long (roughly 45–50 words), allowing students to focus more on areas where they have the most to say.

The questions ask students to reflect on:

1. Why they want to study the course
2. What they’ve done to show interest and prepare
3. How they’ve developed relevant skills beyond the classroom

On the next page, we break down each question with tips on what your teen might include and how you can support them in shaping their answers.



The 3 Questions and What Your Teen Should Talk About

From September 2025, the UCAS personal statement will change from a single 4,000-character essay to three structured sections: Motivation, Preparation, and Additional Preparation. Each section has a specific question to guide your teen's response.

Motivation

Question 1

Why do you want to study this course or subject?



- **Encourage them to share their passion** - Help them express what excites them about the course and how it connects with their future career goals
- **Support their research** - Encourage them to mention any books, subject experts, or activities that have sparked their interest and demonstrate their knowledge
- **Link to their future ambitions** - Ask them to explain how studying this course will help them achieve their long-term goals, whether in their career or personal life

Preparation

Question 2

How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?



- **Connect their studies** - Guide them to focus on how their recent education, whether in school or through additional courses, relates to the subject they want to study
- **Highlight transferable skills** - Help them identify skills they've gained in other subjects that are relevant to their chosen course
- **Celebrate their achievements** - Encourage them to showcase extracurricular successes, such as competitions or leadership roles, that demonstrate their strengths

Additional Preparation

Question 3

What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences helpful?



- **Work experience** - Suggest they reflect on any work experience or volunteering they've done, and how it has helped them develop skills related to the course
- **Personal life experiences** - Support them in sharing personal challenges or responsibilities that have shaped their resilience, empathy, or other valuable traits
- **Extracurricular activities** - Encourage them to mention hobbies, sports, or achievements outside of school that highlight their interests and character



What You Can Do to Help

Most students find that starting their personal statement is the hardest part. If your teen is struggling to get motivated:

- ▶ Reassure them this is not a one-off process – it's something to do over several weeks or months
- ▶ get them to create a document on their phone that they can add to whenever an idea strikes
- ▶ encourage them to make a note of all the things they might want to include without worrying whether or not these will make it to the final version – **use our mindmap on the next double page spread**
- ▶ Don't let them get caught up in trying to think of a catchy opening line - this can be left until much later in the process

Ideas to inspire them:

- ▶ Get your teen to look at the university's website to find out more about the course they are applying for.
- ▶ Help them identify the qualities and experience they will need to do well on the course as this can often help them decide what to write about.
- ▶ Ask your teen why they are applying for that course.

Get them to explain their reasons by asking them what excites them about the course, which modules they are particularly keen to learn more about and where they want the course to take them in their professional journey.

- ▶ If they have chosen several different types of courses, they will need to focus on themes (i.e. creativity, communications, organisation, mechanics, research etc) rather than specifics (i.e. anything unique to one of the course titles).

This is no time for modesty!

- ▶ Get your teen to share drafts with a range of people that have unique insight into their different strengths
- ▶ They can use the feedback so they can confidently express what they're good at without feeling shy or as if they are boasting

Practical considerations

- ▶ Don't start on the application form. Use notes, words or good old fashion pen & paper to start listing down their ideas
- ▶ Use clear English
- ▶ Focus on positives – what they do like and want to develop, not what they don't like and want to avoid

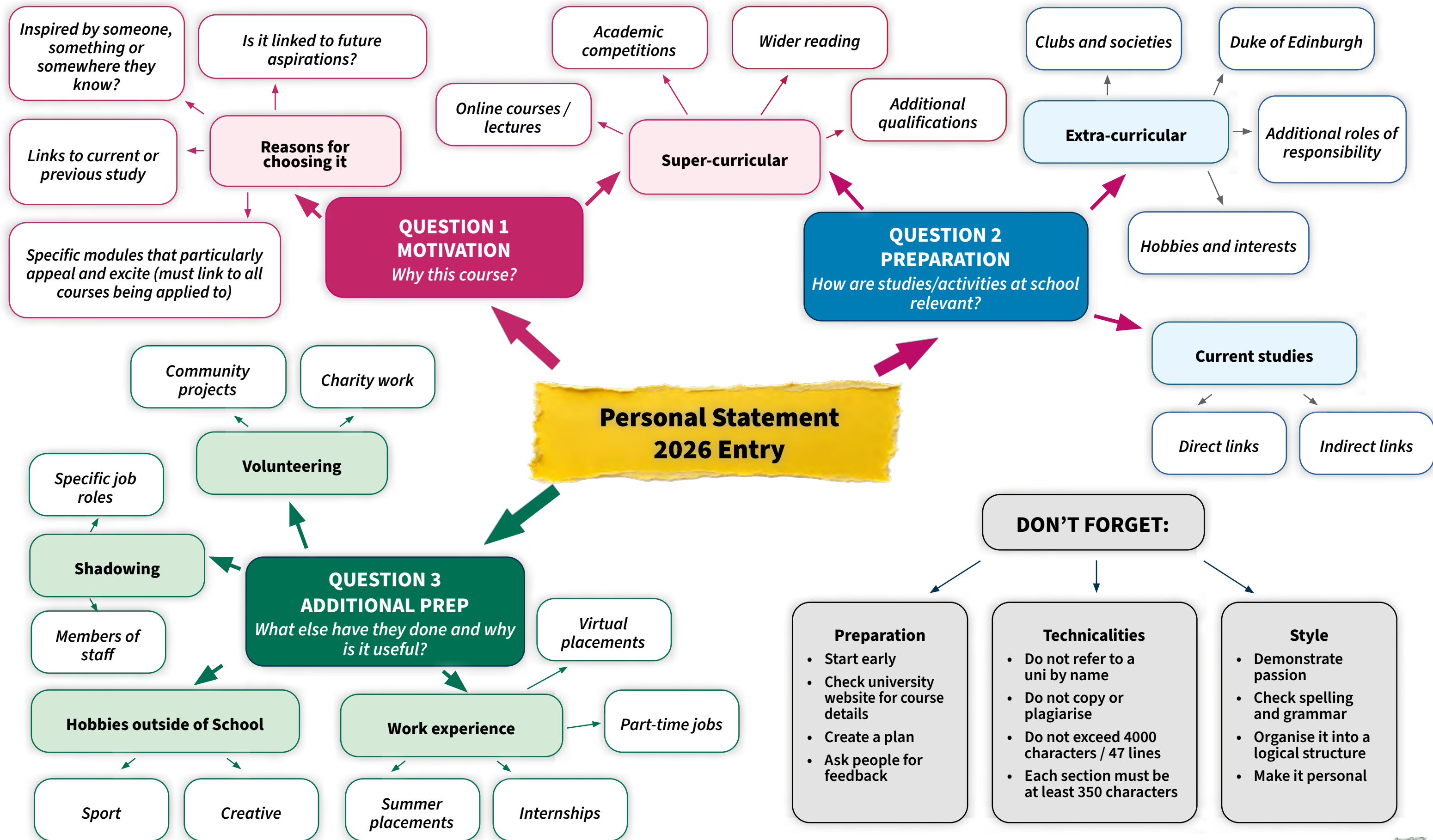
DO:

- ✓ **Start early** - the personal statement will need a number of redrafts;
- ✓ **Create a plan** - encourage your teen to make a list of all their achievements - academic, work-related, sport, music and art successes;
- ✓ **Check the university websites** to see what qualities and skills they want to see: an aptitude for maths? Creativity?
- ✓ **Leave time for feedback** - teachers, tutors, family members and check for spelling and grammatical mistakes;
- ✓ **Relate experience, study and hobbies to the course** or to what university life entails;
- ✓ **Write with passion and enthusiasm** - can your teen demonstrate wider reading? Additional courses completed? Work experience in a relevant field?

DON'T:

- ✗ **Plagiarise or copy any other source** - UCAS will check for this and it may have an impact on your teen's overall application;
- ✗ **Exceed the 4000 character limit** / 47 lines of text
- ✗ **Mention a university or course by name** (if your teen is applying to different universities or for courses with different titles);
- ✗ **Demonstrate uncertainty** or excuse potential bad results or try to be overly funny or waffle.

Personal Statement Mindmap



Tracking the Application

Once the application's been submitted, your teen will get a welcome email and then be able to sign into UCAS Hub at any time to track progress.

Different universities have different criteria on when they make their decisions and their timelines can vary, so responses to each of the five applications won't be made at the same time. Each university will have a deadline for replies, so check these. It may be worth contacting admissions a few days before their deadline if you haven't heard anything to make sure the application hasn't been mislaid.

Universities will make either a conditional offer, unconditional offer or rejection (see adjacent key terms box for what this means).

Interviews

Some universities might request an interview before making an offer. It's best to contact them directly to find out how and where your teen will receive information about an interview – not all course providers will send you an interview invitation via UCAS.

Unconditional offers

Whilst an unconditional offer ahead of final examinations is good news for your teen because it eliminates additional pressure ahead of exam time, it can be bad news for you (and them!) in that the incentive to work hard and achieve the best sixth form grades possible is no longer necessary. It's worth them remembering that whilst sixth form grades may no longer play a part in university entry with an unconditional offer, they will still be considered by future employers – especially if the final degree grade eventually obtained is mediocre.

Making a decision

Once all the offers are in, it's decision time. Your teen can only accept a maximum of two offers – one "first choice" (or firm) offer and, if this is conditional, an insurance offer in case they don't meet the entry requirements specified in their first choice. If their first choice is an unconditional offer, there is no need to accept other offers but this also means that they cannot opt for an insurance place or be entered into Clearing. Universities making any remaining offers must be notified that their offers have not been accepted.

Conditional offer

An offer has been made, but your teen must meet the requirements set out in the offer - usually exam grades or UCAS points.

Unconditional offer

An offer has been made and your teen's place has been confirmed regardless of exam performance. There may be some conditions

attached to this type of offer, such as selecting the university as your teen's first choice.

Invitation received

Your teen has been invited for an interview.

Unsuccessful

Your teen has not been successful. The reason will usually be shown in UCAS Hub.





UCAS Extra

In the event that all universities / courses decline the application, there's an opportunity to apply through "Extra" for alternative universities, but this cannot be activated until all declines have been made official.

How it works

If your teen is eligible for UCAS Extra, an "Add an Extra Choice" option will be displayed on their UCAS Hub profile. Applicants can only apply to one university course at a time until an offer is made. Available courses can be found using the "UCAS course search" tool found on the UCAS website.

Once your teen accepts a university offer on UCAS Hub - they won't be able to accept an offer from anywhere else - so encourage them to think carefully about the decisions they make.

Try not to be discouraged

Keep your teen's spirits up. Applying through Extra can be stressful and your teen might not get a place on their first, second or even third attempt. If your teen is unable to find a suitable university through Extra, then they can choose to apply

through UCAS Clearing, which begins in July.

Encourage your teen to think carefully about why they were unsuccessful with their original choices. Consider whether the universities were appropriate and whether the course entry requirements truly reflected your teen's academic potential.

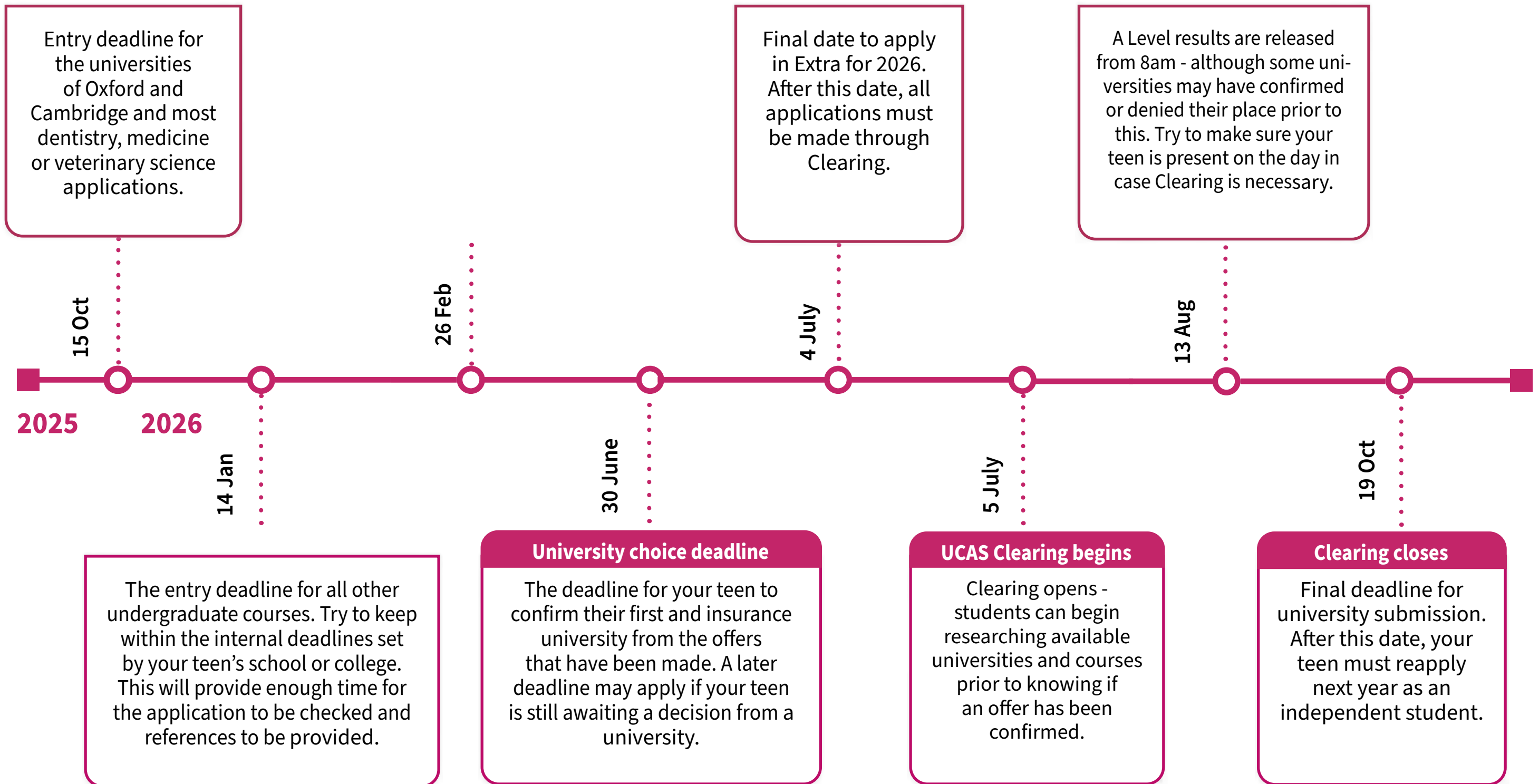
When applying through Extra, consider widening your teen's search for the right university and course. Perhaps consider a more suitable variation of the degree subject they initially applied for.

Contact the university directly
When applying to a university through UCAS Extra, it is worth noting that the university will have access to your teen's original personal statement and their initial university and respective course choices.

We recommend your teen rings the university's admission team directly prior to applying through Extra, particularly if the course or university style is different to their original application. A brief conversation with the university may make the difference between receiving a place or not.



UCAS Key Dates



Always keep to the deadlines specified by your teen's school or college

[Click here for the latest dates](#)



Preparing for Results Day

*Interested in a particular topic?
Click on the heading to go straight there.*

What to expect on the day - key timings, what your teen will receive, and how you can support them.

What to do if your teen does better or worse than expected - and how to help them decide on next steps.

If your teen's grades fall short of gaining a place, Clearing offers a second chance to find a suitable course.

What to consider if university isn't the next step — from apprenticeships to taking time out.

My A level results were better than my predicted grades, but I still wanted to go to my first-choice university, rather than apply for somewhere with higher entry requirements.



Results Day 2026

Results are available from school as early as 06.00 am (collection time will vary depending on the individual school or college) and depending on the school, there may be different secure options to collect results, such as by telephone or via the parent portal. Check with the school / college to ensure you know what options are available.

Can't collect in person?

Where possible, results should be collected in person or by a nominated representative (proof of nomination and ID will be required). If it's not possible for your teen's results to be collected directly, they can login to Track to see the university's decision (i.e. whether or not a place has been offered, or whether a place has been offered but on a different course). They will not know which grades they have achieved so they may not have the right information to make sensible decisions about next steps.

Conditional offers

If your teen is waiting on conditional offers, it can be a nerve-racking time. The best support you can provide is to avoid taking them on holiday so that they are able to collect results themselves and benefit from all the help the school / college provides if they

do not reach their predicted grades. Yes, they might be able to access Track while they are away (subject to reliable internet connections) but this will only tell them whether they have succeeded in gaining their university admission, not their grades – so they won't know which options are available to them through Clearing.

Some applications through Clearing need to be made within specified time frames and working from different time-zones is an added complication that is best avoided.

Unconditional offers

If your teen has accepted an unconditional offer there's not much to worry about other than whether they have achieved their potential; their results won't impact whether or not they get their university place.

Plan ahead

It's best to plan ahead for all eventualities – right down to making sure their mobile phone is fully-charged so they can make the all-important phone calls that might be necessary, having university contact numbers along with the UCAS reference number, and a pen and paper to note things down.



Possible Outcomes

UCAS will receive your child's results directly and update their system which adjusts to reflect university offer status. This happens from 08.00 am, but the system can be busy, so access could be delayed. It does not show your child's results, so it may be better to wait until the results have been reviewed and consolidated, rather than being faced with a disappointing rejection ("unsuccessful") without a full understanding of why the desired outcome hasn't been achieved.

UCAS will show the university status offer. It will show:

- **"Unconditional"** (place and course confirmed – this means that the entry requirements for the previously conditional offer have been met)
- **"Unsuccessful"** (conditions not met, no place)
- **"Unconditional changed course"** (they have not succeeded in achieving a place on their desired course, but are being offered an alternative with lower entry requirements)



Celebrations ahead! If your child has a conditional offer and meets the grades, that offer will switch to "unconditional" and they should receive a confirmation letter from UCAS with details of next steps (it varies university to university). However, if they've matched their offer but since changed their mind about their university or subject choice, they can reject their offer and go through Clearing to try something else.

Don't forget, there is no guarantee that they will get the course they want through Clearing but it does provide alternatives and options if they realise they've made a mistake earlier on in the application process rather than reapplying the next year.



Previously, "adjustment" was a process where students who received better grades than anticipated could apply to another course or university where entry options were higher than they thought they could achieve. Few students took up this option, because most were happy to accept the university place they had been offered, and as of 2022 university entry, the adjustment process has been discontinued.

Students who want to apply to a different university, because they have outperformed the conditions of their offer, can decline their place and go through Clearing to apply for a course with higher entry requirements. If they use Clearing Plus, they will be signposted to relevant universities with spaces whose entry requirements match their results.



Yes, it's disappointing, but there are still plenty of options available and it's all important to keep your child motivated and not let them feel like a failure. This can be difficult if you feel they ignored warnings and did not put in enough effort, but this is, itself, a significant learning experience and may put them on a more productive path in the future.

Options will vary dependent on the variance between their predicted grades and what they actually achieved. If they missed by a small margin, it's possible to speak to the university and see if they will make an exception. Alternatively, they can apply for another place by going through Clearing. If they need time to refocus, a gap year could be an option or check out the information in "other choices".



No matter the reason, a student can decide to decline a university place. It could be because their circumstances have changed, they have decided on an alternative course, they don't want to go to university or other reasons.

Declining a place is not a problem but remember: it is an irreversible decision and they will not be able to change their mind and get the offer reinstated once they have turned it down. So before declining a place, make sure other options have been thoroughly researched (or confirmed, if it is to accept an offer elsewhere) and it is absolutely the right choice. It would be a great shame to turn down a good opportunity in the hope of achieving a better one and then ending up with no offer at all.



If the marks seem inappropriate given your teen's skill level, it's possible to apply for a remark. It's vital your teen speaks to their subject teacher first and confirms their opinion.

Before requesting a remark, it's important to know that grades can go up — but they can also go down. While the paper might have been marked too harshly and a higher grade could be awarded, the review could also result in a lower grade than originally given.

If applying for a remark, keep the university advised of both intention and progress. They are not obliged to hold the place open through Clearing.



Understanding Clearing

Clearing is the system universities use to fill up any vacancies they have on a course. It's available to students that don't have any offers: either because they have not succeeded in meeting criteria for conditional offers or because they have rejected all the offers they have.

Don't feel that because a university offers a university place through Clearing this means the courses are undesirable. It is possible that fewer students applied than anticipated; students didn't achieve the minimum entry requirements; or successful students had a change of heart.

How it works

Students must apply (through UCAS) to participate in Clearing. If a university hasn't responded and confirmed the place for which your

child originally applied (for example, they may be just below entry requirements and the university is considering whether to make an offer) they will not be eligible to apply for another course through Clearing until such time as they have received a rejection. In this scenario, it's worth making direct contact with the university in question to get an update on status.



Discover more

- [UCAS](#)
- [Clearing search tool](#)

Find out what is available

Use the UCAS website to find out which courses are available via Clearing. This will not be a full list of all university courses, but a list of all those that are available now that results have come out and universities know whether or not the students to whom they have offered places have met the grades. Of course, some courses will not appear because they are fully subscribed, but there will still be plenty of choices. In some cases, courses in which your child may have been interested but did not meet entry requirements might appear if many students failed to meet the entry requirements at the time of results.

Some courses (such as Oxbridge and medicine) do not offer places through Clearing.

Don't waste valuable time

It's a good idea to speak to the university in person before applying for a place through Clearing to find out if the course is still available, whether your child meets the entry requirements, and whether the course is suitable for them. Students need to call themselves rather than have someone call on their behalf. The university is going to consider whether to offer them a place, not their representative! In some cases, the universities may make

an offer over the phone – but if not, they will revert relatively quickly.

It may seem obvious, but worth remembering: the most popular universities have the most applicants and field spare places first, so your child needs to be ready to act quickly to secure the best options.

Clearing Plus is a new UCAS Clearing tool which will match unplaced undergraduate applicants to relevant courses with vacancies. Designed to help speed things up, UCAS uses what they know about your teen to suggest courses they might like to express an interest in. Your teen can access this tool by logging into their UCAS account and clicking on the button 'View Matches'.

We recommend that your teen uses this alongside the Clearing search tool.

Results Day Flowchart

Did your child meet the required grades for their first choice university?

YES

Are their grades better than expected?

YES

NO

Well done

Your child has an offer from their first choice university.

NO

Has your child still been offered a place in their first choice university on university track?

YES

NO

*University track not updated?
Contact the university for more information.*

YES

Has your child been offered a place to their Insurance university?

NO

Great

Your child has an offer from their insurance university.



Considering Other Options

It's important to remember that university isn't for everyone. An increasingly popular alternative is apprenticeships and traineeships. Or there are school leaver programmes which give a direct route into employment and can result in further qualifications. If your teen needs more time to figure out their next steps, a gap year can offer breathing space.

Apprenticeships:

Apprenticeships combine study at college or university with work. If your child knows what sort of job they might like to do, this provides an ideal opportunity to go straight into the workplace whilst still formally developing their skills and gaining a qualification.

It's certainly not an easy option – holding down a full-time job and keeping up with studies can be tough. But with a salary, holiday entitlement and sick pay along with access to the university experience and no post qualification loan (their employer and the government fund all costs), it makes for an attractive proposition. Most apprenticeship last for about two to four years and the minimum wage is £5.28 per hour. There are entry requirements at four different levels, from the equivalent of five GCSE passes to the equivalent of a master's degree.

Traineeships

Traineeships are much shorter and last six weeks to six months. They are a great way to prepare for apprenticeships (if your child doesn't have the minimum entry requirements) or to get first-hand experience of what a job is like.

School leaver programmes

School leaver programmes offer opportunities to join the workplace straight after sixth form studies and commence skills development and career progression through experience as well as studying to obtain a nationally recognised qualification. Entry requirements vary from employer to employer.

Gap year / deferred entry

Taking a year out between school and university can provide the opportunity to find out a little bit more about personal preferences rather than being directed by schools, colleges (and parents!). It's also a good opportunity to find out how your child fares fending for themselves.

A gap year can be taken while entry to university is being deferred, once a place has been accepted (allowing a year between leaving school and starting university), or if university is not the next step at all.

Traditionally, this is a year spent travelling overseas, but it needn't focus exclusively on that. Volunteering and work experience can also be incorporated and inform your child's likes and dislikes, as well as giving them valuable first-hand experience in a variety of areas they may not have had chance to try out. However, for some a gap year can be distracting and, if not well-planned, could prove somewhat directionless, which is unlikely to be beneficial.

Some students want to enter the world of work straight away or, if they haven't achieved the results they had hoped, they could always try retakes or other sixth-form subjects.

University reapplication

Should your child decide to reapply to university for any reason, be sure they save a copy of their UCAS application so they do not have to rewrite everything, as the original application is deleted from the central database each year.



Discover more

- [Post 18 Options](#)
- [Apprenticeships](#)

Next Steps

*Interested in a particular topic?
Click on the heading to go straight there.*

Help your teen prepare for university life before they go?

Practical ways to build their independence and confidence.

Student or private accommodation? Things your teen should consider.

I never imagined my son could budget for himself, but with a few tips he proved really good at it.



Preparing Your Teen

Once a university place has been secured, it's time to celebrate. **Make the most of enjoying the moment and be sure to share with your teen how pleased you are for them – especially if the university is one of their preferred choices but not necessarily yours!**

After the celebrations, it's time to prepare. This is a wonderful opportunity and you'll want to help your teen make the most of it. Some useful ideas include:

Let them take control

Let them take control of moving themselves as much as possible: writing their own "to do" lists, choosing a move date, deciding what needs to be done. You can always help them by checking their lists but try not to be the one orchestrating events.

Staying in touch

Of course you're going to miss them, but try not to be over-bearing about how often they should stay in touch once they've moved out. They need to start relying on themselves rather than continually checking in with you. That said, it's only fair that you should come to some agreement about how often they'll communicate, so you both know what to expect. For example, if you want them to telephone you every week, chat this through with them and give them a means of doing so.

Reassure them that they can call if they need help or to chat, but avoid presenting yourself as their personal rescuer when things don't quite go the way they'd like. Coping with life is part of growing up and becoming independent. You are their parent, not a magic fixer!



Life Skills

Budgeting

Teach them how to budget. If you're supporting them financially, don't budget on their behalf by paying bills direct or limiting their money to a weekly allowance – in the long run it won't help them. If they receive financial loans, it's highly likely they'll get the full term's allowance at the beginning of term straight into their bank account, so it could be easy for them to spend all the money and then have nothing for the rest of the term.

Teach them how to budget for rent, bills, course materials, food and entertainment so they understand what expenses are coming up and how to put aside money so they have enough to cover the cost of living.

Discover more

- [Uni budget calculator](#)
- [Managing money](#)

Financial worries

Overspending is an issue faced by many students, which can cause anxiety for both you and your teen. Consider the following:

- Make sure they apply for student discount cards, such as the National Union of Students (NUS) card and a 16-25 Railcard;
- Encourage your teen to find part-time work, ideally during holiday-time, but term-time too if money is a significant issue. However, make sure your teen is not neglecting their academic studies as research shows working more than 20 hours each week during term-time can have a negative impact on academic performance;
- Encourage your teen to speak to a student money advisor at their university;
- Give your teen tips on money saving ideas, such as buying non-branded food items and attending free events; and as a last resort
- Speak with your teen's bank about extending their interest free overdraft.

Cooking

Spend some time cooking with your teen, so that they know how to prepare a few meals with fresh ingredients. These should be easy one-dish dinners that don't require lots of pots, pans and other kitchen utensils. This will not only stand them in good stead for inexpensive and healthy eating, but being able to host dinners will make them popular with other students too.

Course preparation

Remind your teen to check their new timetable, pre-reading and travel time so they become familiar with the rhythm their new life will take.

Some courses may also require several key text books. Check whether the university has a second-hand book shop and try to visit early to find the best bargains.



Living Arrangements

Student accommodation

There are two types of student accommodation depending whether the university is campus or not. Campus universities have student accommodation within the same complex as the university and social buildings, non-campus universities usually have dedicated buildings usually quite close to the university buildings.

The great thing about student accommodation is that it offers private rooms specifically designed to promote study and all the other tenants are students – typically within the same year group. It's a fantastic way to meet students on different courses, of the same age group and in a similar situation. We'd recommend student accommodation for year one, if possible.

Home

If the university is close enough, they could stay at home with you. Financially this is a good choice, as they won't incur expensive rental charges although transport costs may be higher. You'll both need to adapt to different "house rules" about comings and goings, as

your teen (who is now an adult!) at university is very different from a teen at school. Again, this option may restrict your teen's ease in meeting other students and, depending on journey time, may also limit their participation in co-curricular activities because they are not on the doorstep.

Private arrangement

If your teen is going to university with a group of existing friends, they may prefer to live in private accommodation – for example renting a house with four bedrooms, where each can take their own bedroom and share the other areas of the house. This can (though not always) be cheaper than student accommodation. They won't have some of the facilities offered by student digs (i.e. a canteen) but they may feel this offers a more homely option.

The downside is that they may not get to meet other students as easily as well as having to organise their own bills, such as gas, electricity and internet. It can be a great choice once they've found their feet, perhaps in years two or three.

Considerations:

- ▶ Does rent include the room for the year, or will your teen have to move out all their stuff during holiday times (sometimes the rooms are rented during holidays to others)?
- ▶ What's included in rent? Are there additional expenses such as gas, electricity, water rates, WiFi / internet, etc?
- ▶ Where are the laundry facilities?
- ▶ Is there catering (obviously more expensive) or will your teen have access to a kitchen and be responsible for cooking their own food?
- ▶ If they have a car, is there parking available?
- ▶ How far are halls from the university itself – what are the travel options?





What to Pack

Help your teen to organise what they'll need to take with them when they go to university. This means everything from course materials, laptops, phones to bedding, cooking equipment and clothes plus all the appropriate paperwork such as bank accounts, TV licences, insurance and new travel passes. It will make their life easier if they know how to plan ahead and it will make you feel more comfortable knowing they are well-prepared.

Bedding

Knowing exactly what to pack will largely depend on the type of accommodation your teen has applied for. Although most halls of residence provide students with single standard size beds, some private accommodation or alternative arrangements may differ - so it is always worth checking before purchasing any bedding.

Bright colours

Try to keep to the basics when it comes to kitchen utensils and try to purchase items which are easily identifiable - bright colours or patterns will help your teen keep track of their items.

Last minute arrangements

If you are helping your teen move into their new university accommodation, then it may be a good idea to factor in some time for a trip to the local shopping centre for any last minute purchases.

Important documents

- Passport
- Driving licence
- All university / college and accommodation correspondence
- Insurance documents
- Bank details

Electricals

- Laptop and chargers
- Mobile phone
- Extension cables

Stationery and course books

Kitchenware

- Cutlery and crockery
- Kitchen utensils
- Family recipes

Bedroom

- Coat hangers
- Duvet, pillow, mattress protector and sheets
- Photographs of family & friends



University shopping list - [click here for our best buys](#)

I'm interactive!
Click each item for
inspiration!

BEDROOM

Essentials:

- ☐ Alarm clock
- ☐ Bin (small)
- ☐ Books
- ☐ Coat hangers
- ☐ Mirror

Extras:

- ☐ Beanbag
- ☐ Cushions
- ☐ Door wedge
- ☐ Extra storage
- ☐ Family photos
- ☐ Over door hangers
- ☐ Plant
- ☐ Rug
- ☐ Wall art / posters

BATHROOM

Essentials:

- ☐ Bath towels
- ☐ Deodorant
- ☐ Hairbrush
- ☐ Hand towels
- ☐ Nail clippers
- ☐ Razor
- ☐ Sanitary towels
- ☐ Shampoo
- ☐ Shower gel
- ☐ Toilet roll
- ☐ Toothbrush / paste
- ☐ Wash bag

Extras:

- ☐ Bath mat
- ☐ Flip flops
- ☐ Hair dryer
- ☐ Make-up
- ☐ Moisturiser

KITCHEN

☐ Complete sets

Essentials:

- ☐ Baking tray
- ☐ Bowls
- ☐ Cheese grater
- ☐ Chopping board
- ☐ Cling film
- ☐ Corkscrew
- ☐ Cutlery
- ☐ Glasses
- ☐ Knives
- ☐ Mugs
- ☐ Plates
- ☐ Pots and pans
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Tin foil
- ☐ Tin opener
- ☐ Tea towels
- ☐ Wooden spoons

Extras:

- ☐ Casserole dish
- ☐ Colander
- ☐ Masher
- ☐ Measuring jug
- ☐ Plastic bag sealers
- ☐ Recipe books
- ☐ Scales
- ☐ Shot glasses
- ☐ Slow cooker
- ☐ Spice jars
- ☐ Tupperware
- ☐ Vegetable peeler
- ☐ Whisk
- ☐ Wok

CLOTHING

Essentials:

- ☐ Casual clothes
- ☐ Evening clothes
- ☐ Fleece
- ☐ Gym clothes
- ☐ Smart clothes
- ☐ Pyjamas
- ☐ Smart shoes
- ☐ Sports equipment
- ☐ Socks
- ☐ Rain jacket
- ☐ Swimwear
- ☐ Thermals
- ☐ Trainers
- ☐ Underwear
- ☐ Winter clothes

STUDY

Essentials:

- ☐ A4 folders
- ☐ File Dividers
- ☐ Highlighters
- ☐ Notepad / paper
- ☐ Pens and pencils
- ☐ Plastic wallets
- ☐ Post-it notes
- ☐ Stapler
- ☐ White-tac

Extras:

- ☐ Calculator
- ☐ Desk lamp
- ☐ Diary / planner

ELECTRICS

Essentials:

- ☐ Batteries
- ☐ Chargers
- ☐ Extension lead
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Laptop case
- ☐ Multi plug adaptor

Extras:

- ☐ Mouse
- ☐ Keyboard
- ☐ Printer
- ☐ Printing ink
- ☐ Speakers
- ☐ Television

SLEEP

Essentials:

- ☐ Bed sheets
- ☐ Duvet
- ☐ Duvet set
- ☐ Mattress protector
- ☐ Pillows
- ☐ Pillow cases

Extras:

- ☐ Diffuser / oils
- ☐ Mattress topper
- ☐ Night lamp
- ☐ Warm blanket

FIRST AID

☐ Complete sets

Essentials:

- ☐ Antibacterial wipes
- ☐ Antiseptic cream
- ☐ Hot-water bottle
- ☐ Hydration salts
- ☐ Painkillers
- ☐ Plasters
- ☐ Sewing kit
- ☐ Torch
- ☐ Tweezers

HOUSE KEEPING

Essentials:

- ☐ Coat hangers
- ☐ Door wedge
- ☐ Iron
- ☐ Laundry bag
- ☐ Washing powder
- ☐ Wet wipes

Extras:

- ☐ Drying rack
- ☐ Mini vacuum
- ☐ Laundry basket

DOCUMENTS

Essentials:

- ☐ Bank accounts
- ☐ CV and references
- ☐ Discount cards
- ☐ Exam certificates
- ☐ NHS number
- ☐ NI number
- ☐ Passport
- ☐ Passport photos
- ☐ Uni paperwork

Extras:

- ☐ TV licence

FUN & GAMES

Extras:

- ☐ Bicycle
- ☐ Board games
- ☐ Computer games
- ☐ Dress-up costumes
- ☐ Fairy lights
- ☐ Games console
- ☐ Gym equipment
- ☐ Photo albums
- ☐ Playing cards
- ☐ Polaroid camera
- ☐ Projector
- ☐ Recipe books
- ☐ Sports equipment



Final Words

You're bound to feel excited and proud about what your teen's achieved as they embark on their first independent step towards adulthood by attending university. But it may be tinged with an element of sadness as you realise your parenting role is about to evolve into something different. Please don't forget your teen still needs you very much - albeit in a different way.

Be there for them! Leaving school and long-term friends is exciting, but emotional too. For your teen, everything is changing: new teachers, new ways of studying, a new place to live, and a new peer group in which to make friends. If they've been at the same school since Year 7, this shift can feel especially big.

Even if they are not moving away to study, there's still much in their new life that will be different from before. In this sea of change, you are likely to be their only familiar anchor. Yes, they need space to adapt at their own pace, but they may also need to know you are still there for them and that there is some certainty and consistency in a fast-changing environment.

And finally ... don't forget about yourself! University is a short-lived experience that leaves a life-long impression so, alongside your teen, make sure you also enjoy all the rewards and challenges this unique opportunity offers.

Follow us on



A-Z of UK Universities

A

University of Aberdeen
Abertay University (formerly
University of Abertay Dundee)
Aberystwyth University (Prifysgol
Aberystwyth)
Anglia Ruskin University
Anglo-European College of
Chiropractic
Archbishop of Canterbury, The
Arden University (formerly
known as Resource Development
International)
Ashridge Business School
Aston University

B

Bangor University (Prifysgol Bangor)
University of Bath
Bath Spa University
University of Bedfordshire
Birkbeck, University of London
University of Birmingham*
Birmingham City University
University College Birmingham
Bishop Grossteste University
University of Bolton
Arts University Bournemouth
Bournemouth University
BPP University

University of Bradford
University of Brighton
University of Bristol*
Brunel University London
University of Buckingham
Buckinghamshire New University

C

University of Cambridge*
Canterbury Christ Church University
Cardiff Metropolitan University
(Prifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd)
Cardiff University (Prifysgol
Caerdydd)*
University of Chester
University of Chichester
City University London
Courtauld Institute of Art, The
(degrees awarded by University of
London)
Coventry University
Cranfield University
University for the Creative Arts
University of Cumbria

D

De Montfort University
University of Derby
University of Dundee
Durham University*

E

University of East Anglia
University of East London
Edge Hill University
University of Edinburgh, The*
Edinburgh Napier University
University of Essex
University of Exeter*

F

Falmouth University

G

University of Glasgow*
Glasgow Caledonian University
University of Gloucestershire
Glyndŵr University (Prifysgol Glyndŵr)
Goldsmiths, University of London
University of Greenwich
Guildhall School of Music and Drama

H

Harper Adams University
Hartpury University
Heriot-Watt University
University of Hertfordshire
Heythrop College (degrees awarded
by University of London)
University of the Highlands and
Islands

University of Huddersfield
University of Hull

I

Imperial College of Science,
Technology and Medicine
Institute of Cancer Research
Institute of Education, University of
London

K

Keele University
University of Kent
King's College London*
Kingston University

L

University of Central Lancashire
Lancaster University
University of Leeds*
Leeds Beckett University (formerly
Leeds Metropolitan University)
Leeds Arts University
Leeds Trinity University
University of Leicester
University of Lincoln
University of Liverpool*
Liverpool Hope University
Liverpool John Moores University
Liverpool School of Tropical
Medicine



University of London
 London Business School
 London Institute of Banking and Finance, The London Metropolitan University
 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
 London School of Economics and Political Science, The (LSE)*
 London South Bank University
 University College London*
 Loughborough University

M

University of Manchester*
 Manchester Metropolitan University
 Middlesex University

N

NCG
 Newcastle University*
 Newman University, Birmingham
 University of Northampton, The
 Northumbria University Newcastle
 Norwich University of the Arts
 University of Nottingham*
 Nottingham Trent University

O

Open University, The
 University of Oxford*

Oxford Brookes University

P

Plymouth University
 University of Portsmouth

Q

Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
 Queen Mary, University of London*
 Queen's University Belfast*

R

Ravensbourne
 University of Reading
 Regent's University London
 Richmond, The American International University in London
 Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen
 University of Roehampton
 Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance
 Royal Academy of Music
 Royal Agricultural University
 Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (University of London)
 Royal College of Art
 Royal College of Music
 Royal College of Nursing
 Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
 Royal Holloway, University of London

Royal Northern College of Music
 Royal Veterinary College, The

S

University of Salford
 School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London
 University of Sheffield*
 Sheffield Hallam University
 University of South Wales (Prifysgol De Cymru)
 University of Southampton*
 Solent University
 University of St Andrews
 St George's, University of London
 University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth
 St Mary's University, Twickenham
 Staffordshire University
 University of Stirling
 University of Strathclyde
 University of Suffolk
 University of Sunderland
 University of Surrey
 University of Sussex
 Swansea University (Prifysgol Abertawe)

T

Teesside University
 Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music

and Dance

U

University of the Arts, London
 University College of Estate Management
 University College of Osteopathy
 University of Law, The
 University of Ulster

W

University of Wales (Prifysgol Cymru)
 University of Wales Trinity Saint David (Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant)
 University of Warwick*
 University of the West of England, Bristol
 University of West London
 University of the West of Scotland
 University of Westminster
 University of Winchester, The
 University of Wolverhampton
 University of Worcester
 Writtle University College

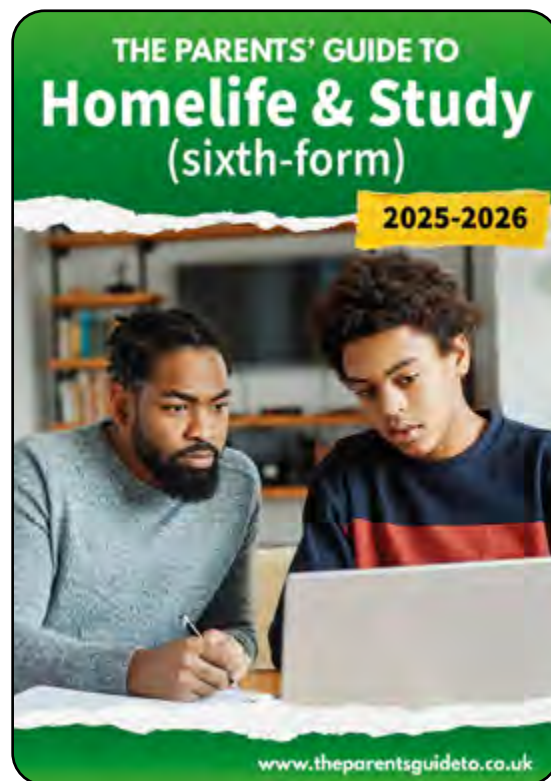
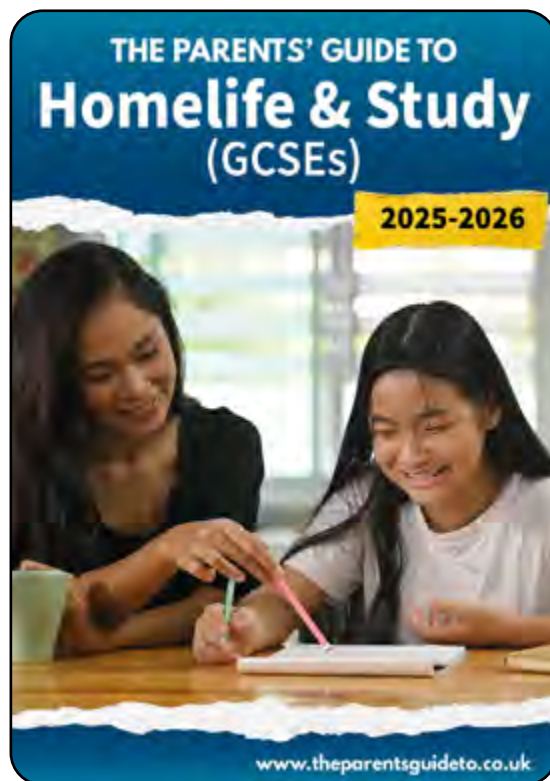
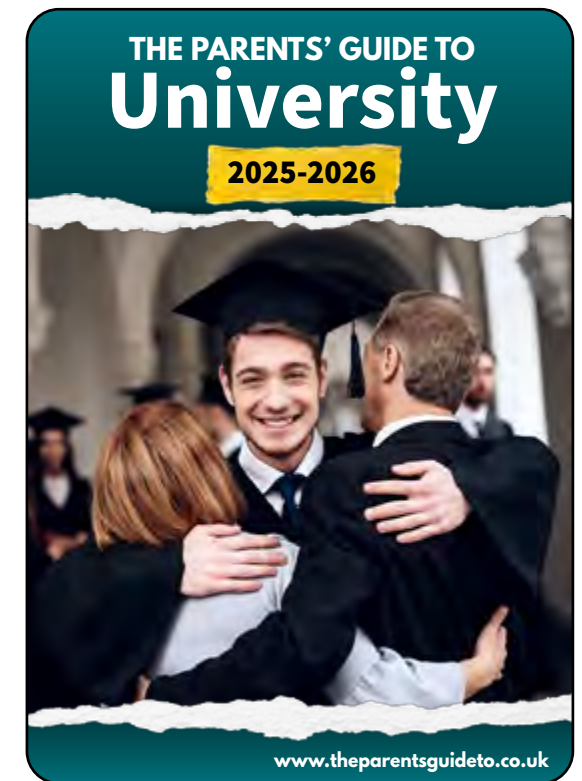
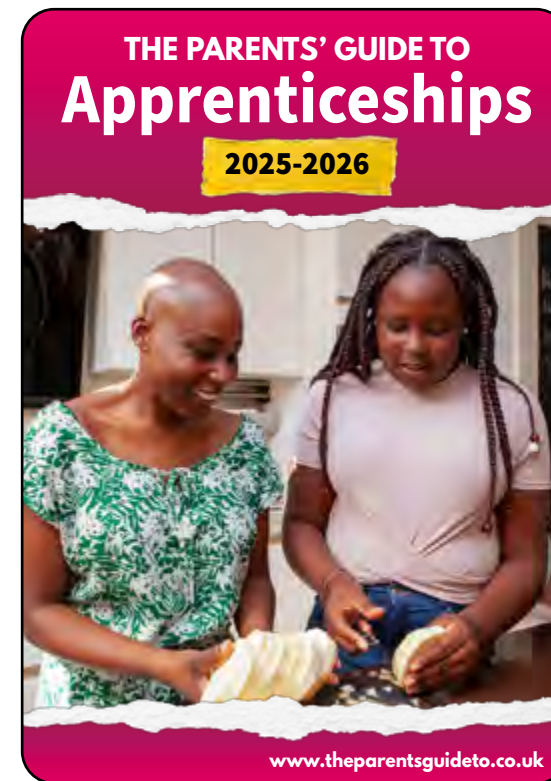
Y

University of York*
 York St John University

*** Russell Group Universities**



The Parents' Guide to:



Parent Guides:

Our range of interactive guides provide you with easy to follow advice, hyperlinks to reliable sources and the most up-to-date information.

Shop now



THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO University

2025-2026

