

Parent and Carers Guide to Higher Education

16-18 Version



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What you need to know:

If your child plans to go onto Higher Education, this can be an exciting but also a daunting prospect for you as their parent or carer. This guide is designed to give you a quick overview of all the main things you need to know about in order to support them, from the application process, to student finance, and the impacts of Covid-19 .

This guide also contains links to further resources, including the PowerPoint presentations which, under normal circumstances, we would deliver to parents in schools. These contain more in-depth information about some of the subjects covered.

Look out for these throughout for more information!

What is Higher Education?

Higher Education is any form of education completed after Level 3 (BTEC or A Level). It covers a range of different types of education, from degrees to professional qualifications. The main form of HE that this guide will discuss is University, although there is also a section on Higher Apprenticeships, a popular alternative to traditional University.

There are many benefits to studying for higher qualifications. For many careers, a degree is an essential requirement, and having a degree can also increase your earning potential in non-graduate jobs.

People aged 22 to 29 without a degree have a lower employment rate (78%) than graduates (90%)

Over the next decade 80% of jobs will be for careers that typically recruit graduates

It is estimated that graduates will earn over £100,000 more over their lifetime than non-graduates

Application Process

Choosing a University

There are over 100 different HE institutions in the UK, offering over 50,000 different courses. Where your child decides to go largely depends on personal preference: location and course content will likely be big deciding factors.

[The University League Table](#) ranks all of the universities in the UK from highest to lowest. It changes every year, but typically the top 5 will include Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews. Realistically, however, the League Table should only serve as a guide. The “best” university might be the one that offers the specific course you want to study, or that has the campus facilities that you want/need.

If possible, try to attend some University Open Days with your child prior to them deciding where they will study. This will give you a much better sense of what the institution is like. Most open days will be online at the moment, but it is still worth attending so that you can ask questions and get more information about the university.

UCAS

All applications go through a company called UCAS, and their website is your best resource in terms of finding out everything you need to know about applying to Higher Education.

Applying through UCAS is quite straightforward. All the information for what to do and when can be found on their website, and schools/colleges will support with this too.

Students create a login through the UCAS website, where they submit their current and predicted grades, a personal statement, and a reference from their school/college teachers. You, as their parent or guardian, can also make a login with UCAS to speak to them on your child’s behalf, if required.

Check out our
UCAS for Parents
Resource [HERE](#)

Entry Requirements

All courses have entry requirements: a set of grades or conditions that they expect all applicants to meet.

Entry requirements will be different depending on the course and institution, and can be found either the UCAS website or on individual university websites. They will typically ask for:

- A certain number of UCAS points (students are given a certain number of points for each of their existing qualifications)
- Minimum grades at Level 3 (eg. A Level AAB/BTEC DDM).
- Some courses might also require the applicant to have taken certain subjects at A Level (eg. AAB including maths and physics).

Institutions will differ in terms of how stringent their entry requirements are. Your child's predicted grades will give them a good idea of where to apply. It's always best to apply to at least one ambitious choice and at least one "safer" option with lower entry requirements, just in case.

NB: Entry requirements are not set in stone: sometimes institutions will consider a student who has not quite met the requirement if the course is under-subscribed or the student has put together a particularly impressive personal statement. Equally, even if you meet the entry requirements for a certain course, this does not automatically guarantee you a place.

Personal Statements

As part of their application, your child will need to submit a Personal Statement. This is a short account of themselves, which explains who they are and why they want to study a particular subject.

This is an important part of the application process because it is the main opportunity for your child to get across who they are as a person. Things students typically include in Personal Statements include their hobbies and interests, work or volunteering experience, extra-curriculum activities such as Duke of Edinburgh, and what their plans for the future are.

School/colleges will support students in writing their Personal Statements.

Personal
Statements have a
strict word count of
no more than 4,000
characters

The Costs of University

One of the biggest concerns for students and for parents/carers can be the prospect of the cost of university. The maximum cost of university per year is **£9,250**.

This cost can be off-putting, but it is important to remember that graduate wages tend to be higher than non-graduate wages, so in most cases, the investment pays for itself long-term.

Key factors to remember about student loans:

- No money is paid up-front, and the repayment process only begins once your child has graduated and is earning above the repayment threshold. The costs will then be deducted automatically from your child's wage packet like a tax contribution would be.
- Your child will not start paying off their loans until they are earning a good wage (£26,575 if they apply through 2020/21 entry).
- The repayments are very small: students only pay back 9% of the money that falls above the repayment threshold. This means that if they were earning £27,000 per year, they would only pay back 9% of £425, which works out at £38 a year.
- After 30 years, the loans are written off regardless of how much money has been paid back. So if they never earn above the threshold, they never pay the money back.

How to Apply for Student Finance

There are two main types of student loans:

- A **tuition loan**, which covers the cost of the course,
- A **maintenance loan** which covers the cost of living (rent, food, travel, etc).

The tuition loan is sent directly to the university, whereas the maintenance loan is paid directly to the student in three annual instalments.

The loans can be applied for via [Student Finance England](#). The application process is quite simple, and the deadline to apply will fall in the **May before your child goes to university**.

Means Testing and Bursaries

The amount you can apply for the maintenance loan varies depending on household income, and whether your child moves out or stays at home. In order to work this out, Student Finance England will ask to see proof of household income.

There is extra financial support available for students with caring responsibilities, students in extreme financial hardship, and for disabled students. These take the form of grants and bursaries, which do not have to be paid back. These can also be applied for through Student Finance England.

Check out our
Student Finance
for Parents
Resource [HERE](#)

Higher Apprenticeships (HADA)

University is not the only route into gaining a degree. You could also look into Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, sometimes known as HADA.

Not to be confused with Level 3 Apprenticeships, Higher Apprenticeships are where companies team up with universities, to provide on-the-job training alongside gaining a degree. They are ideal for students who already know what industry they want to work in, and want to get some real life experience in that industry.

Some of the perks of studying for a Higher Apprenticeship include:

- gaining work experience *and* a degree at the same time
- your employer will pay your tuition loans, and your wages, so you wouldn't have to take out any loans like with an ordinary degree

Students will typically spend 4 days in the workplace, working full time, with the fifth day spent at university. This is why Higher Apprenticeships are a popular option with students who prefer hands-on learning.

Many different companies offer Higher Apprenticeships, from construction and engineering firms, to public services like the police, ambulance service, city council, etc. Opportunities will differ depending on what industries and companies exist in your area.

The applications are much the same as job applications, with candidates submitting a CV/cover letter and attending an interview with their prospective employer. Apprenticeships with leading firms can be extremely competitive to get onto.

Opportunities for apprenticeships show up throughout the year, so if your child is interested, they should keep an eye out now. The best place to look for apprenticeship opportunities is the gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>

Check out our
HADA for Parents
Resource [HERE](#)

Covid-19 and Higher Education: what you need to know

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant changes to nearly every aspect of our lives and Higher Education is no different. This guide will provide you with all the information you and your child need in order to make an informed decision about applying to Higher Education at the present time.

What's Different?

Teaching and Learning

Because universities rely heavily on independent and online learning even in normal circumstances, the switch to online learning has been far simpler for them than it has for schools and colleges.

Most university courses are running as normal this year, with teaching being moved online. Some universities are doing everything online, whereas others are using a mixture of online and face-to-face.

For the majority of courses, the difference to teaching and learning should not be too disruptive. University students should still receive the same number of lectures and seminars as they would under normal circumstances, and will be in regular contact with their tutors.

There are some courses that are not as compatible with virtual learning, however, and these may have been affected. These include:

- Performing Arts courses
- Music courses where singing and/or wind and brass instruments are involved
- Science courses involving lab-work
- Some sports courses
- Other courses with a significant practical element

If your child is planning to study any of the above courses, they should check with the universities they are applying to and find out what changes, if any, have been made. It is likely that all of these courses will still be running in the next academic year, but teaching methods may have been adjusted for staff and student safety.

Living Arrangements

Although teaching has not changed much, the social side of university looks very different this academic year. University Accommodation is still open and accepting admissions, and virtual Freshers events are still going ahead. Universities are also generally very good at providing support for students whose mental health has been impacted by the changes. In spite of this, it is undeniable that the “student experience” is significantly altered this year.

If this is something that is putting your child off from applying, why not suggest the following solutions:

Commute: While overall admissions for the current academic year fell nationwide, admissions for many college-based courses were up, suggesting that many people decided to stay closer to home and commute to university rather than moving away. Students can always opt to commute for the first year, and then look into moving out once the situation is more stable.

Defer: Another option is to apply for deferred entry and apply to attend the following academic year. One thing to consider if you are thinking about deferral, however, is that whatever they choose to do on their gap year is also likely to be affected by Covid-19. Under normal circumstances, many students choose to work and/or travel on their gap year, which may not be possible in the current climate.

Admissions

Following the recent cancellation of A Level examinations, admissions are due to be based on teacher-assigned grades. These will be standardised across the country, although we are yet to receive the full details of how this will work.

Apart from these changes to A Level grading, the process of application is largely unchanged. Some differences are as follows:

- Because of the changes to A Level examinations this year, it is likely that the Personal Statement aspect of the application will be more important than ever.
- Open days will largely be virtual rather than in-person.
- Oxford and Cambridge interviews are now taking place online: full details can be found on their websites.
- Opportunities to gain work experience prior to applying for courses that request it (eg. Medicine) may be reduced. Admissions teams are aware of this difficulty, although applicants are still advised to gain whatever experience they can before applying. For information on this, see this document from the Medical Schools Council:
<https://www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2717/a-guide-for-gaining-relevant-experience-during-the-pandemic.pdf>

Apprenticeships

Another section of Higher Education that has been affected by the outbreak of the pandemic is apprenticeships at all levels, including Higher and Degree. As apprenticeships are a generally vocational and workplace based training, it may be assumed that these are no longer available or plausible. Fortunately, this is not the case! Even during the current pandemic, and latest lockdown, apprenticeships are still able to take place.

Remote training and assessment must be undertaken wherever possible in lieu of the conventional face to face delivery. Training and assessment within colleges and training providers can be undertaken face to face with vulnerable apprentices, or those whose guardians are key workers.

Face to face training and assessment can still take place within COVID secure workplaces where employee attendance is essential.

'Pausing' the apprenticeship for a limited time is possible if training is not able to continue. This could be due to issues such as self-isolation, becoming ill or others that arise due to the current situation like caring for a family member. Apprenticeships should then be able to continue once that issue is resolved. There are certain limits on how long training can be paused, which can be found in the government document below.

New apprentices are still able to be employed and taken on. Employers, training providers or colleges are still taking on apprentices in many different sectors. To search for apprenticeships near you, or in a sector you're interested in <https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>

Don't forget that, unlike university courses, apprenticeship openings are more like jobs; they can be uploaded at any time so it's important that aspiring apprentices are checking the government tool often.

As with much of this guidance, it is still important to check with any apprenticeship or training provider about their guidelines and measures before applying or accepting an apprenticeship position to ensure you are happy with what they can offer you. For more detail and up to date advice and guidance please see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950845/Apprenticeship_response_to_COVID-19_FINAL.pdf

Studying from Home

As we enter into a third national lockdown, you may be wondering how you can support your child in home study. This next section will offer some practical suggestions for what you can do to ensure that they continue to progress, even during lockdown.

Staying motivated

For A Level students it can be easy to feel de-motivated about studying now that exams have been cancelled, but it's important that students do still keep up with their school work.

Even if they are no longer required to sit exams, it is worth bearing in mind that their grade is likely to be determined by the work they produce in class. This means that it is imperative that they continue to work hard and produce the highest quality work they can. For BTEC students, it is important that they stay on top of assignments even in lockdown.

Students who are planning to progress to Higher Education will need to keep up with their studies so that they are prepared for what comes next. Universities expect students to arrive with a baseline subject knowledge and skillset already in place, so students must be sure to develop this during their Level 3 studies if they wish to succeed at Level 4.

Accessing the support available to them

When studying at home, it can be easy to feel like you are on your own, but this could not be further from the truth! School and college staff are still available to help. Students just may have to be more pro-active in accessing them during lockdown.

Who can they go to for help?

Classroom teachers are busy, and may not be able to reply immediately, but they are still there to help! If students have a subject-specific enquiry, they should feel confident emailing teachers to ask them.

Study Skills Teams Many schools and colleges will have study skills tutors who can offer one-to-one support for students. They can also help with university applications and personal statements. Information on how to book in with these tutors can usually be found on school/college websites, or by contacting classroom teachers for a referral.

Online resources there is a wealth of materials available online to support students in home study. Some suggestions of useful websites are included at the end of this document.

Maintaining a routine

It can be hard to convince teenagers to stick to a routine at the best of times, and even more so in the current circumstances. Trying to maintain normality as much as possible will be beneficial to your child's mental and physical health, as well as helping them to study effectively.

Check out our
Home Study for
Parents Resource
[HERE](#)

- Encourage them to keep regular sleep schedules and eat three proper meals daily, as well as taking regular daily exercise
- Where possible, provide a space for them to work in which is reserved just for working and is separate from the area they sleep in (a kitchen or dining room, for example)
- Encourage them to complete work during normal daytime hours and not leave it until the evening or work late into the night
- Check in regularly to see what work they have to complete, and how they are progressing with it. Procrastination is a common problem for students, but it is more often born of anxiety and lack of confidence rather than laziness. Encourage students to seek help if they need it.

If you are concerned about your child's progress, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the school and let them know. With online learning, it can be hard for teachers to tell which students are struggling, so it's a good idea to keep school staff in the loop.

For more detailed information on some of the topics discussed above, check out the following free resources from DANCOP:

[UCAS](#)

[HADA](#)

[Student
Finance](#)

[Home
Study](#)

[Local
HE](#)

FAQ's:

Do I have to pay for my child to apply to university?

UCAS charge an admin fee for applications (£20 for 1 choice, £25 for up to 5 choices), but you will not have to pay for any fees or living costs upfront.

What is the best subject for my child to study at HE?

STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) are some of the most desirable subjects for employers, but the main thing to think about is what your child enjoys, and where their strengths lie. Studying a subject at HE requires a high degree of commitment to that subject, and it needs to be something that your child likes and is interested in. Any degree is likely to teach your child transferrable skills and increase their employment and earning potential, regardless of what subject they choose to study.

My child wants to progress to HE but I'm concerned he/she won't get the required grades. What should I do?

Encourage your child to seek help from school staff and work hard to get the best grades they can. It is not unusual for students to surpass their predicted grades, especially if they are committed to achieving highly. Entry requirements aren't set in stone, so there is a chance they might still be offered a place even if they don't quite reach the grades required. If not, they could consider re-sitting, and/or applying through clearing.

My child wants to have a gap year before attending University. When should they apply?

A gap year can be a good opportunity for students to have a break from study and travel and/or gain some work experience. If your child plans on having a year out, the best thing to do is to apply now for deferred entry. This means that the application is done and out of the way, and it also means that your child can benefit from the support they will receive from school/college teachers when applying.

What support is offered at university for students with disabilities/mental health problems/complex learning needs?

Support for students with additional needs is generally very good at universities. It is common practice for counselling and wellbeing support to be offered free of charge to all students along with career and study support, however you should check with individual institutions to see exactly what they offer. Your child may also qualify for a [Disabled Students' Allowance](#) (DSA). The process of applying for a DSA can take a while, so be sure to apply early to ensure that they receive it in time.

Further Resources:

DANCOP's Website: <https://www.teamdancop.co.uk/>

The UCAS Website: <https://digital.ucas.com/search>

Prospects: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk>

The Uni Guide: <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/>

Student Finance: <https://studentfinance.campaign.gov.uk/>

Higher Apprenticeships:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>

<https://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk/opportunities/higher-apprenticeship>

Free Home Study Resources:

Great for essay/assignment writing, Manchester Phrase Bank is designed for HE students, but is useful for Level 3 Studies too: <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

The Gojimo revision App: <http://www.gojimo.com/>

For more revision tips, try The Learning Scientists: <https://www.learningscientists.org/>

TES have a bank of resources by teachers for teachers, many of which are free to use: <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources>

Seneca Learning offer both a premium and free service, and have resources for GCSE and A Level: <https://app.senecalearning.com/courses?Price=Free>

Functional Skills Maths & English support from BBC Bitesize: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/subjects/zmqj2nb>

Discover Literature with The British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/discovering-literature#>
and Sparknotes: <https://www.sparknotes.com/>

GCSE and A Level Physics Lessons from: https://www.youtube.com/physicsonline?uid=Zzatyx-xC-DI_VVUVHYDYw&app=desktop

A Level Maths Resources from STEM Learning: <https://www.stem.org.uk/alevel-maths>

For languages, try the Duolingo App: <https://www.duolingo.com/>

For more suggestions for home learning resources, check in with your child's subject teachers and see if they have any they can recommend.