



**A PARENT'S  
GUIDE TO  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION**



## CONTENTS

- 5 Why go into Higher Education?
- 6 Routes to Higher Education
- 8 Choosing a course
- 9 Choosing a university
- 10 Open days: things to consider
- 13 UCAS fairs
- 14 UCAS: everything you need to know
- 16 All things money
- 18 What to expect at uni
- 21 Useful websites
- 22 Jargon buster
- 23 8 Steps to university

# INTRODUCTION

**'Aspire Higher' is the consortium name that comprises 3 universities; University of Bedfordshire, University of Hertfordshire and University of Northampton.**

**Aspire Higher is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) body that has developed the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) in England. NCOP aims to increase the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by 2021.**

This brochure is designed to help you and your son/daughter to make informed decisions regarding their application to higher education (HE). The decision to attend university is very important and possibly daunting for both you and your son/daughter. This brochure will outline important dates and what criteria needs to be completed during the school year.

We hope this brochure will demystify and answer any questions or concerns you and your son/daughter may have, so that you can both make the best decision for their future and know what to expect.





# WHY GO INTO HIGHER EDUCATION?

Going into HE is a life changing experience, which offers many benefits:

- **One of the obvious reasons why your son/daughter would want to go to university is to increase their earning potential.** According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), an average university graduate earns £10k more a year than an average non-graduate\*
- **According to the latest Prospects report in 2017,** the number of graduates entering employment six months after leaving university is at a record high\*\*
- **Studying a university degree will maximise your son/daughter's employability** – they'll develop the transferable skills employers highly value (communication, presentation, time management and many more)
- **Going to university is an opportunity for your son/daughter to make lifelong friendships,** have unique experiences and create unforgettable memories they wouldn't get elsewhere.

*Studying a degree will help them to find out what they are really good at, where their talents lie and learn their strengths.*



\*ONS, Graduates in the UK labour market: 2017 [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)  
\*\*[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)



# ROUTES TO HIGHER EDUCATION

HE is more flexible than secondary education and there are different study paths, work and study combinations and part-time options to suit everyone's needs.

HE courses can be studied at:

- University
- University colleges
- Further Education (FE) colleges
- Distance learning providers.

As well as traditional degree courses (BA/BSc/BEng) there are other alternatives to HE your son/daughter may consider, such as Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Diplomas (HND), Foundation Degrees, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships.



To help you and your son/daughter understand the different aspects of each option, we have put together a handy table below:

Traditional Bachelor Degrees (BA, BSc, BEng)	Foundation Degrees	HNC/HND	Higher and Degree Apprenticeships
Studied at universities and university colleges	Studied at universities, university colleges and FE colleges	Studied at FE colleges, university colleges or some universities	Combined package of work and study  Part-time study takes place at a university or college; the rest of the time is with a chosen employer
Usually take 3 years to complete (full-time)	Usually take 2 years to complete (full-time)	HNC: usually takes 1 year to complete (full-time)  HND: usually takes 2 years to complete (full-time)	Can take between 2–6 years to complete, depending on the course level
Available as Single or Joint honours. A huge variety of subjects to choose from at over 150 UK universities	Can be studied full-time or part-time. The part-time course is flexible and can be timed to fit in with working hours	Can be studied full-time or part-time	Developed by employers, universities and professional bodies working in partnership
Can be studied full-time, part-time or distance learning	Usually involves a mix of academic and workplace-based learning	Vocational focus – 'learning by doing'	Degrees earned via this route are awarded by universities and are of an equal standard to degrees taken via the full-time undergraduate route
Often offer study abroad, work experience and internships options as part of the course	Usually designed and delivered through partnerships between employer and provider	Usually designed to prepare you for a specific career such as hospitality management, performing arts or computing and IT	Two structures available:  1. A fully integrated degree course designed specifically for apprentices  2. An existing degree delivers the academic knowledge requirements of that profession plus additional training to meet the full apprenticeship training requirements
Develop a wide set of transferable skills employers look for	Equips graduates with the specific skills that employers seek	Can be used for entry onto an Honours degree	Degree apprentices are employed throughout and are in paid work from day one
Some jobs and professions require a university degree (for example medicine, teaching)	Upon successful completion, students can go to university to top-up their qualification to an Honours degree (usually through a top-up year)		There are around 75 different options to choose from
Upon successful completion, students are able to go into work or further HE study (Masters and PhD level)			



# CHOOSING A COURSE

Moving from sixth form or college to university can be a tricky but exciting time for any student. The information that your son/daughter will be given is vast and can often be confusing and even a little overwhelming. Whilst your son/daughter will need to make the final decision, there are ways in which you can help and support him or her.

Here is a list of questions for you to ask your son/daughter, which may help to guide their decision making:

**Are you studying or working with anything you enjoy at the moment?** Identifying areas of interest your son/daughter has is a good place to start when considering which course to choose. This interest could turn into a passion once they choose it as an area of study.

**Have you asked yourself what you might be quite good at?** Keep the conversation positive, consider their strengths and interests – you can offer a different perspective and may be able to see particular strengths that they may not have considered themselves. This information will also come in handy when writing their personal statement so make a note of it!

**Do you have an idea of what career you might want to get into?** If your son/daughter has already decided on the type of industry they wish to work in, then it may be a case of refining the course they choose. For instance, Nursing is a broad subject area but will often be taught in specialisms such as Child Nursing or Mental Health Nursing. Attending university open days can help you make an informed decision.

**Still unsure? What about a Joint Honours degree?** A Joint Honours degree can be a good option as it offers the chance to choose two subjects rather than narrowing it down to one. Advise them to get online and research courses via the UCAS website or particular universities they've considered.

# CHOOSING A UNIVERSITY

There are over 150 universities in the UK alone to consider, all of which offer different courses, facilities and student experiences. Choosing the right university is just as important as choosing the right course.

- **It's not all about the teaching, but also about the student experience and whether it will suit your son/daughter.** For example, some universities are campus-based, close-knit and self contained, with academic, accommodation and leisure facilities on site. In contrast, some universities are city centre located and may be spread out across multiple campuses. Both offer very different lifestyles and this could affect how much he/she enjoys their time as a student
- **Universities set entry requirements, which applicants must meet to get onto their chosen course.** They vary widely depending on subject, course and university. So when considering universities, it's important to find out what the requirements are and whether your son/daughter would be able to satisfy them.
- **Doing research online is a really good way to make a start on this.** There are various websites, which give impartial advice on universities, and it's definitely a great way to create a shortlist of those to visit for an open day (more information about these can be found later in this brochure)
- **It's important to look at league tables to see how the universities are ranked, but it's worth bearing in mind that each one is ranked based on different criteria.** It might be worth looking at more general league tables such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) initially and going from there





# OPEN DAYS: THINGS TO CONSIDER

Choosing the right university isn't just an academic decision; it's also a very personal one. That's why the best way for your son/daughter to find out which university is most suited to them is to attend an open day. University open days will provide your son/daughter with all the information they need to be able to make their decision.

## What are open days?

Open days provide the perfect opportunity for your son/daughter to ask any questions they may have, see the campus and find out more about the courses they are interested in. There will be hundreds of other students in the same boat as your son/daughter, looking around and asking questions, so please do encourage your him or her to ask as many questions as they like.

## Knowing what to expect

Members of staff will meet and greet attendees at registration. They will usually provide an itinerary for the day and explain this with you and your son/daughter. Universities will also have student ambassadors on hand to help show visitors where to go, or point them in the right direction. Student ambassadors are the best people to ask any questions regarding university life – they are currently experiencing it, so can answer questions from a personal perspective.

## Making your way around

The itinerary will outline when subject talks are and usually includes a map too, so finding your way around should be simple. Key things to look out for are:

- **Campus tours** – a perfect opportunity to see the university, whether it be campus or city-based. The tours usually include student accommodation, library, Students' Union, study spaces, sport facilities and much more
- **Subject talks** – these enable your son/daughter to meet the academic staff, find out more about the course modules and placement opportunities, as well as ask any questions they may have
- **Explore the local area** – your son/daughter needs to feel confident in where they choose to live, so explore the local area and see the opportunities it presents
- **Finance talk** – includes everything your son/daughter needs to know about student finance and how it works. They are also really useful for you too, as you can find out information about how to support your son/daughter's application
- **Application guidance** – additional talks some universities offer throughout the day, which may benefit your son/daughter i.e. personal statement guidance.





# UCAS FAIRS

## Your open day checklist

Being as prepared as possible for an open day will help your son or daughter get the most out of the day, and having questions to hand will help with this.

Below is a checklist your son/daughter could use:

- What does the course cover?
- Are there study abroad opportunities?
- What employment opportunities do you have?
- Are work placements part of the course? If so, where are the common placements?
- What are the employability statistics for this course?
- What type of accommodation is available?
- How much does accommodation cost?
- What support services do you offer?
- What makes the university stand out from the rest?
- Who will be my academic tutor(s)?

## What to expect

UCAS fairs are large events which often include over 100 exhibition stands from universities across the UK, showcasing who they are and what they offer. In addition to stall holders, UCAS fairs also offer seminars and talks throughout the day, covering everything from student finance to subject specific sessions.

## Why visit a UCAS fair?

UCAS fairs provide you with all the universities in one place – the perfect opportunity to speak to universities which are of interest as well as ones which you may not have heard of before.

At a UCAS fair, you and your son/daughter can gather further information about courses, student life, university locations and so much more – hopefully helping to narrow down their choices ready to complete UCAS applications.

## Where to find a UCAS fair

UCAS fairs take place across the UK, so you can usually find an event within a relatively close distance from you and still get to speak to universities from further afield.

A list of upcoming UCAS fairs can be found on the UCAS website:

[www.ucas.com/ucas/events-exhibitions](http://www.ucas.com/ucas/events-exhibitions)

## Getting around on the day

The brochure given out at a UCAS fair will detail which universities are attending, as well as their stand number and a map of where each stand will be located. You can also visit the UCAS website beforehand and download any documents they may have available.

## Ask questions

The universities are there to answer any questions. Encourage your son/daughter to have a think about what is important to them, i.e. cost of living, accommodation, work placements and other factors.

## After-event research

Make sure your son/daughter continues their research after the event. Most universities will give you a prospectus to take away which includes further information about the university as well as courses available, entry requirements and so much more.



# UCAS: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

## What is UCAS?

UCAS stands for Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. It's the online centralised service that students use to apply to university.

## Making an application

A UCAS application costs £25 for multiple courses (or £20 for a single choice) and consists of several sections:

### 1. Personal details

This section involves getting a username, creating a password and setting security questions, as well as naming a parent or guardian as a nominated person on their application.

### 2. Additional info

The usual statistics questions which you will be familiar with.

### 3. Student finance

This section might appear depending on the answers given in the personal details section.

### 4. Course choice

Your son/daughter will be able to choose up to 5 courses to apply for (or 1 choice if they chose to pay £20).

### 5. Education history

This is where your son/daughter will enter all his/her qualifications from secondary onwards, including those results which they are still waiting for.

### 6. Employment history

This section is relevant if your son/daughter has had any paid jobs, part-time or full-time.

### 7. Personal statement

This is a key part of UCAS applications. It provides an opportunity for your son/daughter to show their commitment and passion for the chosen subject, stand out from other applicants, highlight work or volunteering experience and discuss their career aspirations. It is used by universities to assess capability for higher level study and ability to write effectively.

The application is for your son/daughter to complete, however as a parent you can support him/her by:

- Encouraging them and keeping them motivated
- Proofreading
- Offering suggestions on how to improve it
- Reminding them of something they might have forgotten about

There is also a wealth of advice on the UCAS website including step-by-step guides and YouTube videos on how to fill in the application and write a personal statement.



## What's next?

Your son/daughter will be able to see their application progress through the UCAS online system.

## UCAS Track

Through Track they can check if any of the universities they've applied to have invited them for an interview or offered them a place (conditional or unconditional). They will also use Track to respond to any offers they get.

## Interviews/Portfolio reviews

Some universities may invite your son/daughter for an interview/audition or ask to provide a portfolio of work or an essay. This is normal practice for particular courses. It could also be because your son/daughter's application is unusual in some way, and the course tutor wants to ensure the suitability of the course. In either case, attendance will be required to proceed further with the application.

## Decisions on your application

The confirmation of a place might rest on your son/daughter's exams results, depending on whether the offer they received is conditional. If it is, your son/daughter will find out whether they've got a place on Results Day.

## Clearing

Clearing is a way for your son/daughter to find a place at a university if their results didn't satisfy their university offer conditions, missed the UCAS application or offer response deadlines, or had a last-minute change of heart about the university or the course they want to study.

## Adjustment

Adjustment is a chance for your son/daughter to reconsider where and what they want to study if their exam results exceeded their predicted grades.



# ALL THINGS MONEY

When your son/daughter is planning for university, you're no doubt also thinking about the costs involved, and what support they may be entitled to. It is important to remember that you are not expected to fund it all. Your son/daughter will be able to take out a Tuition Fee Loan, as well as a Maintenance Loan from Student Finance.

- The Tuition Fee Loan will go directly to your son/daughter's university of choice
- The Maintenance Loan goes into your son/daughter's bank account
- With the Maintenance Loan, your son/daughter can put this money towards anything, so it could be paying rent, bills and food, or maybe the latest games console (not recommended, but it happens!).

The table below gives you an idea of the Maintenance Loan amount your son/daughter could receive depending on the category they fall under (based on the 2019/2020 academic year – [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)):

Full-time student	Loan amount
Living at home	Up to £7,747
Living away from home (outside London)	Up to £9,203
Living away from home (in London)	Up to £12,010
You spend a year of a UK course studying abroad.	Up to £10,242

**Tip 1:** Student Finance may ask you to send evidence of your income and circumstances. Make sure to send them photocopies, as they won't send back originals!

**Tip 2:** You will need to provide evidence of your household income for each year that your son/daughter will be studying at university. Make sure you put these documents in a safe place so they can be used again if needed!

**Tip 3:** See the following website for more information on how to support your son/daughter's student finance application: <https://www.gov.uk/support-child-or-partners-student-finance-application>

## Paying it back – main facts

- Once your son/daughter graduates from university, they won't need to pay back their Maintenance Loan or Tuition Fee Loan straight away\*
- Each plan has a threshold for your weekly or monthly income. You repay 9% of the amount you earn over the threshold for Plan 1 and 2
- You do not pay anything back if your income is under the threshold.

### Plan 1:

You'll only repay when your income is over £364 a week or £1,577 a month (before tax and other deductions)

Plan 1 loans get written off based on where you are from and when you took out the loan:

**2005 to 2006, or earlier:** when you're 65

**2006 to 2007, or later:** 25 years after the April you were first due to repay

This differs in Scotland:

**2006 to 2007, or earlier:** when you're 65, or 30 years after the April you were first due to repay – whichever comes first

**2007 to 2008, or later:** 30 years after the April you were first due to repay

### Plan 2:

You'll only repay when your income is over £494 a week or £2,143 a month (before tax and other deductions)

Plan 2 loans get written off 30 years after the April you were first due to repay

## Other funding

Your son/daughter also has the opportunity to benefit from scholarships and bursaries. These are generally given by the university your son/daughter decides to attend and don't need to be repaid.

Some scholarships and bursaries are merit-based and have certain eligibility criteria, for example academic excellence or special talent, whilst others and bursaries are income-based or aimed at a particular group of people.

A scholarship might cover the entire cost of your tuition, or an award might be a one-off payment of a few hundred pounds, which could go towards your son/daughter's living expenses.

\*[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)



# WHAT TO EXPECT AT UNI

Here is what you can expect for accommodation and support available at university.

## On-campus accommodation

University halls of residence are a safe environment, ideal for making new friends and developing your son/daughter's independence. Being 'onsite' means that they will have easy access to all the support and services on offer.

Students halls are fully furnished and utility bills are included in the rent (apart from a TV licence for those who would like to bring their own TV). All halls are self-catered, with a cleaning service during term time for communal areas and a 24/7 security team available all year round. Security would usually regularly patrol the grounds during the evening, and monitor the CCTV cameras at all times to ensure that the students will be safe. However, we advise you check with the each individual university.

## Private accommodation

Some first year students may choose to live off-campus in private rented accommodation. In their 2nd and 3rd years, your son/daughter is likely to share a house with friends they have made in their first year.

With private rented accommodation they'll need to factor in costs other than rent, for example utilities, including broadband, water and electricity, and car parking.

Whichever of those two options your son/daughter chooses, they will learn to be independent through booking their own appointments, doing their own grocery shopping and planning their own travel arrangements.

More good news is your fridge will be full and the washing basket will finally be empty!

## Living at home

This option could be perfect for your son/daughter if he/she doesn't feel ready to leave home and chooses a local university. It is also much cheaper, so you will save yourself a lot of money. Also students who stay at home often feel they benefit from having a solid and familiar support network of friends and family around them.

## Support at university

Coming to university is a huge transition, and it's very important for your son/daughter to be happy and comfortable with their studies and university life, as well as you having piece of mind. To help your son/daughter find their feet, there is usually a variety of specialist support available at university to help them through their university journey.

## General support

Each university will have a Student Help Service where your son/daughter can ask for any assistance, information and guidance. Specialist teams include:

- **Financial Guidance Team** – this team can offer information and support on student finance issues such as student loans, bursaries, budgeting and money management. They can also give additional funding if your son/daughter experiences financial difficulties (this is subject to eligibility)
- **Residential Life Team** – this team can help with anything from homesickness to medical emergencies
- **Counselling and Mental Health Team** – this team offers a free, confidential counselling service that can be used throughout your son/daughter's studies. They can also give advice about other services that your son/daughter can use if needed
- **Multi-Faith Chaplaincy** – a team of chaplains from different faiths work together to serve everyone at the university. Even if your son/daughter is not religious, they are welcome to drop in for a talk, to meet others, or just to enjoy some quiet time
- **Learning Development Team** – this team can offer your son/daughter academic support on all aspects of their course with a range of different methods. These include: one-to-one sessions, drop-ins, workshops, study packs, infographics, videos and rough guides
- **Personal Academic Tutor** – someone else your son/daughter can speak to about their difficulties on the course if any arise.





# USEFUL WEBSITES:

[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

[www.university.which.co.uk](http://www.university.which.co.uk)

[www.whatuni.com](http://www.whatuni.com)

[www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk](http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk)

[www.gov.uk/student-finance](http://www.gov.uk/student-finance)

[www.moneysavingexpert.com/students](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students)

[www.thestudentroom.co.uk](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk)

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

[www.targetcareers.co.uk](http://www.targetcareers.co.uk)

## What if my son/daughter has additional needs?

Many universities will offer additional specialist support alongside the general support offered by the Learning Development Team.

They can help with the following:

- Physical impairments
- Sensory impairments
- Mental health difficulties
- Medical conditions
- Autistic spectrum disorders
- Specific learning difficulties, for example dyslexia.

## Will they cope with studying at university?

- Studying at university is a world away from studying at school or college, so it's likely that if they have struggled in the past, this may not be the case at university
- In the first couple of weeks, there will be introductory sessions to ease your son/daughter into the university way of life, and if they are struggling, there is a lot of support available for them.





# JARGON BUSTER

**Admissions:**

The dedicated team at a university that process potential students' applications.

**BA/BSc/BEng:**

Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science/Bachelor of Engineering.

**Conditional offer:**

Offer of a place, made by a university to an applicant, which is dependent on him/her meeting specific grade/qualification requirements.

**Entry requirements:**

Grades or qualifications a student needs to get onto their chosen course.

**Firm choice:**

University a student accepts as their first choice.

**Fresher:**

Student in first year.

**Gap Year:**

A year out before starting university (optional).

**HE:**

Higher Education.

**HNC:**

Higher National Certificate.

**HND:**

Higher National Diploma.

**Joint Honours:**

A form of degree which offers students the chance to study two subjects at once.

**Placement Year:**

This is a year of either work experience or study placement.

**Personal Statement:**

A crucial part of a university application where students can write whatever they'd like to say about themselves and their motivation to study a course.

**Prospectus:**

A university booklet which gives details of degree programmes available.

**Single Honours:**

An honours degree course in which a student studies a single subject.

**SFE:**

Student Finance England – Student Loans Company which provides Tuition Fee Loans and Maintenance Loans to potential students to fund their university study.

**UCAS:**

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

**UCAS Tariff:**

A system UCAS uses for allocating points to post-16 qualifications. Points are used by universities and colleges to make broad comparisons between qualifications used for entry to higher education courses – so instead of asking for set grades, universities and colleges can ask for a number of Tariff points.

**UCAS Extra:**

Additional UCAS service that allows students to apply for one more course, even if they've already used up their original five choices.

**Unconditional offer:**

Offer of a place, made by a university to an applicant, which is not dependent on students reaching their predicted exam grades.

## DISCOVER THE 8 STEPS TO UNIVERSITY





# 8 STEPS TO UNIVERSITY

1

JUL/AUG  
AHEAD OF  
YEAR 12

## THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Things to consider:

- Student's areas of interest
- Speak to career advisors about career ambitions and industry requirements
- Discuss predicted grades

2

JAN-SEPT  
YEAR 12

## RESEARCHING UNIVERSITIES

- Attend UCAS conventions/exhibitions
- Visit open days; check university websites for available dates and registration

Things to consider:

- How far is the university from home
- Entry requirements
- Accreditation and industry partners
- Security
- Academic staff and teaching methods
- Facilities and learning resources
- Additional services: employability, student support, alumni

3

SEPT  
BEGINNING  
OF YEAR 13

## UCAS APPLICATION

Things to consider:

- Decide on the 5 choices
- UCAS cycle opens for applications in September
- Make applications by 15 October for Oxbridge, dentistry, medicine or veterinary science
- Make applications by 15 January for equal consideration to applications for all other courses

UCAS

4

OCT/MAR  
YEAR 13

## UNIVERSITY RESPONSES

Things to consider:

- Depending on the course applied for and the university – some courses will require interview attendance
- Depending on when the application has been submitted, most university decisions will be made by 31 March
- UCAS Extra opens for one additional choice, if you didn't get any offers or decided to decline them all

5

## STUDENT FINANCE APPLICATIONS

FEB  
YEAR 13

6

APR/MAY  
YEAR 13

## YOUR SON/DAUGHTER'S DECISIONS

- Declare their firm/insurance choices and decline other outstanding offers
- Make a university accommodation application

7

AUG  
YEAR 13

## WAIT FOR THE RESULTS DAY

- Best to stay local – your son/daughter will need to check their Track from 8am

Things to consider:

- Conditional Offer changed to Unconditional Offer – they've been accepted onto their course
- Conditional Offer changed to Unsuccessful – unfortunately the place is withdrawn due to the conditions not being met
- No change – advise them to remain calm, collect all their paperwork and contact the university
- If firm/insurance choice grades not met – CLEARING
- If firm choice grades met and exceeded – ADJUSTMENT

8

SEPT  
START THE  
COURSE





## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO HIGHER EDUCATION



Uni Connect is funded by the Office for Students. It is a national network of hubs across England which offer impartial advice, guidance and activities on the benefits and realities of higher education in college and university.



For further information please contact [aspirehigher@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:aspirehigher@northampton.ac.uk)