

The Parents' Guide to **UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS** *2019 - 2020*



As featured in The Parents' Guide to University full edition

HALF OF ALL UK STUDENTS APPLYING
TO UNIVERSITY HAVE NEVER HAD A PARENT
PARENT GO THROUGH THE PROCESS



Introduction

The prospect of your child going to university is very exciting. Attending university can offer them a great foundation for their future success and happiness; both in obtaining further qualifications and in providing a protected environment to transition from teenager to adult.

It's an exciting time for you too. Yes, it's only their hard work that can get them to university, but you've contributed along the way with love, support and encouragement. It can be a daunting time as well. There is pressure to make the right choices, a myriad of options available and, especially in the case of a first or last child leaving home, the likelihood of a whole 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 child faces in shaping their future 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 will differ from child to child – 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, living without parental supervision, adopting fun and meaningful hobbies and interests. It's learning to be a grown-up: self-reliant, resourceful and confident.

Choosing the right university

“

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

”



Types of universities

Ancient, Russell, Civic or Plate-Glass? Different terms are used for different types of university and this can be confusing. Some universities are members of more than one group whilst others choose not to be members of any. There are over 150 universities vying for applications. What's the difference and do the names mean anything?

Broadly speaking, the categories of university relate to the time at which they were established. This lends itself to different subject specialisms and teaching styles.

Ancient Universities

The original seven “ancient” universities were established before 1600. The earliest was the University of Oxford in 1096 and the latest was the University of Dublin in 1592.

Red Brick Universities

“Red Brick” (or “Civic”) universities were established during the industrial revolution of the 1800s, usually in cities. They got their name because of their iconic red brick - a popular building material at the time. The original six members (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield) specialised in much needed vocational skills such as medicine and engineering (rather than the arts, language and theology as studied at earlier universities).

Some other universities established after the 1800s are also included in this category, although some dispute whether they deserve the classification – irrespective of the fact that, being built later, their architectural styles are not in red brick.

Plate Glass Universities

The “Plate Glass” (or “plateglass”) universities were established during the 1960s and, like red brick, take their name from the construction materials of the buildings – typically plate glass in concrete frames. Plate Glass Universities were the next batch of universities to be given royal charter between 1963 and 1992.



New Universities

“New” universities generally refer to what were previously called polytechnics until gaining university status from 1992 onwards.

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. The group was incorporated in 2007 and there are currently 24 Russell universities, all of which have an excellent reputation for research, teaching and industry sector links. They are considered

the top universities in the country, and certainly benefit from high levels of funding (they receive almost two-thirds of all research funds) and, given their strong reputation, entry requirements are likely to be high. Does obtaining a degree at a Russell university make a difference? No doubt, there's a certain kudos attached, but other universities might offer more appropriate opportunities so try not to be biased.

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY

FOR A LIST OF ALL RUSSELL GROUP



Important factors to consider

Teaching and learning

Most universities follow the academic year of schools, starting in September / October and finishing in June / July with three terms.

Ancient Universities (such as Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh) have been established over many centuries and tend to offer traditional subjects (Maths, English, languages) taught in a traditional style. By contrast, newer universities (such as Loughborough, York and Suffolk) offer more vocational subjects taught using less traditional methods. Personal learning styles are important to consider. If your child excels when given lots of direction and little autonomy, a more traditional learning environment might help them achieve better results and vice-versa if they perform better when left largely to their own devices.

The university and its 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 and the advantages and drawbacks should be considered depending upon your child's learning styles. Large universities offer a much wider subject choice, alongside greater social opportunities with an astonishing array of clubs that could give your child 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 greater sense of community and belonging.



Campus or city

The big question here is “to campus or not to campus”. 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 (sometimes some distance) from one place to another is part and parcel of the package. This provides a closer experience to life in the workplace for most people and it gives 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. In some cases, universities won't offer accommodation in halls if the family home is within certain mileage, so it's worth checking the university website.

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS-BASED





Why location matters

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.

Of course, there are practical implications too. If the university is close to home, it may be possible to avoid accommodation costs, although continuing to live in the family home can dilute the university experience in many ways – although this can be combatted by signing up to plenty of clubs and socials. But as parents it will be different for you too! Your lifestyle will change if your child continues to live at home but is attending university rather than school.

Is it important that your child can easily pop home at weekends or will they adjust favourably to only returning during holiday periods?

Rural or city based

Another consideration is whether your child prefers town or country living. A university's location could drive many of the social activities they offer, so if your child 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 your child has a particular passion, it is 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.

Try to be neutral

The tough challenge here is putting aside your preferences as a parent and supporting your child in the choices that are right for them – particularly if they are polar opposites to your own. Don't forget, it's natural to feel protective of your brood and want to keep them close but university provides a good opportunity for them to fly the nest in a protected environment.



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 child 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 child 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.

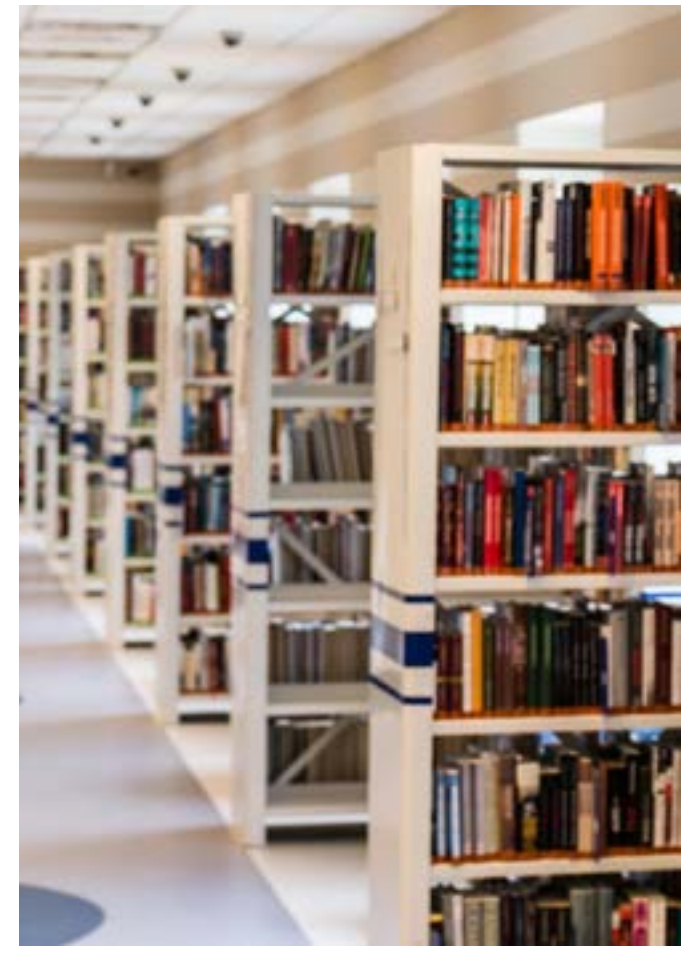
However, if your child hasn't yet gained the confidence to do this, then they could contact a student representative ahead of the visit and get answers by email or set up a chat with a student while they're there. What's important is to get a good sense of the comprehensive opportunities available and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

Trust your child's instincts

No matter how appealing a course might be, if your child 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.

Check if costs are covered

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



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 child should check what's on offer and plan accordingly. In addition, they should make a list of questions that they want to ask each university so they can compare and contrast differences to help with their decision making. Which questions should they ask staff, which are better aimed at students, or should they ask the same questions to both?

Prepare questions in advance

Do not be afraid to ask questions. Open days provide the perfect opportunity to receive direct answers to questions that may be difficult to find online. Furthermore, answers to some questions may be different compared to the previous year, such as whether they would make exceptions to the entry requirements stated on their website. Both you and your child should think of some questions in advance rather than thinking on the spot.

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 child to get a good feel for the environment. Can they imagine themselves living there? Do the students look happy? Is it a friendly environment?

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 child be totally seduced by this, they must make their decision based on plenty of other research too.

Don't stress if you can't attend

If you are unable to make the official open day, then you may choose to arrange a private viewing. Call the admissions team to arrange a suitable date and time to visit. Whilst you are likely to miss out on some of the lectures and presentations that are organised during an open day, you may still be able to speak with a member of staff from the relevant faculty.

Question ideas for an open day

- Will an applicant still be considered if they did not meet their predicted grades?
- Will an applicant still be considered if they did not meet the GCSE entry requirements stated on your website?
- What is the university looking for in a student's application / personal statement - is there anything they can do to increase their chances of being offered a place?
- How many hours of timetabled teaching does the university provide and what is the ratio between lecture and seminar teaching?
- What additional support does the university provide if a student finds certain parts of the course particularly challenging?
- Does the university provide any additional support for students with a particular learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia)?
- What does the university offer with regards to career support and guidance?
- What type of careers / jobs do students go on to have after graduating?
- Can a student take on part-time employment whilst studying?
- Does the university provide opportunities to study abroad / work in industry (or can you tell me more about these opportunities)?



Advice from parents



Try to encourage your child to join the student tours on a university open day. Prathima found it much easier to ask students her questions compared to speaking to lecturers or the admissions team.



Don't worry if the right university for your child is far from home and you don't get to see each other as often as you would like. Sara could only come home during the holidays, but we found lots of ways to keep in touch - Facetime and Whatsapp were our favourites.



Make sure the university offers facilities for your child to enjoy their hobbies. The Olympic sized swimming pool at Birmingham university enabled Chris to continue competing on a national Level.

Summary

University is about much more than obtaining further qualifications. To succeed, your child must feel comfortable.

1

Think about location, size, and atmosphere of the university;

2

Choosing the right course is more important than the university type;

3

Will distance from home affect your child's success and happiness;

4

Will your child do better in closed (campus) or townbased (non-campus) environment;

5

Take advantage of open days or university visits, and try to ensure your child prepares in advance.



Choosing the right course

“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 Undergraduate 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 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.

**FINDING THE RIGHT COURSE
TO SUIT YOUR CHILD
IS TOP PRIORITY**

Researching the right course

With over 30,000 courses available the right course is out there – it just might be tricky to find it! There is plenty of information about university courses available so it's worth researching diligently before making choices, rather than students relying on “my teacher recommends it”; “my parents took it”, or “I like the university”.

When to step back

This research is something that your child 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 child'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 at degree level aren't covered in sixth form options, so don't let your child 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?

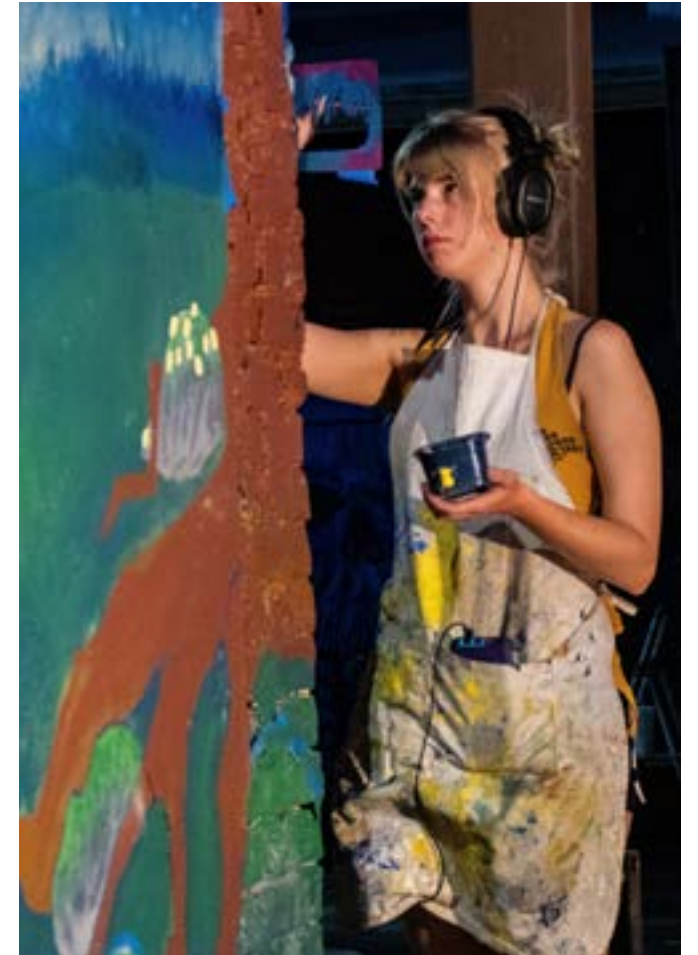
If they are struggling with a starting point, investigating what's of interest to them is a good place to start. You think they spend too much time playing video games? How about a BA in Computer Games Design – it can be a lucrative business post-graduation. Not academic but loves sports? BA in Sports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

Predicted grades

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

Useful link

Which?
University
course
search



Suggested starting points

Is your child 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 school subject they have enjoyed?

Do they have a natural flair for a subject?

If they enjoy more than one subject, are there any common themes?

What are your child's hobbies?

Is your child particularly passionate about any music, sport or art related activities?

Think about your child's personality traits

Try to think outside the box - do they have a particular interest in current affairs? Gaming? Helping others?

Has your child expressed interest in a particular career?

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

Rory's story:

By the time I began Year 13, I had narrowed my degree to two possible choices - an art related course or biology. Whenever I explain this to people, they are always surprised. I enjoyed both, I was on track for As and I had no idea about a potential career path.

Having attended a fairly academic school, there was a certain pressure to choose biology. However, it was the comments of one friend that made me finally choose a degree in illustrations. He said I should choose an art based degree as I was always seen doodling in my sketch book. His comments made me realise what I actually had a passion for - outside of the classroom and during my spare time.

I have never regretted this decision. Dedicating three years to a subject I genuinely enjoyed beyond study led to some of the best years of my life. I am now working for a large marketing company creating online illustrations for a range of clients - a career choice I never considered when I was at school.



League Tables

National league tables

Don't get too obsessed with the national league tables which are published annually by the Complete University Guide, The Guardian and The Times / Sunday Times. They cover a range of factors including student satisfaction, entry standards, facilities and academic services amongst others and focus on full-time student experience (not part-time).

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 but often excel by offering new, innovative subjects which can prove more relevant to today's working environment. A variance of 20-30 places could indicate as little as a couple of points difference. It's also worth noting that universities that rank highly in national tables don't always rank well in international tables as the criteria applied are different. If you spot a big difference, it's worth visiting the university website directly, as they sometimes offer explanations.

Useful links

The
Guardian
University
Guide 2019

The
Complete
University
Guide 2020

The Times
Good
University
Guide 2019

The TEF
Ratings

Subject specific league tables

It's worth reviewing league tables to see how the chosen university delivers in the specific subject areas of interest. This is different from the league tables of how your university performs overall. It's possible that 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). Also, check for professional accreditation by approved membership bodies if seeking out a professional degree – this is a good indicator of whether the course is highly regarded within industry and whether or not it's on par within the UK and internationally.

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)

To assess the quality of teaching within a university, consider the TEF rating as decided by an independent expert panel including students, academics and employer representatives. Ratings awarded are gold, silver or bronze.

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC LEAGUE
TABLES ARE MORE RELEVANT
THAN NATIONAL LEAGUE
TABLES



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 child is suitable for a particular course.

Universities 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 child will have to reach those grades); however, there are sometimes exceptions to rules (if your child 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.

Not all sixth form qualifications are considered equal by some universities. For example, some do not accept BTEC 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 child's final A Level grade, universities are increasingly looking at GCSE performance as a formal indicator of your child's academic ability.

It's worth checking

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



UCAS tariff

In order to compare students as equitably as possible, UCAS offers a tariff (previously known as the "points system") whereby each sixth form qualification is awarded a certain number of points according to a combination of the time spent studying it 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. However, if they do cite a UCAS tariff (i.e. minimum 120 points), check out the tariff tables using the UCAS calculator to work out what qualification and grades will be needed to gain university entry.

Useful links

Tariff
calculator

Understanding 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 child 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 child'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.

Course content

Degree courses vary between universities and each degree may provide a very different experience for your child. 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 child 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?

Teaching and learning

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

Moreover, think carefully about your child'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 large 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?

Entry requirements

Each university sets its own entry requirements so make sure your child 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 child can access when moving into higher education.

Remember, your child 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 child 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 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?



Understanding university 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 child 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.

Key terms:

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 child 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 child to apply early to ensure loans are processed on time.

Tuition fees

The tuition fees (up to £9,250 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. Simply put, the higher the family income, the less money granted:- parents will be expected to cover any shortfall. However, assessment is made on "residual" income – i.e. the money left over after debts and expenses have been paid (so not pre-tax earnings or even net income). This money is paid termly directly to the student, so make sure they know how to budget.

LOAN APPLICATIONS MUST BE
MADE AT LEAST EIGHT WEEKS
BEFORE THE COURSE BEGINS



A different type of loan

Divorced / separated Parents

Where parents are separated or divorced, income is assessed on the parent with whom the child resides and (if applicable) their current partner (irrespective of whether or not that partner is responsible for the child). 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 very generous, so avoid thinking that student loans are like conventional bank loans or even a mortgage. 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 30 years.

Other financing options

It's worth reviewing scholarships, grants and bursaries to see whether you child 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 child getting work whilst studying;- or a combination of both!

Repayment terms are:

1. No payments are made until the student is earning £25,000 in the April after graduation;
2. Once they qualify for payment, they repay only 9% on any amount earned over the threshold (so if they earned £25,100 in April after graduating, they would pay £9 a month);
3. Repayments are docked directly at source and they cease if salary drops below the threshold;
4. Interest rates apply from when the loan is given (i.e. start of the degree);
5. Any outstanding debt is wiped clear after 30 years.

Useful links

GOV. UK
Student
loans

The Student
Loans
Company

Student
Finance
Calculator



Learning difficulties and 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 child can't take public transport) and / or accommodation contribution (i.e. if the bathroom needs to be adapted to meet your child'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 child 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 child receives DSAs; however, it might be helpful for them to know to ensure your child 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 child's entitlements.

Conditions that might qualify include:

- cognition and learning difficulties (such as dyslexia or dyspraxia);
- social, emotional and mental health difficulties (such as ADD, ADHD); sighted or needing crutches);
- sensory and / or physical needs (such as visual impairment or equipment to support a physical difficulty);
- communication and interaction needs (such as difficulties with speech / language, Asperger's Syndrome, autism);
- Under the Equality Act 2010, some long-term health conditions are classified as disabilities (such as HIV, cancer, chronic heart disease).

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

Antoine's story:

At school, I was always given the help and support I needed to do well. I was given a scribe, extra time and learning support to help me with my dyslexia. I was surprised to discover that this type of help also extended to higher education.

Applying for DSA enabled me to purchase a range of learning software that converted my speech into text. This helped me to write essays quicker than I usually would under normal conditions. The university itself also supported me - so I am glad I told them. I thought I would be the only one going to university with a learning difficulty, but that was definitely not the case.



Advice from parents



Encourage your child to find part-time work over the holidays as this will help cover living expenses during term-time.

We couldn't cover 100% of Alfie's living expenses, but the money he earned as a support assistant in a summer camp helped make up the difference.



Don't worry if your child doesn't have a career in mind - it's OK not to know at this point.

Philippa has always loved reading and chose to study English Literature; she's really enjoying her time at university.



Don't let the most famous university names drive your child's decision.

After significant research, Leon found the best media studies course to suit him was at Southampton University, which had excellent industry links.

Summary

Choosing the right course at the right university takes research.

1

Understand how courses differ from one another to steer the decision making process;

2

How long does your child want to commit to further education (at this stage) and do they want to go abroad?

3

Be guided by league tables, but don't obsess over them;

4

Check university entry requirements carefully;

5

Investigate financing options for both tuition fees and maintenance loans and apply with plenty of time.



The UCAS process

“

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 at all so it’s important to respect the timetable outlined.

Plan ahead

The process itself is reasonably straightforward but much of the content requires considerable preparation before submission so this is absolutely not something to leave until the last minute. Applications that have been rushed and insufficiently thought-through are obvious and a slap-dash approach could jeopardise opportunities so ensure your child invests plenty of time in making the application.

Seven sections for completion:

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

Nominated access

Whilst your child 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.

Choose wisely

Applications can be made for five choices – this can be five versions of the same course at five different universities, or five different courses all at the same university – or any combination thereof.

Usually, it doesn’t make much sense to only apply to one university, as entry requirements are likely to be similar whatever the course and this could prevent your child going to university at all if they fail to make the minimum grades.

In fact, some universities prefer applicants to be focused on one course, so multiple applications to the same university could indicate lack of focus and count against the applicant.

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 thing is a wasted opportunity.

A scattergun approach may backfire

Applying for courses that are completely different – irrespective of university

location – can indicate that the student doesn’t know where their interest lies and is unlikely to be looked upon favourably. If this happens, it might be better for them to go back to the drawing board and reconsider their course choices.

UCAS parent newsletter

For regular parental updates regarding the UCAS application process it is worth signing up to the UCAS parents newsletter.

[Sign up here](#)



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 your preferred option and dismiss your application accordingly.

Spreading risk

Try to encourage your child to apply for a range of courses with different entry requirements in case academic expectations are surpassed or not met.

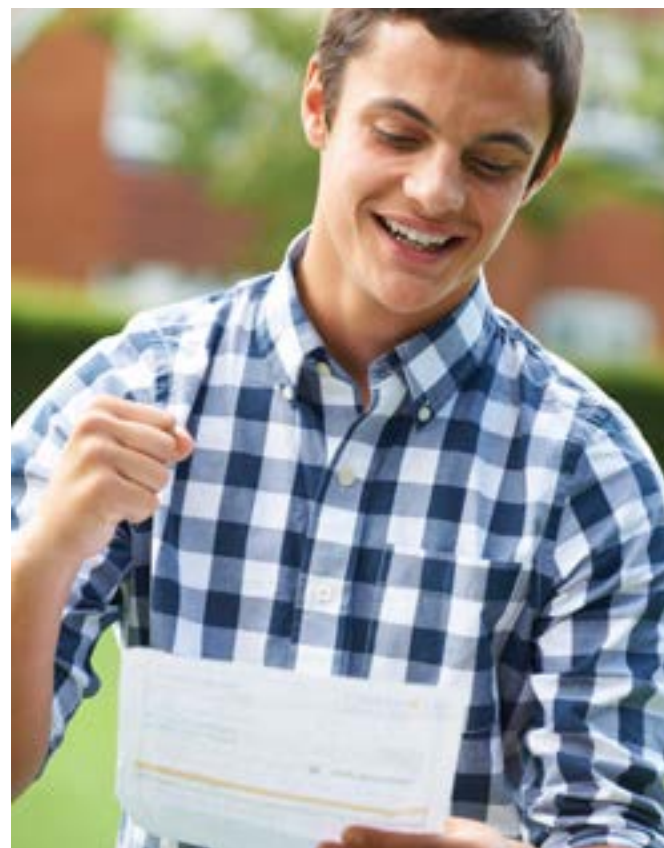
It is usually advised to apply for a mix of aspirational, realistic and safe university options. Applying to a range of universities with similar entry requirements may prove to be a costly error in receiving offers or not on results day.

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 paid employment experience 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 standout 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.



Keep UCAS informed

Email is the first choice of communications for most universities, so your child 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. Failing to do this could mean important communications are missed.

Personal statement

As part of the university application, your child will need to submit a personal statement. Effectively, this is a short (4,000 characters or circa 500 words) advert that lets your child showcase why they would make a great student.

The complication arises in that only one personal statement can be submitted across all university applications and therefore it cannot be tailored to individual universities or courses: which does not mean they should not have been thoroughly researched before preparing the statement. The good news is the bulk of the statement should be focused around your child's strengths, achievements and ambitions.

Content for a personal statement isn't something that can be created overnight. It takes time to assimilate ideas, finesse them, so it's good to encourage them 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 consolidate thoughts and prompt an understanding of ways to describe clearly what they like and dislike and why.

Addressing different course choices

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). If possible, they should seek out the themes common to all the courses.

Notwithstanding this, every effort should be made to articulate their suitability and passion for their chosen courses, even if this means articulating in general terms rather than specifics depending on how different the areas of focus in each course may be.

It is worth noting that more academic universities will seek greater evidence of your child's passion for the subject versus their skillset, less academic universities will place more weight on skills.

Hobbies and interests

Their interests beyond the classroom are especially important, where they can demonstrate initiative for doing something that has not been prescribed, and interests and inspiration that they have discovered themselves. This is a key way to stand out from others because it clearly demonstrates their uniqueness. Voluntary experience can also be included.

Don't forget location. If all their chosen universities are city based whilst their hobbies are all country-related, they need to address this.

Being a joke may not be funny

Tempting though it may be to make lots of jokes, write in an unusual style, or exaggerate the truth in a bid to stand out from others, this is not the appropriate way forward. Notwithstanding the personal statement should reflect your child's personality, these pretensions should be avoided.

Demonstrating passion

With relatively few words allowed, it is essential that the university understands why this is the right course for your child. Wider reading and relevant work experience associated with their degree choice (even if it is for a day) will help illustrate their interest.

**YOUR CHILD'S PERSONAL
STATEMENT SHOULD BE
STARTED EARLY**



Setting the right tone

It is essential to write in clear English (it does not have to be flamboyant or elaborate but should articulate the meaning simply), use a sensible email address and focus on positives (what they do like and contribute, not what they don't like and want to avoid).

Like CVs, there are certain descriptors that can be over-used (creative, great communicator, diligent, willing to learn, team player, problem solver to name but a few). It's fine to use these expressions, but the focus should be on why this applies (and examples to prove or demonstrate) rather than listing them without qualification.

Sequence, paragraph order and a broad remit covering a variety of aspects of their personality are important. This is no time to be shy or secretive. Your child should share drafts to get feedback and input from a range of people that have unique insight into their different strengths.

The personal statement can be cut and paste from another source. To get a good statement, it will probably need to go through many iterations, so best not to type it directly onto the application form!

Getting personal experience

A key way to stand out from others is to gain some experience, either by volunteering, working or enjoying hobbies. It resonates all the more if they can show reflection on what they've learned from it and how it's impacted them. This has special merit if it's in a related area to subjects they're applying for:

- Someone applying for a medical degree might demonstrate a caring personality by volunteering at a local hospital, charity or hospice;
- Someone looking to get involved in a sports degree might help set up a jogging group for teenagers in a local park;
- Working in a shop over the weekend might offer all sorts of insights into customer relations, understanding consumer bias, appreciating the importance of customers being polite and respectful to staff etc;
- A passion for a certain hobby and how that has grown and developed over time, demonstrates commitment, enthusiasm, progress and self-growth.

If a gap year is planned, it's worth including an outline of how it is hoped this will expand their experience and knowledge in the personal statement.

How to support your child with their personal statement

DOs

- Start early - the personal statement will need a number of redrafts;
- Create a plan - encourage your child 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;
- 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 child demonstrate wider reading? Additional courses completed? Work experience in a relevant field?

DONTs

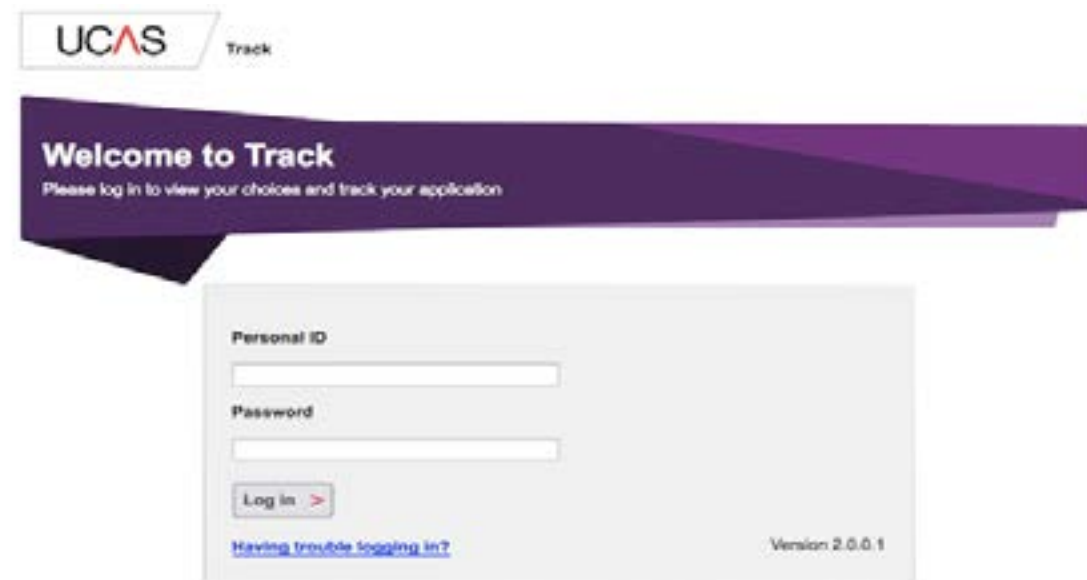
- Plagiarise or copy any other source - UCAS will check for this and it may have an impact on your child's overall application;
- Exceed the 4000 character limit / 47 lines of text
- Mention a university or course by name (if your child is applying to different universities or for courses with different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

Tracking the application

Once the application is in, there isn't much to do other than sit back and wait. Different universities have different criteria on when they make their decisions and their timelines can vary, so responses to applications won't be made at the same time.

UCAS records progress and status through their online programme "track" which has a secure login. At present there is no app for phones.

Universities will make either a conditional offer (the application is accepted so long as the student achieves a certain level of grades when taking sixth form qualifications) or unconditional – the



Most universities respond within a fortnight or so of receiving the application, but there are exceptions and a delay in response does not necessarily imply bad news. There are firm deadlines and, in the event that universities haven't responded by the appropriate deadline, their response is automatically deemed as a rejection. On this basis, it could well be worth telephoning them a few days ahead of the deadline if there has been no news to ensure there hasn't been an error in losing the application.

application is accepted and either the student has already met their minimum requirements (for example, if they have already taken their exams) or there are no pre-requisites notwithstanding exams have not yet been taken. Whilst an unconditional offer ahead of final examinations is good news for a child 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. However, it's worth remembering that



whilst sixth form grades may no longer play a part in university entry, they will still be considered by future employers – especially if the grade of degree obtained was mediocre. In some cases, universities will flat out decline the application.

Once all the offers are in, it's decision time. Your child can only accept a maximum of two offers – one "first choice" (or firm) offer and, in the case 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 (unless they do much better than predicted and their results surpass expectations, in which case they can either accept the place offered or go for a different course through the UCAS "adjustment" process). Universities making any remaining offers must be notified that their offers have not been accepted.

Key terms:

Conditional offer

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

Unconditional offer

An offer has been made and your child'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 child's first choice.

Invitation received

Your child has been invited for an interview.

Unsuccessful

Your child has not been successful. The reason will usually be shown in UCAS Track.

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 child is eligible for UCAS Extra, an "Add an Extra Choice" option will be displayed on their UCAS Track 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 child accepts a university offer on UCAS Track - 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 child's spirits up. Applying through Extra can be stressful and your child might not get a place on their first, second or even third attempt. If your child is unable to find a suitable university through Extra, then they can choose to apply through UCAS Clearing, which begins on 6 July 2020.

A second chance

Encourage your child 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 child's academic potential.

When applying through Extra, consider widening your child'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

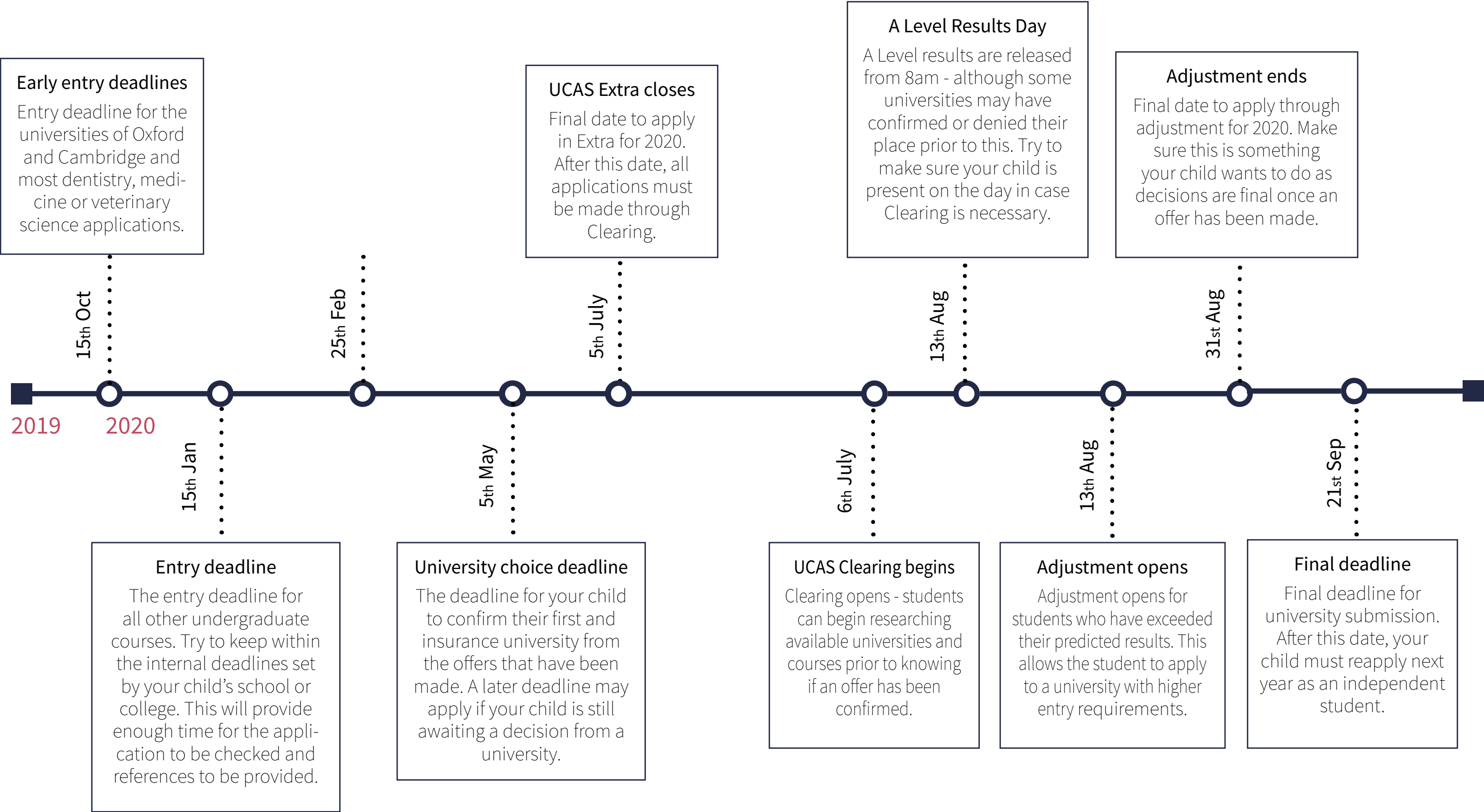
When applying to a university through UCAS Extra, it is worth noting that the university will have access to your child's original personal statement and their initial university and respective course choices.

It is therefore recommended for your child to ring 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.

**ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO
THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT THEIR
NEW CHOICES**



UCAS timetable



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

Advice from parents



Don't worry if you can't help your child with their personal statement as much as you would like.

Kitty was able to get extra advice from our neighbour and one of my work colleagues.



Try to encourage your child to stand out from the crowd.

Vanessa volunteered at the local veterinary surgery to find out first-hand what it was like to be a vet. Whilst most of her friends were working for money, Vanessa benefited from relevant experience.



Try not to let an unconditional offer stop your child from achieving the best A Level results they can.

Paul was on track for BBC, but didn't work as hard once he got his unconditional offer and failed a subject he could have passed.

Summary

All university applications go through UCAS according to a prescribed format; however, there are still things your child can do to make their application stand out from others:

- 1 Complete each of the seven sections carefully;
- 2 Check for spelling errors and typos;
- 3 Include non-school activities, such as hobbies, volunteering and work experience, focusing on the impact they have had, to help demonstrate how your child is different from others;
- 4 Don't rush the application and read it several times before submission;
- 5 Keep contact details up to date.

A-Z University listing

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 (also known as Imperial College London)*
Institute of Cancer Research, The (degrees awarded by University of London)
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**

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