

Where next?



Supporting your bright teenager to make decisions about their future

A guide for parents and carers

*“There are so many things my daughter could do with her life,
I don’t know how to help her best.”*

*“No one in our family has ever been to university,
what do we do?”*

*“Is he doing the right qualifications
for the job he wants to do?”*

*“How can we
afford university?”*

*“I left school at 15,
what do I know
about university?”*

*“She wants to be a vet,
which is the best university
to go to for this?”*

“He wants to take a year off

after A levels but I don’t know what to tell him.”

*“It would be great if he could meet other youngsters with the same interests,
where could he go?”*

*“I just don’t understand
how he applies to university. What can I do?”*

*“Could we visit some universities with her to
find out what they are like?”*

City GATES

The **City Challenge Gifted And Talented Education Strand (City GATES)** is a three-year £15million strand of the overall City Challenge programme.

The objective of City GATES is to achieve a significant, measurable improvement in progression to university by gifted and talented students in the three City Challenge areas; through the Progression Academies we aim to help those students realise their potential. Through building confidence, motivation and determination, learners will develop the practical skills they need to move successfully into higher education.

To find out more about the City GATES programme, please contact the Regional Co-ordinator in your area:

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Or visit our website at:

ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/citychallenge

We have created this booklet in conjunction with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC).

Who is this booklet for and what is it about?

This booklet has been produced for parents, by parents, to help steer you through the minefield of helping your gifted teenager reach some of the decisions they need to make about their future. It is based on the real concerns of real parents who have gone through this process recently with their own children – parents just like you who want the best for their son or daughter and want to help them but don't know the best way to go about it.

It is divided into six sections:

1. Understanding your teenager
2. Supporting your teenager
3. Helping your teenager with university and careers
4. Helping your teenager develop effective study skills
5. Helping your teenager make the most of opportunities in school or college
6. The skills your teenager needs and how you can help

If this booklet does not answer your specific question, you could make an appointment with someone in your child's school or college to talk about your concern in more detail. Or you could get in touch with the National Association for Gifted Children's Information and Advice Service. This is the independent organisation that supports parents and carers of gifted children.

The contact number is **0845 450 0295**

NAGC runs regular workshops for parents and carers on a variety of issues connected with bringing up your gifted child. Why not contact them for a list of their training courses? They also have a website where you can find out about the support on offer in your area and around the country – www.nagcbrtain.org.uk

Contents

Section 1 | Understanding your teenager

	<i>Page</i>
Pressures facing your teenager	4
Increasing your teenager's confidence	5
Providing constructive feedback and recognising effort and achievement	6
Encouraging discussion through effective questions	7
Overcoming the fear of failure	8

Section 2 | Supporting your teenager

	<i>Page</i>
Decisions to be made	9
What qualifications could your teenager take?	10
Finding the right support	12
Agreeing an action plan	13
My action plan	15

Section 3 | Helping your teenager with university and careers

	<i>Page</i>
University – myths and facts	16
The university application process	17
The costs of university	19
Where to get help	20
Visits to universities	21

Section 4 | Helping your teenager develop effective study skills

	<i>Page</i>
Helping your teenager understand how they learn	22
Creative thinking skills	23
Critical thinking skills	24
Time management	25
Exam study skills	26
Presentation skills	27

Section 5 | Helping your teenager make the most of opportunities in school or college

	<i>Page</i>
Working in partnership with the school or college	28
Tutors, role models, mentors and experts	29
Peer mentoring and coaching	30
Flexi schooling	31
Taking exams early	32
Recognised qualifications for university entry	33

Section 6 | The skills your teenager needs and how you can help

	<i>Page</i>
Helping your teenager extend their learning	34
Helping your teenager prepare for a job or course interview	35
Helping your teenager with their written communication skills	36
Qualifications outside school or college	37
Helping your teenager obtain other opportunities	38
Organisations and websites that can support you and your gifted teenager	39
Some useful definitions	41

Pressures facing your teenager

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So, you are the parent of a gifted teenager. It's worth reminding ourselves that they are first and foremost a teenager facing the same kind of issues as their peers. As with all young people your child may, or may not, want to talk to you about what they did at school or college that day, their hobbies or interests, or their plans for the future. They may cause you no worries over their exams, their friends, their clothes, what they watch on television or where they go in the evening. If that is the case, fantastic!

On the physical side, the teenage years can be summed up in one word – hormones. The increased oestrogen and testosterone running through their bodies will mean they change in a whole variety of ways you (or they) didn't think possible. For many teenagers this can be an awkward stage, with you as a parent becoming everything from the make-up adviser to the girlfriend counsellor.

At the same time as your child is getting to grips with their new body, along comes 'peer pressure'. He or she has to have the same trainers 'because everyone has them', choose the same school or college, or have the same hobbies or interests. Having friends or being sensitive about what other children think can become really important, especially in the early teenage years and you as a parent can often seem to be stuck in the middle, not knowing what to do for the best.

Whilst you are getting to grips with all of this, along comes the pressure on you and your child to choose the right course, the best university, or a career. And if all that wasn't enough, what about the extra pressure of your child being gifted?

Some of the characteristics of gifted children

- Strong sense of right and wrong – high moral values
- Strong opinions – they think they are always right
- Extremely sensitive about the world
- Fear of failure
- Perfectionist – can't start or finish anything unless it will be perfect
- Easily bored
- Needs to understand why they are doing something
- Curious about the world
- Gets obsessed with a subject – wants to know everything about it
- Understands new concepts easily
- Poor handwriting

Increasing your teenager's confidence

The emotional well-being of your child is important as it can affect the way they behave and influence their learning. Increasing their confidence will make them believe in themselves more and feel that they are worthwhile. With teenagers particularly, words need to be chosen carefully so they are not perceived as negative. They can very quickly believe that they are 'no good' at anything if you don't regularly point out the good and extraordinary things they frequently achieve. A positive comment needs a lot of reinforcement to be believed; a negative comment only has to be said once and will be remembered!

Eight ways to build self-esteem:

- Praise. Find things to praise your child for as often as possible. Think about a 4:1 ratio – four positive comments for every negative one.
- Avoid negative labels. Don't call your child stupid or naughty. It is so much better to focus on the behaviour and not the child. You could instead say, 'that was a daft thing to do'.
- Avoid comparisons. Try not to compare your child to other children, even brothers and sisters. We are all unique, so focus on the child achieving their personal best.
- Assist with understanding. Teach your child that making mistakes is an essential part of the learning process and we all make mistakes, even adults.
- Divide tasks into chunks. Help your child to break down tasks and learning into smaller and more manageable chunks – this can make learning much less daunting.
- Celebrate success. At every opportunity remind your child of all the things they can do and what they have achieved, but also....
- Praise effort. There is some evidence that only praising achievement can make young people complacent. Much success is the product of hard work as well as raw ability.
- Positive thinking. Help your child to think positively and have a positive attitude to their learning. Teach your child how to turn 'I can't' thoughts into 'I can!'

Providing constructive feedback and recognising effort and achievement

Feedback will help your child to improve what they are doing and develop as a person. Giving feedback, however, is not always an easy task and doing it in the wrong way can have a negative effect.

Develop a feedback ethos

Encourage your child to ask for constructive feedback without feeling criticised by it, rather seeing it as help and support for further improvement. Encourage self-evaluation and discussion.

Praise

Praise your child on all the positive areas of their work, on their effort and on their attitude towards their work. Emphasise the positives in your child's work and take the approach of improving on their strengths instead of criticising their weaknesses.

Choose your moment

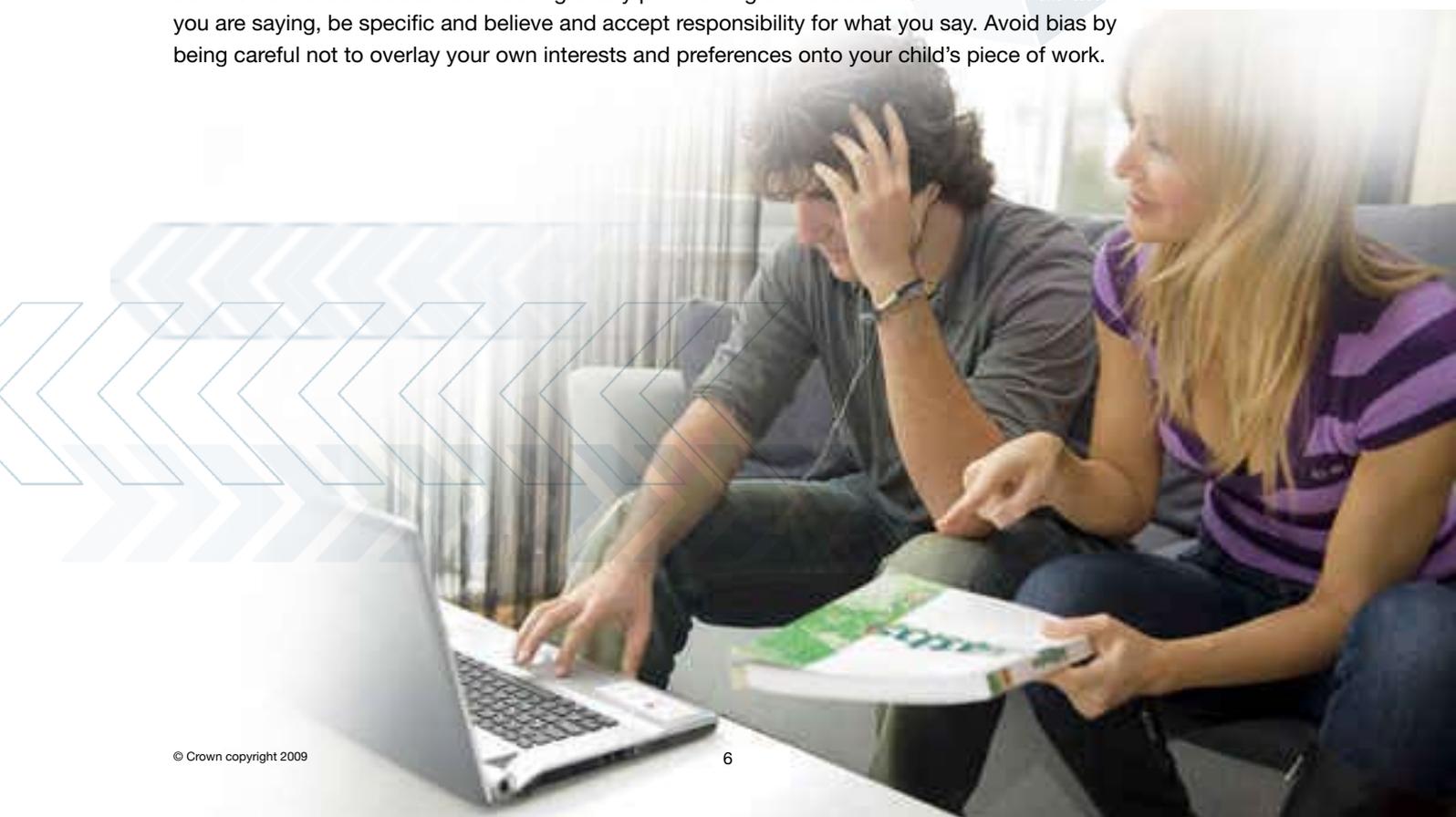
Feedback can only be given successfully when your child is in a receptive mood, so that they are able to take it on board.

The sandwich technique

Try to use the sandwich method for giving feedback. Say something positive about what your child has done, tell them the area for improvement and then another positive thing about what they have done.

Be respectful

Offer feedback in a respectful manner. Respect your child's work and their feelings. Avoid comments that can be seen as mocking at any point during the feedback. Give reasons for what you are saying, be specific and believe and accept responsibility for what you say. Avoid bias by being careful not to overlay your own interests and preferences onto your child's piece of work.



Encouraging discussion through effective questions

Discussing everyday goings-on with your teenager can be difficult at the best of times! Communicating with them can often feel as if you are making all the effort with very little response from them. Below are some suggestions for encouraging them to express themselves better:

Listening

Your child is much more likely to open up if they know you are listening to them and that what they say is valued. Your role as a listener is to understand and respect what is being said.

- Give your undivided attention by looking at them and putting aside distracting thoughts.
- Show that you are listening by nodding occasionally, using facial expressions, making verbal comment (yes, uh huh) and making your posture open and inviting.
- Reflect back what has been said by occasionally paraphrasing: 'What I'm hearing is...' and 'Sounds like you are saying...'
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. 'What do you mean when you say...?' 'Is this what you mean?'
- Allow your child to finish and try not to interrupt.
- Be candid, open and honest in your response, treating your child with respect.

Questioning

Asking the right question is at the heart of effective communication and information exchange. If you ask your child the wrong questions, you'll probably get the wrong answer, or at least not quite what you're hoping for!

- Ask **open questions** to understand your child's knowledge, opinion or feelings. These usually begin with **what, why** or **how**. You could also use 'tell me' or 'describe'.
- Ask closed questions, ones with fixed answers, when you need to conclude a discussion or make a decision.
- Use **probing questions** to get to the root of a problem. Ask gradually more detailed questions, picking up on details in their responses and asking for clarification.
- To engage your child in a conversation, ask **rhetorical questions** – ones that don't need an answer. 'Isn't Hannah's art work creative?'

Overcoming the fear of failure

A perfectionist is someone who wants everything to be perfect and who rejects anything which they feel is less than perfect. Perfectionism is different from wanting to be the best, which is often driven by competitiveness as well as the need to achieve.

Perfectionism is not necessarily a bad thing; if it is managed carefully it can help your child to achieve more and produce a good standard of work. However, someone who is a perfectionist can often be frightened of failure and may prefer not to try a task rather than to do something that is less than perfect. This fear of failure could stop them from trying new things or stepping outside their comfort zone and thereby not fulfil their potential.

It is important for people of all abilities to be faced with difficult tasks, so they learn strategies for coping with failure without it preventing them from progressing.

Helpful hints

- **Explain the concept** – people need to be able to accept that they can't always win or be the best at everything. Sports and games, e.g. chess and other board games, are good opportunities for them to experience winning and losing.
- **Help them to understand the value of participation skills** – starting a new activity can be frustrating for a perfectionist. They need encouragement to see that it is OK to be the best they can, without having to be the best.
- **Encourage them to accept that they can't always win** – your child needs to experience failure in a supportive environment. Where possible, offer them support and praise their effort rather than highlight the result. Give them empathy when they don't win, but invite them to use this as a motivation for next time.
- **Reward and encourage** – praise your child's attitude towards losing when things go well and let them know how well they handled it. Identify how they can move forwards and improve with practice.
- **Use relevance and context** – show empathy to your child when they lose by sharing a time when you experienced a similar loss and how you felt about it, or think of current well-known examples such as a team losing the cup final or getting a bronze in the Olympics. Discuss how they feel and sensitively explain that it is not the 'end of the world'.
- **Discuss the consequences of actions** – discuss the different ways that people can react when they lose and how these reactions can impact on their relationships with their friends, peers and the rest of the team. Discuss your child's own reactions to losing at something. Talk through how it would be if they reacted differently.
- **Set goals for effort and improvement** – try to avoid goals based purely on winning, but concentrate on goals involving sustained efforts and improvement.
- **Encourage other interests** – encourage your child to participate in activities that they are not necessarily gifted or talented in. They are not expected to be the best or to come top, but are similar to the other participants. This also helps to give them a broader range of skills and social peers.
- **Show understanding** – empathise with your child and show you understand how important the occasion is to your child. Discuss how it is all right to feel angry or upset at not winning or not coming top. Help them to handle these feelings in a mature fashion.

Decisions to be made

Today, more than ever before, there are so many choices young people have to make about their future – what job to do, what course to study, where to live or go to university. The difficulty for you as a parent will be in helping them make the right choice; one that they are happy with.

To help guide your child, it would be useful for you to understand some of the decisions that they will need to make. But don't worry because:

1. **You could not possibly know about all the different choices open to your child.**
2. **Your child will be doing a lot of research at school; thinking and looking at what they want to do in the future, usually in dedicated careers lessons.**
3. **There are some very good websites you can look at and books you can buy or borrow from the library to help you both.**
4. **You can make an appointment for your child or both of you to go and see an adviser at the Connexions service (formerly the Careers Service).**

Young people can leave school at the age of 16. From 2013 the age for leaving school or training will be increased to 17, and from 2015 it will be increased to 18. However, at the moment a young person aged 16 generally has the following choices:

- **To stay on at school, sixth form or further education college and do additional qualifications,**
- **To do an apprenticeship,**
- **To get a job,**
- **To do something else (e.g. to travel, do voluntary work or be unemployed).**

So your son or daughter will have a lot of thinking to do. How can you help?

- **Understand the different options open to them,**
- **Look at the books or websites together,**
- **Ask the difficult questions so you can both make sure that the right decisions are being made,**
- **Be a listening ear, someone to bounce ideas off.**

What is the definition of a university?

A university is a place where people go to study higher education and which gives academic degrees in a variety of subjects. People who go to university are either undergraduates, who are studying for their first degree, or postgraduates, who study another course after they have got their first degree.

Why should your child consider higher education?

- Studying a favourite subject at a deeper level can be very rewarding.
- If they know what career area they want to go into, they could enter it at a higher level.
- They would have the opportunity to make new friends and see different places.
- It would increase the range of their knowledge and experience.
- It would enable them to get an interesting, fulfilling job.
- They could earn a higher salary.

Comparison of average weekly wages at different qualification levels

Highest qualification achieved	Average weekly wage
No qualifications	£350
GCSEs	£425
A Levels	£504
Degree or equivalent	£695

What qualifications could your teenager take?

The range of qualifications can include:

Qualification	What is it?	How long does it usually take?	What can you do with it?
GCSE	An exam available in a variety of subjects. Normally taken at age 16.	2 years	Go on to take A Levels or equivalent.
National Certificates and Diploma (sometimes called a BTEC after one of the awarding bodies that design and accredit them, though other awarding bodies offer them too)	Practical work-related qualifications which can be taken at different levels – award, certificate, diploma.	Different lengths depending on the level taken	Go on to take a variety of different vocational and academic qualifications.
Diploma (the new 14-19 Diploma)	Study contextualised in work-related areas such as engineering or creative and media. They can be taken at different levels: Foundation, Higher and Advanced.	2 years	Progress to other qualifications, a degree, or work depending on level.
A Level	Advanced Level subject exams normally studied between age 16 and 18. A Levels are made up of the AS Level and A2 Level.	2 years	Go on to take a degree or another qualification at a higher education institution (HEI).
AS Level	Advanced subsidiary exams. These can be taken as qualifications on their own or as the first year of an A Level.	1 year or equivalent	Full A Level.
International Baccalaureate (IB)	An international qualification offered at three levels – primary, middle and diploma. The diploma is best known and this is usually taken at age 16-18 in place of A Levels.	2 years	With an IB Diploma go on to an Honours degree.
NVQ	A qualification based on what you do in the workplace.	Most NVQs are taken in the workplace and are variable in length.	NVQs are available at different levels (1, 2, 3 etc), lead on from each other and into other academic or job-related qualifications.
HNC/HND (Higher National Certificate / Diploma)	A job-related qualification available in a range of subjects.	HNCs take 1 year full-time. HNDs take 2 years full-time. They can also be taken part-time.	An Honours degree.
Foundation degree	Job-related higher education qualification which consists of both academic and work-based learning.	2 years full-time or equivalent part-time. Other options are available e.g. online or distance learning.	Other professional qualifications linked to an Honours degree.
Diploma of Higher Education	Very similar to an Honours degree but with less content.	2 years if full-time, or equivalent.	This DipHE can be converted to a degree with 1 extra year of study.

Qualification	What is it?	How long does it usually take?	What can you do with it?
Honours degree	A subject-based qualification. This is the most common higher education qualification. A sandwich course includes a year at work.	3+ years if full-time. It can also be taken part-time or flexibly e.g. online.	A professional qualification such as a Masters degree or PhD.
Postgraduate certificate/diploma	This is either a vocational course taken following an undergraduate degree or a course taken to allow a graduate to study a new academic subject at degree level.	Up to 2 years full-time. Diplomas that last a year or longer are often seen as equivalent to a Masters degree.	Masters degree
Masters degree MSC/MA	A subject-specific degree given to a graduate who undertakes a further period of study.	Normally 1-2 years full-time or equivalent.	PhD
Doctorate (e.g. PhD)	PhD stands for doctor of philosophy. There are professionally related doctorates too such as in law or psychology. In the UK, it usually involves doing original research and justifying this before a panel of experts.	Length of time varies from 2+ years to a certain number of hours.	This is the highest degree there is.
Medical doctor (MD)	This is a doctoral degree, it is granted by medical schools.	This is a higher doctoral academic research degree. To qualify as a doctor, you need to take the Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery etc.	This is the highest degree there is. There is also an equivalent – the Master of Surgery.



Finding the right support

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Helping your child to make decisions about their future can be tough. But think of it this way: you have been successful so far in choosing their primary and secondary schools. Your child is now almost ready to become independent and that is down to you and your skills as a parent.

Your next challenge is to support your child in their future career or college choice so that they – and you – can be confident that the decision they make is the right one for them. Your child could go on to pioneer scientific developments, run a multi-national company or design an award-winning building. Looked at positively, their future is ahead of them and you can help make it fulfilling for them.

So, just who can help you and your child through this time of excitement and confusion? Here are some of the people who are there to help:

Other parents with children already in work or university are particularly useful. They will know the real issues, what university life is really like and what you need to do to support your child. Why not ask your child's school or college to arrange a meeting of parents with children who went to university in the previous year?

Your child's school or college probably has a specialist member of staff responsible for careers advice and guidance. This could also be the Connexions Adviser but could be someone else who provides support in lessons. If you would like to talk to someone, either with your child or on your own, information will be in the school prospectus or on the website. If in doubt, get in touch with your child's form tutor or the school office.

City GATES is the Gifted and Talented strand of the City Challenge areas. Based in the Black Country, London and Manchester, this initiative is designed to:

- narrow achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged gifted and talented learners by improving the achievement of the disadvantaged
- improve progression to higher education, so that gifted and talented learners in comprehensive schools and colleges – especially the most disadvantaged – are better represented in our most competitive universities

and can help in a variety of ways to support gifted and talented children.

Connexions is a service for young people aged 13-19 to provide advice and guidance on a range of things – from money and relationships to learning and careers. They have a range of advisers around the country, many of them based in schools. You can find out where the nearest adviser to you is from the Connexions Direct website.

Connexions Direct is the telephone and website service for Connexions. The free telephone line is open from 8.00am to 2.00am seven days a week. Type 'parents' into the search box to find links.

Aimhigher is a government programme aimed at getting young people into Higher Education. It is there to support young people to do this and offers a range of activities, including visits to university campuses, residential summer schools, open days, master classes and mentoring schemes.

National Association for Gifted Children supports the families of gifted children. They run a free Information and Advice Service for parents including a helpline and fact sheets on a variety of issues. The helpline is open 9am-4pm Monday to Friday.

Agreeing an action plan

Your child has so much to consider when they think about their future. Having an action plan with things they have agreed or are going to look into is much better than having no action plan at all – even if they change their mind later on. There is a blank action plan on the next page.

Some of the areas of the action plan for them to consider could include:

What is my dream for the future?

Career

- What do I enjoy doing?
- What job do I want to do?
- Which companies could I work for?
- What do I need to get there?

School/sixth form/college

- What do I need to study to achieve my dream?
- What grades do I need?
- What additional support do I need?

Going to university

- Where is the best place for me to go to achieve my dream?
- What research do I need to do?
- Do I want to stay at home or study away?
- Do I want to live in a city, town or on a campus?
- Do I want to live on site or rent a place?

At university or HE college

- What do I need to study to achieve my dream?
- What grades do I need?

Beyond university

- What other qualifications or experience do I need to achieve my dream?

Other options

- Do I want to / can I take a year or more out of education (such as a gap year between college and university)?
- Can I do voluntary work to gain experience?
- Do I want to look into getting a job?
- Should I consider taking an internship (a voluntary job with a small salary or expenses) to gain experience?
- Do I want to expand my horizons by travelling?

Your child may have no idea at all about what they want to do in the future. If they don't, some general questions may help to get them to think about their future, such as:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- What don't you like doing?
- What kind of job can you see yourself doing in the future?
- Would you like to go to university? If you don't, make a list of the things that are stopping you.
- What would you like to do – after 16? After 18+? After 21?

Supporting your child in choosing a career

Helping your child to find the job they want is not easy – there are so many different careers to choose from. As a parent, there are lots of things you can do to help, including:

- helping your child to fill in their personal action plan,
- encouraging them to research different careers they may find interesting,
- buying or ordering from the library magazines or books about different careers,
- finding other people for them to talk to who are already doing that job,
- recording television or radio programmes for them about the particular career area.

Agreeing an action plan (Continued)

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If your child still has no idea about what they want to do, encourage them to keep as many doors open as possible. But bear in mind that it is never too late to learn – they can always retrain or do a different course at a later date at college.

The range of qualifications can include:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Collegiate – where you become a student at the university through admission to one of its colleges e.g. Oxford or Cambridge. Colleges provide accommodation and bursaries and often have their own meals, libraries and sports teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can get to know others in your college easily. • Accommodation is provided by the college, either inside college or in rented accommodation outside. • Social and emotional care is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be only a few people in college studying the same subject. • The place where the subject is studied may be a distance away from the college.
<p>Campus – where everything is on one site – with student accommodation, leisure, teaching and research facilities in one, normally out-of-town area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient – everything is in one place. • Students are somewhat protected from the outside world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be fewer opportunities to experience life outside university. • Accommodation may be more expensive than other types (e.g. a shared house).
<p>City – where the university is located in the centre of the city or town with accommodation spread across an area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables the student to be part of the life of the city. • Encourages more independence in the student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities outside university may compete with student-focused activities in the university. • Accommodation may be a distance away from lessons.

My Action Plan

My dream job or career is...

What I want to achieve	Details	Timescale	Research needed	Action plan
Qualifications at school				
Qualifications at college or sixth form				
Higher education qualifications				
Other qualifications				
Work experience/placements				
Other experiences or activities				
Job				
Other support				

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University – myths and facts

If no one in your family has experience of going to university, it can seem like an unobtainable goal, with too many obstacles:

- Will you be able to afford to send your child to a good university?
- Will they have to take a job at college to stay out of debt?
- Will they be paying off a student loan for the rest of their working life?

Before we look at what your child may need to get into university, let's take a reality check on some of those myths:

Myth: Young people won't be able to go to university if their parents can't afford to support them.

Reality: Young people only have to start paying their tuition fees once they are earning over a certain amount. This, added to the fact that grants are available to help students cover their cost of living, will mean that there is much less pressure on parents to support their child financially through university.

Myth: Graduates will struggle to pay back their loans.

Reality: Student loans are a world away from the commercial loans that banks offer. This is because:

- Repayments are linked to the size of your child's income, not the size of their debt – so repayments are calculated by what they earn, not what they owe.
- The loan is really flexible – for example, your child can stop repayments if they are taking time out of work to have a gap year or start a family.
- The only interest charged is based on inflation, meaning that in real terms they only pay back the money they borrow.
- Anyone still paying back their loan 25 years after graduation will have their outstanding debt paid for them.

Myth: Students will be worse off while they are studying at university or college.

Reality: Full-time students will be better off because they and their families will not have to find the money to pay tuition fees upfront – and many will even benefit from the much larger maintenance grants.

Myth: Students laze around all day and never do any work.

Reality: The media would like us to believe that students are lazy and never do any work but for most students that myth couldn't be further from the truth. Work is harder, the pressures on them can be greater and given the competition for the good jobs at the end of the course, students have every incentive to work towards getting a good degree.

The university application process

The Higher Education application process can seem daunting and your son or daughter may need your help. The more you know about the process, the better you can support them as they decide whether or not to go, which course to take and where to study. Your support, encouragement and involvement can make a real difference.

The options open to young people today are changing constantly as new courses are offered and new colleges open. Have the most up-to-date information available when you and your child start to look at Higher Education. The best places to get these are online as they are updated more regularly. However, you could buy or borrow one of the many books produced on applying to university.

The body which processes applications for places on most full-time Higher Education courses is called UCAS. You can find all the information you want on their website as well as the latest list of all the courses on offer. This website, along with the online application site (called Apply), is almost all your child will need to make their application to Higher Education. They will need to pay a fee for registering their choices (up to five) and for the paperwork to be processed.

The Personal Statement

What is it?

The personal statement is the section on the UCAS form for applying to university which your teenager fills in to tell those universities all about themselves.

Why it is so important?

It is the only bit of the application form that your child will be able to personalise. They need to use it to sell themselves to potential universities. For those universities that invite students for interview, it can make the difference between being invited for interview or being rejected and for those courses who do not interview students, it can determine whether or not they will be offered a place. Students often find this the most difficult part of the form to fill out – and they need your help to make them stand out from all the other applicants.

What should go in it?

Help your child to think about everything they do that could help to make them shine; what clubs do they go to, what hobbies do they have, have they ever represented their school at anything, do they have a Saturday job? Write everything down so you don't forget anything.

How do you fill it in?

Encourage your child to write a draft of what they are going to put in their Personal Statement. Then they can edit it to make it as strong as possible. Remind them to:

- use positive language,
- write the most important things at the beginning to make a good first impression; why they want to choose the course, any relevant experience, outside interests, plans for the future,
- write a conclusion about why they should be chosen to go on the course,
- read the statement out to you or someone else so they can hear how it sounds,
- check spelling and grammar to iron out any mistakes in the statement,
- not write the statement at the last minute – like anything worth doing, the statement can take time to do properly.

The university application process (Continued)

When do you apply to university?

The year before going to university:

August – September	Decide what to study and where to go Start thinking about their Personal Statement
October – January	Submit the application to UCAS Opportunity to visit universities for Open Days The closing dates for Oxford University and some Cambridge courses are in October.
March – May	Once offers of a place are received, choices must be reduced to two – one firm choice and one insurance choice. More opportunity to visit university open days
End of June	Final date for applications. Applications received after this date go into the clearing house system.
May – July	Decide which place to accept and which to reject. As long as they get the grades required, they will be able to attend the university of their choice.

Please note – some art and design courses have a different timetable to this – check on the UCAS website for the various deadlines in the application process.

What happens next?

When students apply through their school or college, their referee will write a reference and send it all off to UCAS. The student will have to pay for their application.

If your child is applying on an individual basis, they should ask their referee to send them a copy of the reference, which they paste onto their application. They can then pay for their application using a credit/debit card and send it to UCAS.

What if your child doesn't get the grades?

To help ease this problem, UCAS has set up a clearing house system. This starts in August and is where universities and colleges register all the unfilled places on courses they have. These can be matched to students who have not yet got a place on a course. It may mean that your child does a slightly different course or goes to a different university but it is far easier than waiting for a whole year to start university.

Top tips for helping with the application process

- Allow plenty of time to fill in the application form and make sure it is returned before the deadline.
- Encourage your child to only put down the places or courses they want to do. They can add in other courses later (up to five) as long as they haven't accepted an offer.
- Make sure you both double-check things like course and location codes. Making simple mistakes may mean they end up on the wrong course!
- Support your child in writing their Personal Statement – and make sure they sell themselves in the right way. This may be as simple as sitting alongside to encourage them.
- Make sure your child does not copy anyone else's Personal Statement. UCAS has a way of detecting this and will look negatively on it.
- Make sure your son or daughter informs UCAS if any of their details have changed, e.g. address or telephone number.
- Make sure that they reply to any offers by the stated 'reply by' dates.
- When confirmation of their place comes through, make sure they formally accept it, if that is what they want to do.

The costs of university

(All figures given below are correct for 2009–2010.)

How much are tuition fees?

The figures are different for each of the countries in the UK. The cost is determined by the location of the university, not the student; however Scottish students do not have to pay tuition fees if they attend a Scottish university.

In Scotland, the figure is fixed at £1,820 (£2,895 for medicine) for students from England studying in Scotland. Bear in mind that many Scottish degree courses are four years instead of three; therefore the total cost including an extra year's accommodation and other expenses is likely to be the same, if not greater.

In countries other than Scotland, the governments have set a maximum fee and the individual universities set their own figure. Only two English universities opt to charge less than the maximum fee. The maximum figure for England, Wales and Northern Ireland is £3,225 per year.

However, tuition fees do not have to be paid in advance – see next page.

What about accommodation?

The next major cost is accommodation. Most universities will guarantee a place in a hall of residence for first-year students who make it their first choice and apply before their deadline. Some will be able to remain in hall for their entire course though most opt to rent privately in subsequent years.

Halls of residence vary considerably in facilities and cost and an accurate figure can only be found in the universities' literature. Many rooms now have phone lines, broadband and TV outlets provided. One of the factors determining the cost of a room is catering – this varies from two meals a day every day during term time to one meal per day on weekdays only. A catered hall with basic rooms and communal washing facilities might be cheaper than a plusher en-suite, self-catering room. Students can expect to pay for about 36 weeks in the year. So a figure of about **£2,200 – £3,600 per year** should be allowed for a place in a hall of residence.

Private rental is much more difficult to estimate; the more people sharing the cost of the house, the lower the cost per person. Bear in mind that when renting a house the student will have to pay for the whole year, not just the academic year.

Any other costs?

Students need to budget for living costs – most notably food. For those in a fully catered hall this is less of a problem but they will still have to budget for a meal at mid-day. Students also need to buy text books and other resources for their course. Other costs to be considered are laundry, mobile phone use, clothing and entertainment.



Where to get help

Loans and grants

This information applies to students living in England. The figures for Wales and Northern Ireland vary only by a few pounds, but Scotland is substantially different – refer to the Students Award Agency for Scotland.

Tuition fee loan

Student Finance England pays the tuition fees direct to the university (regardless of parent income) and these do not have to start being repaid until the April after graduation at the earliest. For those who can afford it, fees can be paid direct to the university and some offer a discount if you do.

Maintenance loans and grants (loans are repayable, grants are not)

Students with parents who earn up to £50,020 a year are entitled to a grant on a sliding scale and can apply for a loan to top this up. The amount of loan you can apply for is related to the grant entitlement. Whilst students with wealthier parents may not get a grant, everyone is entitled to at least 75% of the maximum loan. The entitlement depends on whether the student is studying in London or elsewhere and whether or not the student lives at home (regardless of university location). For more information, go to www.studentcalculator.org.uk/original/income_1.asp.

Scholarships, Bursaries and Awards (The information given here applies to England only.) All universities charging the full tuition fee are required to offer a bursary to every student in receipt of the full maintenance grant. The figure for 2009/10 is a minimum of £310 per year, but many offer considerably more. Most, but not all, offer a reduced bursary to those not receiving the maximum grant, often on a sliding scale.

Some offer additional bursaries to students living within a defined geographical area near to the university (often by postcode) and to pupils of schools with which they have a special relationship (sometimes known as a 'compact'). Many also offer scholarships to students with a talent – often sporting or musical and academic scholarships are available – often based on the student gaining more than a given number of

UCAS points in their A Levels. Some scholarships are competitive – the university chooses a small number who will receive the award, others go to everyone who qualifies. As with all things, research is important, but the choice of university should be made on course suitability and not primarily on the financial assistance.

What about Oxford and Cambridge?

Many people believe that studying at either of these universities is very expensive, which may account, in part, for the relatively low percentage of state school pupils applying to them. Both universities charge the maximum fee but offer a bursary to those with the maximum grant, so for those who qualify, tuition is effectively free.

For those with a low family income, Oxford provides a one-off start-up payment. Both Oxford and Cambridge offer bursaries that reduce on a sliding scale.

Based on 2009/10 figures in addition to loans, the maximum maintenance grant of £2,906 is paid for families with an income of less than £25,000 in both Oxford and Cambridge. This is reduced in amount up to those with an annual family income of £50,020.

Both universities also have bursary schemes, which are generally awarded to families with an income of less than £50,020 although more is paid in the first year to help with starting a degree.

In Oxford, the maximum bursary awarded is £4,100 in the main university's scheme (see www.univ.ox.ac.uk/files/1250157387-file.pdf). There are also other grants and funds available such as the university old members' trust bursaries.

Cambridge figures are similar (see www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/finance/support). The Cambridge University Bursary is also available to families with income under £50,020, and increases to £3,250 for those on the lower income levels. As with Oxford, there are a range of other bursaries and awards available (see the above website).

Finally, living costs at these universities vary slightly between colleges. Generally rooms in Cambridge are slightly cheaper but costs are based on 30 weeks per year, rather than Oxford's 27 weeks per year.

Visits to universities

University visits are an important and informative way of deciding where your child would like to study and are **highly recommended**. Ask your child to rank the universities that they would most like to go to so you can decide together which to visit.

My child has an idea of subject area. How do we find which universities offer a suitable course?

- Use a university guide such as The Guardian University Guide,
- The Guardian and the Times websites give details of university and subject league tables,
- Search university courses on the UCAS website without having to register.

We have a list of possible universities, how do we arrange some visits?

Most universities offer a variety of opportunities such as:

1. **Open days**, where talks are given about student finance and university life; there will be opportunities to meet academic staff, receive information, ask questions and visit accommodation. They are usually arranged twice a year around March/April and September/October.
2. **Guided campus tours**, where a current student shows a group around the campus and the major public buildings. This doesn't usually include visits to the individual subject departments or a look inside the accommodation.
3. **Self-guided tours**, where you can print off a guide of the university and see what it's like for yourself.

Most universities ask you to register in advance for Open Days and Guided Campus Tours. Some universities do not hold Open Days, but ask prospective students to contact them to make individual arrangements.

What should we look out for during the visit?

- Ask your child to think about and write down the things that are most important to them so that they have a reminder of what to look out for or ask about during the day.
- Time your journey both there and back for future reference.
- Check the timings of the various talks so that you get as much out of the day as possible.
- Encourage your child to ask questions of current students and the academic staff.
- Collect information leaflets and relevant brochures to take home.
- Have a chat on the way home about what your child thought about the university and make a few notes.

Helping your teenager understand how they learn

Individuals learn very differently and this can affect what they learn and when. By understanding your child's preferred learning style you will be able to help them learn quicker and more thoroughly. Your child will have many preferences for their learning, including different times of the day and the position of their desk. Here you can look at how best your child takes information on board using the VARK learning preferences system; Visual, Aural, Reading or Kinaesthetic. Their learning preference will affect how they take information in, how they study and how they will best present information.

The four learning preferences are: VISUAL, AURAL/AUDITORY, READ/WRITE and KINAESTHETIC.

Type of learner	Study tips to help them
<p>Visual learners remember things best when they've seen them. They will like a stimulating and orderly environment and they like to use diagrams and charts. They probably like reading, and may be a good speller.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw pictures, charts and maps to help understand things. • Use mind-mapping techniques. • Use planners, organisers or goal-setting charts. • Highlight important points with colour (but not in books that are borrowed!). • Try visualising ideas and facts in the mind. • Try changing places in the room while you're studying, to get a different perspective. • When revising, read over and recopy notes.
<p>Aural/auditory learners learn best when they're listening (for example, in a lesson) and when they're involved in discussion. They will remember things best when they've heard them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make use of sound. • Tell them to talk things through as they learn them, with a friend or in a tutor group. • Read aloud to them or tell them to ask a friend to do so. • When they have to learn facts, tell them to try reciting them, or even singing them aloud. • Find out if they study best in silence, or with music playing in the background. • Help them to realise that some people aren't as good as them at remembering what they are told.
<p>Read/write learners learn best when they see it written down or write it down themselves. They will enjoy using the internet, PowerPoint and reading, quotations or making lists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written words in all their forms will help them learn. • When studying graphs, charts and diagrams encourage your child to convert them into words. • Encourage them to write out notes again and to read through them. • Encourage them to convert written notes into bullet points and lists. • Ask them to rewrite the ideas and principles into other words. • Practise turning notes into multiple-choice questions.
<p>Kinaesthetic learners learn best when they've done things for themselves (rather than just read about them). They like to actually carry out a physical activity in order to learn. In lessons they may make lots of notes but tend never to look at them again.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage them to move around as they learn and revise. • Field trips and laboratories will encourage them to learn. • Real-life examples will help them to understand. • They need to work through problems physically and will benefit from a hands-on approach. • They can mentally review what they've been studying while they're active (e.g. swimming or jogging). • They will benefit from using models and machines where possible. • They need to take plenty of breaks while they're studying.

Many people are **multi-modal learners**, meaning that they use a variety of these learning preferences. If your child is a multi-modal learner they may need to see information presented in more than one way in order to absorb and learn it. They may also choose to shape their learning style to that of significant people around them.

Creative thinking skills

Intelligence doesn't automatically make people creative thinkers. Intelligent people are often good at logic and learning things, but creativity often comes from a change of perception. A good idea is often one of many ideas, so encouraging many different ways of thinking about something will encourage creativity. So how can you help your child generate lots of ideas?

Try this example:

- Try to think of as many different uses for a bottle as you can together, as sensible or as wacky as you like, in a short period of time.
- Change something in the problem: its size, its shape, the material, the number; add to or take away from it, reverse it.
- Change perspective: look through other eyes such as those of a child, an animal, a camera or a mirror, or change the function.
- Recognise and challenge assumptions: instead of keeping something in the bottle, how about keeping something out?
- Combine with something else to leapfrog to another idea: a bottle and a train might lead you to think of a ship in a bottle. A bottle and a tree might lead you to think of a seed germinator. A bottle and an arrow might lead you to think of a target for shooting at.

Once you have lots of ideas your child can choose which to develop further.

Critical thinking skills

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How can you tell the difference between facts and someone else's opinion? How can you recognise other people's assumptions in information? How can you spot the flaws in others' arguments? Critical thinking helps to do this, teaching you to think in a coherent and logical way, with a balanced approach.

Critical thinking is a form of reflective judgement, a process that will enable your child to explore the accuracy and worth of information and knowledge rather than just taking someone else's word for it. It teaches them to provide evidence for their own argument and ask for evidence of others, before accepting their conclusion.

Strategies to help your teenager think critically:

Encourage them to always consider **the other side** of an argument. Ask them to take the opposite stance to the one they believe in and make a case for it.

Think of an unusual 'what if' scenario, e.g. 'What if all door handles were made of chocolate?'

Encourage your teenager to think of **something Positive, something Negative and something Interesting** about this scenario.

Encourage your teenager to consider why a statement or view is a **stereotype**. Can the statement be changed to reflect a more balanced view? Do newspaper headlines really mean what they say? How have they used emotive language to influence people's thinking?

Encourage your teenager to consider similarities and differences between themselves and people from **other cultural backgrounds**. Would teenagers in a very different part of the world have the same views as your child on recycling, the environment and climate change? How and why might their views be different?

Have open-ended discussions with your teenager where there are **no right or wrong answers**, so that they feel safe to express their views without being judged. This would also give them the opportunity to question their own views and those of others.

Time management

Time is valuable. If time is used efficiently to do the things that need to be done, you can have time to do things you enjoy. It's all about organisation.

Listing and prioritising: Help your child to make an action list that can be kept visible and nearby. Order the list so you both know which tasks are urgent. Small tasks (sending an email) can be listed in one column and the more important tasks (an assignment) in another. Be realistic!

Time budget: Work out together approximately how long each task on today's list will take. Write the time beside it on the list. Some things may come off or be put on the list when this is complete.

Small tasks first: Encourage your child to plan to do some small tasks first to give a sense of achievement and get into work mode. This also stops concern about a backlog of tasks when working on a longer piece.

Timing: Decide together how long your child is going to spend at working and set an alarm for the end of time. They can include short timed breaks and plan in a little leisure time to keep the brain working efficiently.

Positive marks and rewards: Your child can place a positive mark, such as a tick, by the task once it is complete to help them feel they are making progress. A small reward, such as listening to a favourite track or having a snack, for completing the tasks will help to keep them motivated.

Time wasters versus Time savers

Time wasters	Time savers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking emails • Texting • Fetching materials • Task hopping • Hunger or thirst • Loud music or TV on • Daydreaming • Talking to friends or family members • Negative feelings about work • Worrying about other things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing and prioritising • Dressing for work • Preparation and planning • Organising • Eating well • Focusing on the task • Getting enough sleep • Working fast at the start (when high energy levels) • Addressing worries beforehand

Exam study skills

There are many ways in which your child can improve their exam study skills. Preparation before exams is important to maximise performance on the day.

Preparing for exams

To help them prepare for an exam, you can order a revision guide from a bookshop or the library. You could also get hold of the syllabus for the exam, if they haven't already got access to it at school or college. Past papers are good indicators of the subjects that will come up in the exam; these are available from the school/college or can be downloaded from revision websites.

What's needed for revision planning?

- A clearly written exam timetable, with the dates, length and time of each exam
- Organised notes for the subject with clearly labelled topics
- A revision timetable that can be adhered to, with what subjects to revise on which days and how long to spend on each.
- Plan work for no longer than 45 minutes at a time with a 15-minute break.

What is revision?

- Reading the revision guides and syllabus so your child knows what is expected.
- Asking teachers for advice on what each exam involves in order to understand what the examiners are looking for.
- Scanning through the notes and making some revision notes with just the key phrases for each topic. Underlining headings to help focus on topic areas.
- Using revision notes to test knowledge (you can help with this).
- Looking through some past papers, taking note of the number of marks allocated to each question and the space left for the answers.
- Remembering that exams are not just testing knowledge, they are testing how the knowledge is used, e.g. in reading and interpreting data.
- Actually doing practice papers under timed conditions.



Presentation skills

If a presentation is well planned and delivered it will be remembered for all the right reasons. Your child will appreciate constructive comments given in a positive and sensitive way. They need to keep it simple, avoiding jargon, slang and complicated language. Most people appreciate clear points being made, as they are easy to recall later. Persuade them to put in something entertaining (if appropriate to subject matter), such as amusing quotes.

General advice

Appearance – dress both for smartness, to look the part, and for comfort. Avoid brand new clothing as you can't always be sure how comfortable it will be.

Basic needs – they need to make sure they are not too hungry, too cold or too hot. If there is no water, they can ask for a glass of water beforehand. They also need to make sure they have been to the bathroom.

Arrive early – they need to get to the venue in plenty of time. If they give themselves time to set up they will start off relaxed rather than stressed out. Make sure their needs are known in advance e.g. if they require a projector or a flip chart.

Use the checklist below to help your child prepare for their presentation:

How many people they will be presenting to?	
Where will the presentation take place?	
Will they be giving out handouts? How many are needed?	
Will they use visual aids or props? These will add interest but may become overwhelming if they use too many.	
Have they prepared an introduction? This should include the objective and a flavour of what is to come	
Have they prepared their main message? This should be organised into logical steps that are easy to follow. They should know this information inside out.	
Have they prepared a conclusion? This should be a short summing up of what they have said in the main message.	
Will they allow questions throughout or at the end? They should tell the audience this information at the start.	
Have they practised their presentation out loud to someone else? This will give them valuable feedback.	
Have they timed their presentation and does it fall within the allowed limit?	
Have they prepared prompts? These are best on small cards with just a few words reminding them of what they want to say.	
Have they referenced their information? This will demonstrate that they have researched the topic well.	
Do they speak clearly and at a good pace (not too fast and not too slow)? Make sure they don't trail off at the end of their sentences.	
Do they sound interested and enthusiastic? This will rub off on the audience!	
Do they seem relaxed and confident? Presenting this image will allow the audience to focus on what they are saying.	

Working in partnership with the school or college

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Many parents feel that teachers should be left to get on with the job of educating children. However, because every child is different, the teaching role is much easier when parents work in partnership with the school. Being interested and involved in your child's education will give your child a better chance of success for many reasons: they will know that you value education and that you want them to succeed, staff will understand your son/daughter better and know that your family makes a positive contribution.

Communication

Communicating with your child's tutor regularly forms the basis of good relations. This could be done verbally, by report card, by telephone or email.

Dealing with problems

When problems arise, you can ask for a meeting with your son/daughter's tutor or other relevant person. Prepare for the meeting by writing down details about the issue. Stick to the facts and focus on your child's needs. You could ask your partner or a friend to attend the meeting with you. Make sure you keep notes of meetings and the points that were agreed.

Getting help for your child can be a complicated and emotional process. Because of this, there may well be misunderstandings in communication between you and people working with your child. As frustrated as you may become, remember there are many good reasons to set aside emotions and try again. Begin with areas of agreement and work from there. Focus on your child's best interest, ensure the views you are advocating are accurate, valid and reasonable, and emphasise what is right rather than who is right.

Be personable – treating staff members with respect and monitoring your words, tone and emotions will get you off on the right foot. Working with the school throughout the process will be likely to get the best result for your child.

Be patient – it will take time to implement changes and things may not be right the first time. Give yourself a deadline of a few weeks for things to improve.

Be persistent – if matters don't improve, go and speak to the school again. If you get nowhere with your child's form tutor, you can speak to the year group manager. If you still get no joy, speak to the next in line.

Get involved in your child's education

- Learn all you can about the school or college.
- Attend parent consultations.
- Think about your child's individual needs.
- Present yourself as an ally.
- Ask what you can do at home to support your child's learning.

Tutors, role models, mentors and experts

Schools and colleges are becoming much more imaginative in what they offer students to help support them in their education and learning. Examples of the kinds of support available in some schools and colleges include the provision of:

- Tutors
- Role models
- Mentors
- Experts

Why your child may benefit from mentoring and other support:

- Many gifted children feel out of step with their peers who are the same age. Contact and sharing experiences with a mentor can help to increase their confidence and self-esteem.
- Many gifted children are able in more than one subject. This makes choosing courses and careers difficult. The opportunity to spend time considering a few areas and to talk to experts in them may help them make decisions.
- A tutor can help raise a young person's aspirations as they are given a sense of what they could achieve by being with someone who is experienced in it.
- Gifted young people need new challenges to prevent them from switching off. Real life experience demonstrated by role models may give them the challenge and motivation they need to focus and achieve.

How to encourage your child to make the best use of expertise:

- Make sure your child wants to make use of the support available – paying for a tutor is expensive if your child is unwilling to try.
- Be honest with them about their need for this support and how they will benefit – gifted children often don't want to get involved with things unless they can see the logic behind it.
- Work with the school to carefully choose the support they are offered; gifted teenagers are often strong willed and may not respect the individual.
- Ensure the person supporting your child makes the experience fun and challenging.

Definitions

A **tutor** is someone who gives in-depth one-to-one instruction to someone in a specific subject. These could be provided at no cost to the parent through the school e.g. at lunchtimes. However, there is also a growing number of private tutors and tutoring companies in existence.

A **role model** is someone who is a good influence for the young person – someone they want to be like in the future. They can be anyone – from an older student, a friend who works hard or is successful, or someone from the media or television. The young person will respect them and seek to copy their behaviour and so give themselves more confidence or learn new ways of working.

A **mentor** is one person helping another to achieve something. It is about giving help and support in a non-threatening way which the young person will appreciate and value, and giving them confidence to achieve what they want. Almost anyone can be a mentor; they don't even need to understand the issues the young person is raising. They just need to listen and be a sympathetic ear to enable the young person to raise issues in a non-judgmental, completely confidential way.

An **expert** is someone who has a high level of skills and knowledge about a subject that the young person can tap into in a variety of ways to increase their own knowledge or understanding. Schools make use of a variety of different experts – university professors who come and talk to students about their subject, parents with particular areas of expertise and business people with particular skills or knowledge. Extending your child's education through the use of experts from a variety of walks of life can inspire and encourage them to achieve their potential.

Peer mentoring and coaching

It is widely accepted that young people can support their peers well in various ways. Many secondary schools now operate some form of peer mentoring system. It could benefit your child to take part in peer support, either as a mentor or being mentored. Below is some information to help you decide whether this would be right for your child.

How will peer support benefit your child?

Peer support can benefit young people who have low self-esteem or lack confidence. They can respond well to the 'older brother or sister' relationship with a peer who will look out for them and try to understand their concerns. It is a positive way of providing a safe person for them to go to share their difficulties and concerns.

As a peer mentor or buddy for someone else, your child would gain valuable social and life skills; patience, leadership, trust and the experience will reinforce their own learning. They would also experience the satisfaction of helping another and gain confidence in their own abilities. The experience could be noted in their achievements and used in the future for university entrance or job applications.

What forms of peer support are there?

- **Peer Mentoring** where older pupils provide emotional support to younger ones, useful for those with low self-esteem, social, emotional or behavioural difficulties or able learners who are under-achieving.
- **Peer Tutoring** where pupils provide support to others in lessons, particularly useful for practical activities such as science experiments.
- **Circle of Friends** where a support network is provided for a child who is new to a school or is having difficulties at school.
- **Buddies** where one-to-one support is given to a child who is lacking in confidence.
- **Study Partners** where older or more able pupils can share ideas about study skills in an accessible way.
- **Peer Mediation** where pupils are taught to mediate in disagreements.

How do you get support for your child?

As many schools operate some form of peer support, you could find out what is going on at your child's school already. Make an appointment with your child's form tutor to discuss the kind of support your child needs.

How can your child get involved?

If you think your child would benefit from being a mentor to others, talk to them about it first. Encourage them to find out what is happening at school already and who is responsible for the programme if they would like to be involved. If there is no system in their school at present, they could look into setting one up.

Flexi schooling

Flexi schooling describes an arrangement between a parent/carer and the school where their child is registered so that they can attend part time. For the rest of the time, the child is home educated or attends an event. Agreement to flexi school is at the discretion of the headteacher of the school at which the child is registered.

What is the legal position of flexi schooling?

In England, flexi schooling is covered by the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations. Regulation 6(1)a(iii) instructs schools to indicate on the register when children are attending an approved education activity off site. Regulation 6(4) defines an approved educational activity as an activity which takes place outside the school premises and which is approved by a person authorised by the proprietor of the school. In practice, this means the headteacher. The activity must be educational in nature (including work experience and sporting activities) and must be supervised by a person authorised by the headteacher. This includes home education off site.

How do I arrange to flexi school my child?

To arrange flexi schooling, you should prepare a proposal and set up a meeting with the headteacher. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your proposal and the advantages of the idea both for your child and for the school.

Your proposal should include a paragraph stating that, as a child will be in your care and absent from school, there will be no insurance implications for the school.

Once the headteacher has heard your proposal he/she will probably want to discuss it with his/her senior staff, class teachers and possibly the school governors; so don't expect an answer straightaway.

In addition, the headteacher may contact the local authority for their opinion as they may never have encountered this option before and will want to discuss the legal implications.

The responsibility for ensuring that your child is receiving full-time education remains with you. You need to be aware that the local authority may want to ensure that the education you are providing is suitable for your child's age, ability and needs.

Taking exams early

Many gifted children choose or are offered the opportunity to take exams earlier than their classmates. There are many reasons for this, including because it means:

- they learn new subjects
- their abilities are stretched
- their skills are broadened
- boredom in the classroom is reduced.

As a parent, you will want to work with your child to make sure that you both weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of taking these exams early. We have listed some of these below.

What are the advantages?

- It provides academic challenge when this might otherwise be lacking.
- It enables a child to progress more quickly, to suit their pace.
- It enables further study in the subject.
- The child may not have to take as many exams at one time.
- It prevents a bright child switching off.
- The subject may not otherwise be available.

What are the disadvantages?

- Skills may 'go rusty' before taking A level. This is especially true in subjects that have a logical progression like maths and the sciences.
- Possible repetition of work can lead to boredom at some stage.
- When it comes to competition for very popular courses at the 'best' universities, many university admissions tutors give preference to someone who has demonstrated their ability to produce the results under the normal exam pressure conditions rather than from more qualifications gained over a longer period.
- Universities are not always willing to accept students who are under 18, especially those under 17.
- When exams are taken very early there may be long-term social and emotional implications for the child.

How do we make the decision?

Taking exams early is good if it forms part of a well planned strategy to deepen and broaden a student's learning experience. This generally needs to be done in full consultation with the school and parents.

The most important thing for you to think about is the social and emotional well-being of your child – will they benefit from doing the exam early and what will happen if they don't?

If you have decided that taking the exam early is the right thing for your child, meet with their school as soon as possible. You need to find out things like:

- What support will they offer your child if they take the exam early?
- Will they offer an alternative curriculum for your child after they have taken the exam?
- Will it enable your child to take an additional subject that the school's option choice system would otherwise prevent?
- Will the school pay for any additional qualifications taken?

Recognised qualifications for university entry

A Levels are the best known qualifications that are required for entry to university and it is likely that your child will be taking these. However, there are many other routes for students to take and the most common ones are explained below. Many universities are now working with the UCAS points system, whereby grades are worth a set number of points.

Access Courses	Many courses welcome applicants studying the Access to HE Diploma in a relevant subject. Specific grades in particular units might be required.
Advanced Diplomas	Universities will also accept candidates studying the new Diploma qualifications at Advanced level if they have the appropriate subject-specific content.
Advanced Extension Awards	Many universities welcome the added depth provided by Advanced Extension Awards.
National Certificate/Diploma	Offers are conditional on the overall grade achieved. Specific grades in particular units may be required.
Higher National	Offers are conditional on passing the qualification.
Foundation Programmes	Many universities offer and accept a variety of foundation programmes. Some courses also require a GCSE in a specific subject at a certain grade.
International Baccalaureate	Offers may be conditional on overall points and/or individual grades or subjects.

Young people with an interest in particular subjects can search for courses on the UCAS website and research individual university entry requirements. The whole range of qualifications they will accept may not be listed, so it's worth contacting the university directly and requesting an undergraduate prospectus for more information.

Helping your teenager extend their learning

Exploring areas of interest with your child is a good start to extending their learning. It enhances their motivation and prevents them from underachieving at school or college. It can also be a way of spending some quality time with your child, whilst showing an interest in their education.

Encourage your child to visit websites with activities or discussion to engage and motivate them in the subject area.

Subject-related trips can be to museums, locations, films, plays or art galleries; anything relevant to what they are studying at school. It may be possible to arrange a trip to a factory to see how something is made, or to a supermarket or recording studio to see behind the scenes.

Read around the subject with text books, articles, websites and journals.

Regardless of the subject, **debating a matter** is fantastic for developing thinking skills, particularly critical thinking. Either an issue in the media or a topic at school could be the subject, but it needs to hold your teenager's attention and inspire them to think about it from different angles.

Projects are great for developing creative skills and integrating subject learning. Working on a mini project from start to finish can be an exciting way for your child to extend their learning, giving them a buzz with a sense of achievement at the end of it.

Encourage your child to take an active interest in **current affairs** and, where possible, relate them to what they are doing at school.

A project could be developed into a **social enterprise**. They could make something to sell to family and friends. The money for this could go into paying for the materials and additional profit could then go towards a chosen charity.

Competitions

Encourage your child to enter literacy, poster design or media competitions. Even if they don't win a prize, they will still have expanded their learning and skills base by entering the competition.

Friends or family who are in the jobs or professions that your child is interested in can act as **role models** for your child to talk to.

Most subjects have set up **associations or institutions** where your child can obtain learning enrichment through publications or websites.

There are various ways in which your child can **publish** things they have written. Publishing on the web is becoming increasingly common and accessible.

Whatever your child is taking part in and achieving outside formal education can be included in their **personal portfolio and university application**.

Supporting homework that your child is given will show them that you value it and want them to do well. You could provide them with a quiet place to work, complete with notice board for them to organise themselves. They need a realistic amount of time set aside to be able to focus on their studies. With your support and encouragement, they will find it easier to get into the homework habit, take more responsibility and learn to manage their time.

Helping your teenager prepare for a job or course interview

Being successful at the right interview, be it for a job or a course, can be a life changing experience for your child as it is their opportunity to set themselves apart from the crowd. However, **whether** successful or not, going through the interview process will give them good experience for the future.

How can I help my child prepare?

Spend some time researching as much as possible about the company or course in question so that they can talk about it when needed and ask informed questions. You can find lots of information very quickly on the internet.

Encourage them to reread their application form. It is important that they know exactly what is on it so they can refer to it and steer clear of telling interviewers the same thing twice. (This is why they are told to keep a copy of an application.)

If they have no direct experience for the job or course, think of relevant examples of experience together. This could be something that developed transferable skills, such as team work or leadership skills.

Get them to write down experiences they have had that demonstrate they have achieved something or taken on responsibility. You could include any regular responsibility they have had in the running of the house (such as looking after pets or shopping) or within a social activity.

Talk to them about their personality strengths. They need to be firm in the knowledge that they will bring something valuable to the job or course – they need to be able to sell themselves! They also need to be ready to answer, 'Why should we give this place/job to you?'

Help them think of a good negative. If asked about their strengths and weaknesses, they need to be ready with a weakness. It would be unrealistic to say they don't have one, but at the same time they don't want to say something that will put the interviewers off. For example, when asked about their main weakness they could say 'I tend to be a workaholic and put everything I have into the organisation or course.' This sounds more positive than 'I am obsessive!'

What about on the day?

Below are some tips for you to pass on to your child about the day of the interview:

- Dress comfortably but smartly; they need to look as if they have made an effort.
- Know exactly how they are getting there and the timings.
- Make sure they have enough money and change for public transport.
- Take the contact name and details of the person the interview is with so you can let them know if there is any hold-up.
- Avoid one-word answers; they need to take any opportunity to talk about the things they have prepared.
- They need to appear keen and enthusiastic about the job or course.
- Avoid bringing up subjects that are irrelevant, unless it aids small talk at the start or end.
- Don't be afraid to say what they are good at.
- When asked whether they have any questions, ask at least one that is relevant to the job, course or circumstances. However, make sure it is not about money or grades – this can be discussed when the place is offered.

Helping your teenager with their written communication skills

Good written communication skills are essential, both at university and in their chosen career, because they will help your child to:

- answer a question accurately,
- make accurate notes and do their work,
- put across the argument they are trying to make,
- sell themselves.

As a parent, there are things you can do at home to help your child improve their written communication skills. These include:

- making sure they use a dictionary (or spell check on the computer – but don't over-rely on it as these sometimes don't pick up all the errors) to check any words they are unsure how to spell,
- getting someone to read over their work once it is complete to check for spelling mistakes or errors in grammar,
- helping them write for the correct audience and in the right way
 - asking questions like:
 - who are you writing this for?
 - what kind of language should you be using: formal, informal, persuasive?
 - what kind of written communication should you use: a report, letter, notes?
 - what are you trying to do with the written communication, e.g. make notes you can understand afterwards, get your money back in your letter of complaint?

Gifted children like to do work that is 'real'. You could help them with this. Think about the kinds of things you need to write: could your teenager do some of them for you? You could ask them to:

- write letters of complaint or satisfaction about a service received,
- write a note to the milkman to cancel the milk,
- write to the council to ask about something.

Learning how to make notes is one of the most important writing skills your child will need when they go to university. Could you help them improve the speed and accuracy of their skills? One of the ways to do this is for them to volunteer to take the notes of a meeting of a local club.

Doing these real-life pieces of work will be of great benefit to your child, as they will help them see the impact that their writing has.

Issues with handwriting? Gifted children sometimes have difficulties with handwriting – it may be scruffy and they may be terrified of putting pen to paper in case they feel the work they produce is not of a high enough standard. Can you help them to find ways to get round this – using the computer, recording what they want to say and copying it out or just putting thoughts down on paper and working on it later? If you are concerned about handwriting, contact NAGC's Information and Advice Service for specialist help and advice (0845 450 0295).

Qualifications outside school or college

School sixth forms and further education colleges provide traditional routes for young people to gain qualifications that will help them on their way to university and beyond. However, for some young people, these options are either not suitable or not possible.

Other opportunities include:

Adult Education	Due to funding pressures, some Adult Education Centres may be unwilling to allow younger students to take part on courses without charging a fee.
Home Education	Young people do not have to be educated within the school system. For more information see www.education-otherwise.org
Little Arthur Independent School	Offers a range of IGCSEs. There is no age restriction but costs apply. www.littlearthur.org.uk
NEC (National Extension College)	GCSE, IGCSE and A Level. There is no age restriction but costs apply. Tesco clubcard points can be used. www.nec.ac.uk
Open University (OU)	Young people aged 16+ years can apply to study for a degree at the Open University. All OU courses are available for them as long as the content is suitable in the context of safeguarding young people. www.open.ac.uk
Oxford Open Learning	GCSE and A Level. There is an age limit of 13+ years for GCSE and A Level. There are charges. www.ool.co.uk
Yahoo Group	For GCSE advice HE-ExamsGCSEs_alternatives_others@yahoogroups.com



Helping your teenager obtain other opportunities

Other opportunities include:

Arts Award supports young people to develop as artists and arts leaders and is available throughout England. The Arts Award is a nationally recognised qualification at three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold. www.artsaward.org.uk

The British Science Association's range of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths enrichment activities aim to inspire and engage 5–19 year olds through their nationally recognised **CREST award** schemes, support for Science and Engineering Clubs, the National Science and Engineering Competition and events such as the Big Bang: UK Young Scientists' and Engineers' Fair. www.britishsociety.org

Young people aged 14–24 can get involved in the **Duke of Edinburgh Award**. This is a voluntary programme that they can take part in during their spare time. It helps young people develop key skills and is available at Bronze, Silver and Gold levels. www.dofe.org

A **gap year** can help young people find out about themselves and what they want from their future. It can help them mature and gain key life skills. There are many websites and companies offering help and support with a gap year. Key tips include researching companies, countries and programmes well, contacting others who have personal experience and asking for references wherever possible.

An **internship** is a temporary unpaid position in a workplace with the emphasis on on-the-job training rather than merely employment. Although interns are often college or university students, they can also be FE students.

The **Prince's Trust** is a UK charity that helps young people to overcome barriers and get their lives back on track. www.princes-trust.org.uk

Sports Leaders UK provide nationally recognised leadership qualifications and awards through the media of sport, dance, basic expedition, language, maths and literacy that help people whatever their age or background develop essential life skills. There are 11 different qualifications and awards, starting at age 9. www.sportsleaders.org/our-awards.aspx

Volunteering is not only good for the community or the group being helped, but also gives young people new skills and vital experience, and builds self-confidence.

Work experience can give young people a real flavour of what a future career in a specific area might be like and also demonstrates an interest to universities and future employers. It can also be a source of additional income in preparation for future study.

Organisations and websites that can support you and your gifted teenager

Organisations:

Arts Award

Trinity Guildhall
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TP

Telephone: 020 7820 6178

Website: www.artsaward.org.uk

Email: enquiries@artsaward.org.uk

Awards for Young Musicians

PO Box 2754
Bristol BS4 9DA

Telephone: 0117 904 9906

Website: www.a-y-m.org.uk

Email: enquiries@a-y-m.org.uk

City GATES

CfBT Education Trust
60 Queens Road
Reading
Berkshire RG1 4BS

Telephone: 0845 602 1732

Website: ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/citychallenge

Email: citygates@cfbt.com

Connexions Direct

Website: www.connexions-direct.com

Helpline: 0800 001 3219

Text: 07766 413 219

Text phone: Minicom 0800 096 8336

do-it! Volunteering Made Easy

Website: www.do-it.org.uk

Duke of Edinburgh's Award

Head Office
Gulliver House
Madeira Walk
Windsor
Berkshire SL4 1EU

Telephone: 01753 727400

Website: www.dofe.org

Email: info@DofE.org

Educational Maintenance

Allowance

Website: <http://ema.direct.gov.uk>

Gap Year

Telephone: 0845 3 447 667

Website: www.gapyear.com

Girlguiding UK

Commonwealth Headquarters
17-19 Buckingham Palace Road
London SW1W 0PT

Telephone: 020 7834 6242

Website: www.girlguiding.org.uk

Email: chq@girlguiding.org.uk

Hero – Gateway to Higher Education

Website: www.hero.ac.uk

Kumon

5th Floor, The Grange
100 High Street, Southgate
London N14 6BN

Telephone: 0800 854 714

Website: www.kumon.co.uk

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

Information and Advice Service

Telephone: 0845 450 0295

NUS – The National Voice of Students

NUS HQ
Centro 3, 19 Mandela Street
London NW1 0DU

Telephone: 0871 221 8221

Text phone: 020 7380 6649

Website: www.nus.org.uk

Email: nusuk@nus.org.uk

Sports Leaders UK

23-25 Linford Forum
Rockingham Drive
Linford Wood
Milton Keynes MK14 6LY

Telephone: 01908 689180

Website: www.sportsleaders.org/

Email: contact@sportsleaders.org

Student Finance

Website: www.direct.gov.uk/StudentFinance

Student Loans Company Ltd

100 Bothwell Street
Glasgow G2 7JD

Telephone: 0141 306 2000

Website: www.slc.co.uk

The Prince's Trust

Head Office
18 Park Square East
London NW1 4LH

Telephone: 0800 842 842

or 020 7543 1234

Website: www.princes-trust.org.uk

Email: webinfops@princes-trust.org.uk

The Scout Association

Gilwell Park
Chingford
London
E4 7QW

Information Centre: 0845 300 1818

Telephone: 020 8433 7100

Website: www.scouts.org.uk

Email: info.centre@scout.org.uk

Times Online

Good University Guide

Website: www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/good_university_guide

UCAS

Telephone: 0871 468 0 468

Website: www.ucas.ac.uk

Email: enquiries@ucas.ac.uk

Youth2Youth UK

Website: www.youth2youth.co.uk

Email: office@youth2youth.co.uk

Vinspired Volunteering – Young people's volunteering organisation

Telephone: 0800 089 9000

Website: www.vinspired.com

Email: info@vinspired.com

Text: v to 80010

Volunteering England

Regents Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL

Telephone: 0845 305 6979

Website: www.volunteering.org.uk

Email: volunteering@volunteeringengland.org

Websites

careersadvice.direct.gov.uk/ Government careers advice website.

www.cityandguilds.com City & Guilds website – gives some careers ideas and directs to suitable courses.

ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/citychallenge The City GATES programme supports gifted young people aged 14–19 attending a maintained school/college/academy in one of the three City Challenge areas: London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester.

www.connexions-direct.com/ Connexions Direct is part of the Connexions Service. It offers information on a wide range of topics relating to 13–19 year olds.

www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/index.htm Great general advice about applying, funding and finding the right course – includes a link to a video about student life and finance.

www.gotouni.direct.gov.uk/ Direct link to the video detailed above.

www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/WhyGoToUniversityOrCollege/DG_073320 A page with the title ‘What is Higher Education Really Like?’

www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance Financial information about studying in England.

www.he.courses-careers.com/ Courses and careers UK website has a higher education section.

www.hecsu.ac.uk/hecsu.rd/index.htm Higher Education Career Services Unit website.

www.nus.org.uk/en/Student-Life/Becoming-A-Student/ NUS advice for students including careers, money and funding, and housing.

www.offa.org.uk/ Office for Fair Access

www3.open.ac.uk/study/ Open University information for prospective students.

www.opendays.com/advice/ Part of the open days website for universities and colleges, this section gives advice on choosing a university and questions to ask.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/ Information and support for parents on how to help with their child’s learning.

www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk The Complete University Guide

www.trotman.co.uk A publisher’s website with a range of useful books.

www.ucas.com/yougo/ Provided by UCAS, ‘yougo’ is full of features and has dedicated areas for students thinking of applying, currently applying or already at university or college.

www.unistats.com A website where you can compare courses and universities/colleges in terms of student satisfaction ratings and job prospects.

ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/ The Government’s programme for gifted and talented children and young people.

www.yourteenager.co.uk/ Contains over 50 articles written by experts on a variety of issues affecting teenagers including school and work.

Some useful definitions

Apply: the online application system for applying for higher education courses.

Clearing: a system used which enables an applicant who has not yet secured a place to apply for course vacancies.

Conditional offer: an offer made to an applicant by a university or college, whereby the applicant must fulfil certain criteria before they can be accepted on the relevant course.

CUKAS (Conservatoires UK Admissions Service): an online application service for practice-based music courses at seven of the UK conservatoires.

Confirmation: when conditional offers that have been accepted by an applicant become unconditional or are declined. Confirmation is dependent on an applicant's qualification/exam results.

Deferral: holding an offer until the following year.

Entry Profiles: comprehensive information about individual courses and institutions, including statistics and entry requirements.

Extra: the opportunity to apply for another course if an applicant has used all five choices and has not secured a place.

Firm offer: the offer that the applicant has accepted as their first choice.

Institution: a university or college offering higher education courses.

Insurance offer: the offer that the applicant has accepted as their second choice, in case they do not meet the requirements for their firm offer.

Personal ID: a 10-digit individual number assigned to an applicant when they register online. It is then printed on every letter sent by UCAS and displayed in the format 123-456-7890.

Point of entry: the applicant's year of entry to the course, for example, 2 refers to the second year of the course.

Route A: the application system used for all UCAS applications except for Route B art and design courses (see below).

Route B: a sequential application system for specific art and design courses, where applicants can choose up to three courses and the order in which they are sent to their chosen institutions.

Scheme code: used in conjunction with the Personal ID to uniquely identify an application.

Track: a system where applicants can track the progress of their application online, reply to any offers received, and make certain amendments, for example, change of address or email.

UCAS tariff: the UCAS tariff is the system used for allocating points (numerical values) to qualifications and establishing agreed comparisons between different types of qualifications used for entry into higher education.

Unconditional offer: an offer given to an applicant by a university or college, whereby the applicant has satisfied the criteria and can attend the course.

Unistats: a website for students who want to research and compare subjects and universities before deciding where to apply. Students can also look at student satisfaction ratings and explore the figures about getting a graduate job after completing a course.

Unsuccessful: the applicant has not been accepted by the university or college concerned.

Withdrawal: either an applicant or the university/college cancels a choice before a decision has been made – a reason will be included if the withdrawal was issued by an institution.



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