

A photograph of three young women sitting on a yellow couch, looking at a laptop screen. The woman on the left is wearing a maroon tank top, the woman in the middle is wearing a grey t-shirt, and the woman on the right is wearing an orange t-shirt and blue pants. They are all smiling and appear to be engaged in a collaborative activity. A large red arrow-shaped graphic is overlaid at the bottom of the image, pointing to the right.

Getting  
started

# Why higher education?

## The benefits are massive!

- Besides greater potential earnings and better career prospects, higher education helps the next generation learn new things, take charge of their future and help them get where they want to be in life.
- A university education develops independent learning, communication, intellectual, research and IT skills – all more important than ever these days.
- Higher education broadens interests and knowledge, nurturing independence, self-confidence and responsibility.
- Society also benefits from having a well-educated workforce, and employers value graduates. A relevant degree is vital to enter some careers, such as medicine or teaching.

## What's it like?

Undergraduate higher education courses usually last three or four years and are known as a bachelor's, undergraduate or first degree. The courses are taught through a mixture of lectures and seminars, usually made up of different modules. Students can often choose some of their modules, so they can study what they're most interested in.

As well as an academic course, university offers young people opportunities for:

- learning and socialising with a wide variety of people (including students from outside the UK and those studying very different courses)
- travel
- taking part in cultural events
- meeting potential employers

## Careers advice

Your son or daughter can get further information online from careers specialists about how higher education can help with building a career. Each UK region has its own website:

England: National Careers Service  
([nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk](http://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk))

Northern Ireland: Careers Service  
Northern Ireland ([www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk))

Scotland: Skills Development Scotland  
([www.myworldofwork.co.uk](http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk))

Wales: Careers Wales  
([www.careerswales.com](http://www.careerswales.com))

or they can contact their local careers service.

# What is UCAS?

## We're here to help

[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) is the place to start for information about applying to university or college. The section for parents and guardians [www.ucas.com/parents](http://www.ucas.com/parents) will help you understand the UCAS applicant journey and support your child through the process.

## What we do

- After checking that applications are complete, we send them to the applicant's chosen universities and colleges.
- The universities and colleges send us their decisions and we let applicants know what these are through our online Track service.
- We are a central source of information about universities and colleges.



# UCAS terms explained

There are quite a few specific terms used by UCAS and universities in the application process. We've explained some of the key ones here, but you can find more information in our UCAS terms explained [www.ucas.com/ucas-terms-explained](http://www.ucas.com/ucas-terms-explained).

## Getting started

**Admissions tests** – for some subjects (for example, medicine or law) applicants may need to take an additional test [www.ucas.com/admissions-tests](http://www.ucas.com/admissions-tests).

**CUKAS** – Conservatoires UK Admissions Service – the performing arts application system for practice-based music, dance and drama courses [www.cukas.ac.uk](http://www.cukas.ac.uk).

**Tariff** – a means of allocating points to compare post-16 qualifications used for entry to higher education [www.ucas.com/ucas-tariff](http://www.ucas.com/ucas-tariff).

**UCAS** – UCAS stands for Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. We process applications to full-time higher education courses in the UK.

**Undergraduate** – Higher education starts here. It's the first level of study, for example a degree or HND.

## Filling in the application

**Apply** – the name of the UCAS online application system.

**Deferral** – if an applicant wants to apply to study the following year, they need to check with the university or college that they're happy to consider a deferred entry application.

**Nominated access** – an applicant can nominate someone to make decisions on their behalf and discuss their application with us and the universities and colleges they have applied to. This is often a parent, carer or grandparent.

**Personal ID** – a 10-digit unique identifier given to an applicant when they register in Apply.

**Personal statement** – a statement, not exceeding 4,000 characters, written by an applicant as part of their application, to persuade universities and colleges to offer them a place on the course.

**Reference** – a statement written by someone who knows the applicant well and can give an informed and academic assessment of an applicant's suitability for the course.

## After the application is sent to UCAS

**Conditional offer** – an offer which gives the applicant a place if they fulfil certain requirements, usually exam results [www.ucas.com/offers](http://www.ucas.com/offers).

**Extra** – applicants who've used all five choices, have received all decisions and are not holding any offers may want to use Extra to add an additional choice  
[www.ucas.com/extra](http://www.ucas.com/extra).

**Firm choice** – an offer accepted as an applicant's first choice  
[www.ucas.com/replies](http://www.ucas.com/replies).

**Insurance choice** – an offer accepted as an applicant's backup choice  
[www.ucas.com/replies](http://www.ucas.com/replies).

**Invitation** – in Track an applicant may receive an invitation from a university or college to attend an interview or audition, or submit a portfolio, essay or other piece of work [www.ucas.com/invitations](http://www.ucas.com/invitations).

**Track** – our online system applicants use to check the progress of their application, change their details and manage their choices  
[www.ucas.com/trackyourapplication](http://www.ucas.com/trackyourapplication).

**Unconditional offer** – an offer of a place with no conditions. If the applicant accepts, the place it's theirs as long as they meet any non-academic conditions such as health checks – [www.ucas.com/offers](http://www.ucas.com/offers).

## After exam results

**Adjustment** – sometimes exam results are much better than expected. If an applicant has met and exceeded the conditions of their conditional firm offer, they may want to use Adjustment to find an alternative course  
[www.ucas.com/adjustment](http://www.ucas.com/adjustment).

**Clearing** – the Clearing process runs from early July and helps students who have not secured a place, and those who apply after 30 June, to find courses where there are still places available [www.ucas.com/clearing](http://www.ucas.com/clearing).

**Confirmation** – the outcome of a conditional offer which has been accepted by an applicant. If the conditions are met the place becomes unconditional; if not the offer may become unsuccessful.





# Choosing courses

# Choosing courses

## Research, research, research!

Research is key to a successful application. When we interviewed second year university students and asked them what advice they would give their 18 year old selves, ALL of them said '**do more research!**'. They'll find lots of ideas on our website [www.ucas.com/choosingcourses](http://www.ucas.com/choosingcourses) to get them started.

## Find out what others have said

It's often useful to know what others have said about their courses. Unistats, the official website for comparing UK higher education courses has information, including satisfaction scores from the National Student Survey, for all undergraduate courses. Take a look at <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk>.

## League tables

Many people want to know what is the best university or college. The truth is that there is no one course or institution which is perfect for everybody. Similarly, university league tables don't often agree as they award points for very different criteria and use different weightings according to what their editors happen to believe is most important. League tables can be found at the following websites:

- [www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide](http://www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide)
- [www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/gug](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/gug) (Good University Guide subscription service)
- [www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk](http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk)

These tables reveal a lot about other people's opinions, but the most important thing is whether a university or college will suit your son or daughter, and the best way to work that out is to get a feel for the place and work from there.

## Getting started

The first thing to think about is what subject areas your son or daughter enjoys and would be keen to study in depth.

Many subjects can be started at university. For example subjects where applicants are unlikely to have an equivalent A level, though they will be expected to prove they have potential. These include archaeology (universities will look for a practical interest in history and objects), architecture (where they will want evidence of an ability to express ideas in pictures and diagrams) or languages (someone with an A level in one language can often study another from scratch). University admissions tutors are usually happy to talk to you about what would be acceptable.

Most courses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland take three years to complete. In Scotland it is usually four years. Language students often take an extra year, which is spent abroad working in a country where the language is spoken.

Thinking of going to university or college?

No

Possible alternatives:

- Employment
- Apprenticeship
- Part-time course
- Gap year
- Resits

Yes

Do the research!

1. Which career?

- Talk to local careers service
- Try some work experience in the profession

2. Which subject?

- Talk to your school, family, etc
- Visit [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) for our search tool with links to uni websites
- Visit school or local library
- Attend a taster course or summer school

3. Which course?

- Which university or college? (see their websites and prospectuses)
- Check if the uni requires an admissions test to be sat or are likely to be called to interview or audition (see [www.ucas.com/admissions-tests](http://www.ucas.com/admissions-tests))
- Check out teaching and assessment methods
- Attend an open day to look around and meet current students [www.ucas.com/open-days](http://www.ucas.com/open-days)



## Different types of study

When people think about higher education, they tend to assume it is all about degree courses but there are different qualifications that can be gained. For more information on courses visit [www.ucas.com/study-types](http://www.ucas.com/study-types).

## Finding courses and their entry requirements

The online search tool at [search.ucas.com](http://search.ucas.com) lists the universities and colleges, along with their courses, entry requirements and map showing where they are.

The entry requirements will give you an idea of what grades would be required in certain qualifications, such as A levels, Scottish Highers or International Baccalaureate. It will also tell you if certain subjects will not be counted, or if there are other requirements, such as an admissions test.

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Attending open days is a huge must. They were very, very insightful and helped a lot in deciding on my choices.”

## Open days

One of the best ways to get an independent view is to see for yourself – encourage your son or daughter to go to open days at the institutions where they are thinking of applying. Then they'll get a chance to see what is on offer and whether they feel they could be happy spending three or four years there. They might prefer to go alone; in which case discuss with them the information they'll be looking for and questions they should ask. If they forget to ask a question, they can always telephone with further queries. To find our list of open days visit [www.ucas.com/open-days](http://www.ucas.com/open-days).

## UCAS conventions

Visit [www.ucas.com/conventions](http://www.ucas.com/conventions) to find conventions and exhibitions run by UCAS. These are free events where your son or daughter can speak to individual universities about their requirements and what they offer. There will be free seminars on a wide variety of subjects such as student finance, applying to Scottish universities, and writing a winning personal statement.

To help your son or daughter get the most from the convention, visit [www.ucas.com/prep](http://www.ucas.com/prep). It's full of things to help you, including a video about visiting an event, questions to ask and a guide to download.

## Making the right choice

Your son or daughter needs to have a realistic view of their predicted grades. These should guide them in their choices of where to apply. They may want to apply to a range of universities so that if their grades are better or lower than predicted they are still likely to have a chance of a place.

Other things to consider include:

- small or large institution
- distance from home
- transport
- sports facilities
- city or country location
- course facilities (labs, libraries, tutor access)
- nightlife and social life
- accommodation available
- activities, clubs and societies



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It may not be the course alone that would help them have a great experience.”

## Students with disabilities

If your son or daughter has a disability, it's a good idea to contact universities and colleges to discuss any support they might need before sending their application to us. Most universities and colleges have coordinators or advisers who will be happy to help. Most also publish details of their provision for disabled students on their website.

There is more advice on our website at [www.ucas.com/individual-needs](http://www.ucas.com/individual-needs) including a video guide for students with disabilities (and a BSL version), along with a video giving advice from university disability officers.

## Tuition fees

Most universities can charge up to £9,000 annually for tuition fees for their courses. However, privately run universities may charge more as the Government's tuition fee limit does not apply to them. Students at private institutions may be eligible for a tuition fee loan of up to £6,000. International students can be charged more.

Applicants will need to be clear about how they will fund payment of these fees. For up-to-date information see [www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/student-finance](http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/student-finance) and look at the information on student finance on pages 24 - 26.

## Useful resources

### UCAS

- [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)
- [www.cukas.ac.uk](http://www.cukas.ac.uk)

### Finances

- [www.moneysavingexpert.com/students](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students)
- [www.nasma.org.uk](http://www.nasma.org.uk)

### International students

- [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/studying](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/studying)
- [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)

### Lifestyle and accommodation

- [www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/student-life](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/student-life)
- [www.thesac.org.uk](http://www.thesac.org.uk)
- [www.nationalcode.org](http://www.nationalcode.org)
- [www.brightknowledge.org](http://www.brightknowledge.org)
- [www.studential.com](http://www.studential.com)

### Gap year

- [www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com)
- [www.carolinesrainbowfoundation.org](http://www.carolinesrainbowfoundation.org)
- [www.projecttrust.org.uk](http://www.projecttrust.org.uk)



# Case study

## The Harvey family

2012 – 2013

My twins are now happily settled in universities where they feel at home, studying courses which they love. It's so hard to believe that only a year earlier every decision about courses and campuses seemed incredibly momentous. Even so, I'm pretty sure that they might have been equally happy studying slightly different subjects in slightly different institutions, because the main thing is not just finding the course and the university that you love, it's also what you bring to it when you get there.

I still remember being shown round a particular university by a bubbly, confident undergraduate who was prominent in her students' union. She really loved the university she was at. But at the end of our tour, she told us that this had not actually been her first choice – she hadn't been accepted by the place she had dreamt of going to.

Having said that, your son or daughter needs the best chance of fulfilment and the career they dream of, so we started talking early about careers and subjects. Work experience, even for a short period, can clarify goals. The sooner they've decided on a subject, the easier it is to settle down to finding the university or college that offers what they want, and the UCAS website really helped

with tables of open days and their search tool; then you can use the universities' own websites to drill down and find out what particular modules and topics are on offer at each place. For instance, many different universities offer history, but not all of them included the periods which are my daughter's favourites.

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Just throw yourself into it and take advantage of everything it has to offer you, and you will have a great time and a great future.”

**Top tip for parents:** university towns vary hugely in the cost and availability of accommodation and cost of living generally. Factor this in when budgeting.



# Myth busters

## Some other things to bear in mind:

**Uni is not just for people who are good at academic courses** – there are thousands of practical, physical or creative courses which develop practical skill and work experience. There's a course structure to suit everyone.

**No need to add five choices** – there's space for five choices, but they can apply for just one. Or two, three or four. As long as no offers have been accepted or declined, they can add additional choices later.

**They don't have to have an insurance choice** – it can act as a backup choice. However, it's important that they only select one if they are happy to attend that university – an insurance choice is not a requirement.