

- ✓ What university can do for your child
- ✓ Choosing the right course
- ✓ How to apply

**PARENT
KNOW
HOW**

Why go to **university?**

department for
education and skills

16+

AT A GLANCE



University – opening the door to opportunity

- When your child decides whether to go to university, they are making a decision that will affect the rest of their life.
- University offers a whole range of benefits from better work and money opportunities to making new friends and living new experiences.
- You can support your child as they make their decision. Share what you know and learn about higher education and make sure they don't turn their backs on university without knowing what it's really like.
- Talk to your child about their course and university decisions. Look through course information with them and, if possible, visit universities to see if they meet your child's needs.
- Make sure your child considers all their needs before they come to a decision.
- They can speak to their teacher or a Connexions Personal Adviser for help about university or courses. Or they can find out more information at www.ucas.com

Did you know?

Over the course of their working life, the holder of an undergraduate degree can expect to earn on average £120,000 more than a similar individual with two or more A levels.

Is university right for your child?

Perhaps your child has already started talking to you about what they want to do when they leave school or college. Are they thinking about finding work? Or do they want to go on to higher education – studying at university or college? Do they know that they can study at university and work at the same time?

As a parent, you can play an important part in their decision – which is one that will affect their chances later in life. If you haven't been to university yourself, or if you don't know how much universities have changed since you were young, you might not think you can be much help.

But if your child doesn't know much about university, how can they make a decision about whether it's for them?

That's where this leaflet comes in. It tells you what you need to know about university and how it could open up opportunities for your child.

You can use it to help them make a decision once they've thought about all available options.

The leaflet covers:

- what university offers your child
- removing obstacles
- how to choose a course
- how to apply.

What does university offer?

It's no surprise that people talk about university being the best time of their life. Not only does it offer exciting, new experiences, it also takes people's lives in new directions and offers a whole range of benefits.

When your child finishes a university course, the qualification they get will improve their chances of getting a good job. There are different kinds of qualification that need different kinds of study. But all of them will impress your child's future employers.

Of the 13.5 million jobs expected to be filled by 2012, 50% are in positions most likely to demand university graduates.



A university course can also be a great way to pick up skills for the workplace. Some courses – such as nursing – focus mainly on developing practical skills. But even more traditional courses like history have their practical side – they might include computing and research skills, for example.

How university could help your child

- **Personal growth** – the challenges your child faces at university will help them grow as a person.
- **Socially** – they will meet new people from different backgrounds.
- **Financially** – not only are they less likely to be unemployed, but they will probably earn more than people without a university qualification.
- **Increased opportunities** – not just in work. University allows young people to get involved in a wide range of leisure activities that lead to new experiences.
- **Work placements** – for some courses, your child will need to spend some time with an employer to pass their course.

Did you know?

In 2003/04 the average starting salary for graduate level jobs was £18,000.

Removing obstacles

Has your child turned their back on university without knowing what it would be like? Would they change their mind if they knew their view of higher education is wrong?

'I can't afford university. It will get me into debt.'

It's true that students need to find funding to pay for their course fees and day-to-day living. But think of it as an investment for the future. Many students can get help with paying some or all of their course fees. For day-to-day living there are student loans – the good news is that they don't have to be paid back until your child is earning at least £15,000. And payment will be in small amounts. If your child earns £20,000, they will only need to pay back £8.65 a week.

Help for young people from low-income families

Young people from low-income families can get financial help both for course fees and for day-to-day living. And many universities have hardship funds to support students who have financial difficulties.

'I won't fit in. People like me don't go to university.'

The truth is that people from all backgrounds go to university, so your child doesn't have to worry about being out of place. Universities actively encourage applications from parts of the community that are under-represented.

'I'd rather get a job and start earning.'

Why not study and work at the same time? Or do a course that is work-based and involves some time in the workplace picking up practical skills.

'I'm not ready to leave home.'

No one's going to force your child to leave home if they want to go to university. Lots of students study locally and live at home to save money.

'I'll miss my family and friends.'

If your child goes to a university that isn't near home, they can always come home to visit regularly. Or you can go and visit them. But one of the great things about university is that there are so many new people to meet. Most young people find they make new friends early on – and they can still stay in touch with older friends from school.

Choosing the right course...

If your child decides to go to university, they will need to choose the course that is right for them. You can help them by asking the following questions:

- Do they want to study a skills-based course (like beauty therapy or hotel management) or an academic course (like English or physics)?
- What do they enjoy doing now and what kind of job do they see themselves doing in the future?
- Would they like to get work experience while studying?
- Do they want to study full-time or part-time?
- What level of qualification do they want to study for? Different qualifications have different entry requirements, so check beforehand.

...and the right university

Choosing a university is just as important as choosing a course. Remember that all organisations are different, so your child should keep these questions in mind:

- Do they want to live at home, near home or in a different place?
- Are they more interested in studying in a city, the countryside or near the sea?
- Do they want to go to a large university or a smaller organisation?
- What kind of accommodation would they prefer?
- What kind of social life do they want?

Finding out more

Every university has a prospectus – a publication describing the organisation and its courses. You can get one by visiting the university website or by phone. You can also ask universities if they hold open days, where your child will be able to ask current students what the course and university are really like.

Applying for a place

If your child is interested in going to university, they can ask their teacher or a Connexions Personal Adviser at their school or college for help.

The application process can be confusing at first, but for most courses it is handled by one organisation – UCAS, the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK. You or your child can visit **www.ucas.com** for guidance on how to apply, but the process will begin in August of the year before your child wants to start their course.

August – September

Decide on the course and university

- Start thinking about course and university choices.

October – January

Fill in the application form

- Apply for up to six full-time places (there is no limit for part-time places).
- Submit application form to UCAS.

March – May

Make the final choices

- If your child gets offered several places, they must accept two: one definite choice and one back-up.
- Offers might depend on your child getting specific grades in their current studies.

May – July

Reply

- Reply to UCAS letting the organisation know what places have been accepted.
- If your child gets the grades required, they will be on the course.

Did you know?

There are over 50,000 courses being offered at more than 500 colleges and universities.



Want to find out more?

Aimhigher provides ideas and great links to help you find the right course:

www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Children under 16: **www.aimhigher.ac.uk/dontstop**

ParentsCentre

Information on how you can help your child learn and deal with exams.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/highereducation

Department for Education and Skills

A guide to the financial help available.

www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport

☎ 0800 731 9133

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)

List of full-time courses and guidance on applying for a place on a course. **www.ucas.com**

Can't get onto the internet at home?

Visit your local library which will have computers and internet access.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from: DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.
Tel: 0845 60 222 60 Fax: 0845 60 333 60 Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com Please quote ref: PKHSM11

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