

Parent and Carers Guide to Higher Education

13-16 Version



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What you need to know:

Studies have shown that parental influence is the single most powerful factor in deciding whether or not a child progresses to Higher Education: your opinion holds far more sway than the opinions of their teachers and peers.

This guide is designed to give you a quick overview of all the main things you need to know about in order to support your child as they think about their futures.

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 (so after college/sixth form). It covers a range of different types of education, from standard 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

Where to Start

It's never too soon to start thinking about Higher Education.

Choosing to go to Uni

Whether or not your child decides they want to go to university (and their reasons for doing so), will depend on a multitude of factors. It might be that they already have a clear idea of what they want to do in the future, and already know how university does/does not fit into that plan.

Most young people, however, are still making their minds up at this point. Our main concern is making sure that they have all of the information they need in order to make an informed, sensible decision.

Schools will often run activities such as university visits and taster sessions, and these can be a fantastic opportunity to get a sense of what university might be like.

You could even suggest that they sign up for a virtual Open Day. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, most universities have moved their Open Days online. They are aimed at sixth form/college students, but that doesn't mean that younger students can't sign up. See what virtual open days are available [HERE](#). Many universities also have virtual tours and marketing videos available to watch on their websites, or on youtube.

Choosing a Course

If your child has expressed an interest in university, the next thing to think about is **what** they might study.

- There are over 50,000 different courses on the [UCAS Website](#), including both Bachelor's Degree courses (BA, BSC, BEng, etc.) and vocational courses (Higher National Certificates/Diplomas).
- Some courses are very broad in their scope (eg. Maths), while others are extremely specialised (Eg. Film and Visual Effects Technology).
- It's worth your child spending some time looking through the UCAS course search page, just to get a feel for the different courses that are available.

What your child decides to study should be led first and foremost by what they enjoy and are interested in. Any degree is going to be beneficial, so it doesn't matter too much what subject they decide to pursue. All degrees will give students a foundation of transferrable skills, and these are usually what employers are looking for, rather than the content of the degree itself.

The exception to this is, of course, when your child is interested in pursuing a career which requires a specific degree, such as Medicine, Law, Engineering, etc.

GCSE/Level 3 Options

Part of the reason we try to get students thinking about university early is because their decisions now could impact upon the options that are open to them in the future.

- Some courses, especially science-based subjects, require applicants to have certain Level 3 subjects. For example, in order to study medicine, many courses require 3 A-grade A Levels, including Biology and Chemistry.
- Many courses accept BTECs, whereas others specifically ask for A Levels.

If your child already knows what course/subject area they want to study, they should be mindful of this when picking Year 9 and Post-16 options.

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.

This is not something your child needs to decide any time soon, but they might want to think about what type of university they would prefer in the future: would they prefer to attend a prestigious “redbrick” university such as Oxford or Cambridge, or somewhere more modern? Do they want to move away and live in another city, or stay close to home?

[The University League Table](#) ranks all of the universities in the UK from highest to lowest. 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.

Who can help?

The most important thing is that students are informed about their options, and are aware of the different opportunities that are out there. There are lots of places you can go to find out more about university.

- **DANCOP** we provide information and guidance to children throughout Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. See our [website](#) for more information.
- **School** schools will often run events, trips or ‘drop-down-days’ targeting students who might want to go to university. And students can always ask their teachers for advice as well!
- **Universities** sometimes universities will run events and activities that are open to the public- keep an eye out for these in your local area.
- **Online resources** we have listed some at the end of this document.

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 (the threshold is currently set at £26,575 for 2020/21 applicants).
- The repayments are very small: students only pay back 9% of the money that falls above the repayment threshold. (Eg. 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](#). Their deadline falls in the May before your child is due to go 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.

If your child is an able student, but is not excited by the idea of spending more time in the classroom after leaving school, then a HADA may be for them.

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](#)

The Application Process

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

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.
- 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.

Students will generally go through this process in their second year of college/sixth form.

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.

Covid-19 and Higher Education

Hopefully by the time your child is ready to apply to university, things will be pretty much back to normal. There are a few things you may want to bear in mind, however.

What's Different for you?

- 1) In normal circumstances, there are many opportunities for students to experience university **through taster sessions, school trips, and activities in school**. This year, you might have to get a bit more creative as most of these outreach activities have moved online for the time being.
- 2) The current situation has left many **students feeling despondent about the future**, especially Year 10 and 11 students who have been affected by the cancellation of exams. It's important to do what you can to try to keep spirits and aspirations high in spite of the many setbacks that the pandemic has resulted in.
- 3) All students will have **messed out on chunks of school** through the various lockdowns and closures. This once again means that parents are more important than ever in keeping them on track.

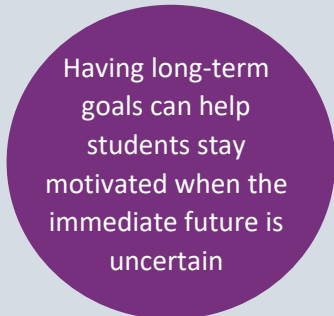
Studying from Home

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

It can be difficult for students to stay motivated after facing so many setbacks—especially for students whose exams have been cancelled, giving them no concrete goal to work towards.

- Working towards a goal further in the future, such as attending university or achieving a certain career can actually be a great way to help children to focus and stay motivated.
- Remind them that even if their exams have been cancelled, their grade is likely to be determined by the work they produce in class. So it's important to work hard and stay on-track.
- School work can be a great distraction from bigger worries, and staying in a productive routine with something to focus on is about looking after their mental health, as much as it is about staying on-track academically.



Having long-term goals can help students stay motivated when the immediate future is uncertain

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.

The most important thing to prioritise at this time is your own, and your child's mental wellbeing.

Make sure they still take the time to relax and engage in the activities they enjoy.

It is understandable if your child is feeling anxious about the current situation. See our 'Studying from Home' resource for suggestions of free online mental health resources.

Who can help?

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 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.

Support Staff/Catch-up Tutors: Many schools will have study skills or catch-up tutors who can offer one-to-one support for students, especially with core subjects like Maths and English. Check with your child's school to see if they offer anything like this.

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.

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.

Should my child have a specific career in mind before applying to university?

Not necessarily. If they do already know what they want to do when they leave school then that's fantastic, but it is worth bearing in mind that plans made at this age are always provisional. Many people end up in a career that is nothing to do with their degree subject: most people who study law do not become lawyers, for example. But their degrees are still valuable because they provide them with transferable skills that are desirable to a wide range of employers.

I want my child to attend university, but they say they would rather get a job. What should I do?

Encourage them to keep their options open for now, and see how they feel when they are older. There is no point pressuring them into something they do not want to do. Degree-level study requires commitment and dedication, and studying something they do not enjoy is likely to make your child miserable. If they do not enjoy classroom-based learning, you could suggest that they look into more hands-on options such as a HND or HADA. Remember, there is no age-limit on Higher Education, so if they change their mind later down the line and decide that they do want to study, this is also fine!

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).

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:

Oak National Academy: <https://www.thenational.academy/>

BBC Bitesize: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>

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

For more revision and study tips, try The Learning Scientists:

<https://www.learningscientists.org/>

Seneca Learning offer both a premium and free service, including GCSE resources:

<https://app.senecalearning.com/courses?Price=Free>

TES have a bank of resources by teachers for teachers, many of which are free to use:

<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources>

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

and Sparknotes: <https://www.sparknotes.com/>

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

A wide range of Science and Maths resources are available from STEM Learning:

<https://www.stem.org.uk/resources/search>

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.

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

UCAS

HADA

Student
Finance

Home
Study

Local
HE