

How can I help my child apply to University?

UCAS is the organisation which processes all the students' university applications. Their website www.ucas.com contains lots of info and the "find a course" search is very good, it saves you looking up every university website individually to find what you're looking for. Or you can use the UCAS widget link which is under the parent information menu on the CDHS website www.cdhs.info or www.ucasdigital.com/widgets/advisers/ucas-adviser-widget.html#target2

Here's the link to UCAS application timeline <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/apply-andtrack/key-dates> For example, looking at the 2019 entry, applications can be made anytime from 5th September until the deadline of 15th Jan. NOTE: medicine/vet courses & Oxford/Cambridge close much earlier (15th Oct).

Pupils thinking of going to Uni are advised by the school to register with UCAS as the application is all done online. You can choose up to 5 courses on your application from a range of universities. Many unis don't look at the applications until the deadline date so there's no huge panic to submit the application but you don't want to leave it to the last minute either! A staff member (normally their support teacher) has to write a personal reference for each application and as they may have 20-30 to do, the pupil needs to allow time for this part of process. Get it done by the beginning/mid-December.



Once submitted, some courses begin offering places straight away (unconditional offer = all conditions met (they're in!!) OR conditional offer = they have a place so long as they get ... e.g. a B grade in X subject), it can be several months of waiting before some courses respond - doesn't mean it's bad news, it's just the way that particular Uni/course operates! Unfortunately some courses are much more popular than others and just by having the minimum entry requirements is no guarantee of being offered a place, interviews and rejections are common. Although it's hard not to, it's best that your child doesn't set their heart on one course/Uni but keeps an open mind until they see what offers they receive.

Students are expected to be able to show they have done a variety of things out with school e.g. volunteering, Duke of Edinburgh Award, work experience, hobbies etc. This part of the application is called their personal statement which gives them the chance to show they are the ideal candidate for the course include things like; why you are applying, your interests, achievements, work experience and relevant skills. Pupils will receive some advice on the application process and some guidance on what to include in their personal statement at school. Further guidance can be found online including a video tutorial on the UCAS site or simply phone the University and ask what they're looking for in a personal statement for a specific course.

SAAS is the body which awards student grants/loans. The best link for their website is www.saas.gov.uk/forms_and_guides/index.htm The funding guide and video presentation are good. Read our "Financing Further Education" article too.

Each university website provides info on their campuses and accommodation but nothing beats going to see it for yourself (both student & parents). Open Days are promoted on the school noticeboard and on university websites, they normally take place from September each year although you can make appointments individually to visit at almost any time - sometimes that's better as you see the Uni in its working clothes and mingle with its current students. However, Open Days provide a wealth of information and everyone is "on tap" for you and your child to speak to. Make sure to visit the accommodation while you're there.

Every Uni and course is different and there's a lot of choice out there – try and research thoroughly to help your child find the best match for them. Chat to any parents/students who have been through it. Normal story though - what suits one, won't suit everyone but it is always good to hear other people's experiences!

Bear in mind, University isn't for everyone and coming from a rural area like ours, going to some Universities can be a massive culture shock! Some youngsters are surprised by the:

- small amount of time per week timetabled in College/University versus the large amount of time for private study (some students will only have timetabled classes a couple of days per week). While this suits students commuting from home (a high percentage of central belt students commute) it's not ideal for those who live further away and are paying for student accommodation.
- high number of foreign and mature students at some Universities.
- difficulty in finding like-minded people to share their student accommodation with.
- number of students who go home at weekends. Have you considered the mode & cost of transport to and from home? Bear in mind, it is much easier to settle in one place than commute between two.

The Student Union is a great resource once they're at University, it provides a wealth of information to help & support students both financially & emotionally; which is reassuring to both students & parents!

It is useful to attend an Open Day when your child is in S5 so they can see what a Uni is - it's just school in a bigger, more adult format! Equally you could just walk past any Uni campus during term time (normally September – May) or hang around student areas to get a feeling for the environment! Often in S6 your child will have a clearer idea of what they want to do, so visit all the places (mostly on Open Days) at which they have identified courses that interest them. Just like buying a house you get a "feeling" about some places/people that can help your child to make the decision of which course & Uni is right for them.

What is the main thing a parent can do? Be involved in the background, supporting & prompting when required! Good luck - it's an adventure – but remember, University won't suit everyone!