

# A guide for parents and carers

## Helping your child on their way to university

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Applying to university can be a daunting time for students. Parents, relatives and carers can play a vital role in all stages of the process, from helping students research institutions to writing lists of what to pack. While any decision must ultimately be theirs, this factsheet outlines how you can support your son/daughter along the way.

### What are the benefits of going to university?

Studying for a degree provides the opportunity to gain an in-depth subject knowledge, which is essential for many career choices. Lots of students choose to study a subject they enjoy for its own sake, as many graduate vacancies don't require a specific degree subject. Employers really value the transferable skills students develop while at university, which can help build a successful and fulfilling career in a competitive job market. Higher education can also lead to further study and training opportunities. There can also be financial rewards, with an increased earning potential after graduation and faster career progression. Studying at university has many social benefits too and can develop independence and self-confidence.

### How should they choose a degree course?

When deciding what to study, your son/daughter might like consider:

- What do they enjoy studying? Do they want to continue a subject they have previously studied or explore a new one?
- What are their career goals? Do they require a particular degree or accredited course?

- What skills do they want to develop?
- Does the course content match their interests?
- How is the course taught and assessed?

Choosing the right course is essential for ensuring your son/daughter gets the most out of their time at university – with something like 37,000 degree courses at 350+ institutions available through UCAS, this is no easy feat! They should begin researching their options early, especially as the content of courses with identical titles and course codes can vary dramatically between institutions.

Most universities offer a range of Bachelor of Arts (BA), Engineering (BEng) and Science (BSc) undergraduate degree courses, which typically take three years to complete. Engineering and Science subjects may also be available as four-year undergraduate integrated masters degrees (eg. MEng, MSci). Dentistry, Medicine and Veterinary Science courses normally take five years. In some instances courses are available with a foundation year, or a year spent working in industry or studying overseas.

### How should they choose a university?

Once they've narrowed down which subject(s) they're interested in and which institutions offer those courses, there are a wide range of factors that your son/daughter may wish to consider:

- Does your son/daughter want to study at a city-based or campus university? How far is the university from home?

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- Does the university have the facilities needed to support them whilst studying?
- How large is the university? Is university-owned accommodation guaranteed in the first year?
- What financial support is available?
- Does the university have a good reputation in their chosen field? If you are using league tables, bear in mind that rankings can vary dramatically depending on what is taken into account. Research Assessment Exercise results can also be useful for institutions where teaching is research-led.
- Are the department's teaching and research fields allied to their own interests?
- Make sure they stay ahead of any application deadlines. The typical application deadline for UK and EU students is 15 January, but for professional courses and Oxford/Cambridge it's 15 October.
- Ensure they find out dates and booking requirements of any open days and visit opportunities well in advance. These are an excellent way to find out what a university's really like.
- Help them think of examples that demonstrate their commitment and enthusiasm in their personal statement, but avoid heavy editing yourself – it's called 'personal' for a reason!
- Make sure they remain realistic in terms of their applications – will they enjoy the course and will they meet the entry criteria? Are they applying to some courses with slightly lower entry requirements for potential insurance choices?
- Discuss student finance early on. You can reassure them that they won't need to pay fees up front, that help is available in the form of non-means tested government loans and that they won't need to start repaying their loan until earning more than £21,000 per year.

Your son/daughter should pay close attention to the entry requirements for their chosen course and institutions, both in terms of grades and specific subjects. Some courses may require additional entry tests.

All applications to full-time courses are made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS). UK schools and colleges are registered with UCAS to manage their students' applications. Your son/daughter can apply for up to five courses (more than one can be at the same institution), but can only use four choices for Dentistry, Medicine or Veterinary Science courses.

### How can I help my son/daughter?

- Encourage them to begin their university research early and explore university websites and prospectuses fully.

### Where can I get further information?

Our parents' website contains further information on all aspects of planning for university:

- [bristol.ac.uk/study/parents](http://bristol.ac.uk/study/parents)

The UCAS website also contains comprehensive information on the application process and an A-Z course search facility at [ucas.com](http://ucas.com).