



**YOUNG
PERSON'S
GUIDE**

**YOUR GUIDE
TO HIGHER
EDUCATION**



ABOUT US AIMHIGHER PLUS

We are a partnership of universities, colleges and schools working together to provide quality information and opportunities to young people across the West Midlands relating to higher education (HE). We want to encourage young people to reach their potential and inspire them to think about their future.

This booklet is packed full of information and guidance about university and higher education to help YOU make an informed decision about what you do next.

Meet your Graduate Guides!

Mickie, Lewis and Ray are all recent higher education graduates so they know first-hand what it's like to go through the application process and then be a university student.



Hi, I'm Mickie. I studied Psychology & Counselling at Newman University in Birmingham.

I went to university because I wanted a better life for me and my Mom. We'd struggled financially for so long and were even homeless at one point, I wanted a way out. I also wanted to get a career that I enjoyed! I didn't have the traditional path to higher education, there were many obstacles: self-belief, not thinking I was 'academic' and struggling at secondary school.

GRADUATE...

a person who has successfully completed a higher education degree.

It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to do, but once I'd made my mind up that I wanted to study Psychology and Counselling I enrolled on an Access to HE course and the next year I was at university. Three years later I graduated with a 2:1. I can't believe I went from not thinking I was good enough to graduating with one of the top grades - you can do it too!



Hello! I'm Ray and I studied History at the University of Sheffield.

I went to a normal state school in Stafford, stayed on for 6th Form and then went straight to university after my A Levels. My only major fear about going to Uni was the fear of debt and how much it would cost. However, by doing some research, I found it

was not an obstacle at all and I was just simply misinformed due to things like the media! With a better understanding, I knew university was an option for me and chose History as it was the subject I enjoyed most at A Level. I went to university not only to improve my career prospects but also to experience being independent and move away.

Being a university student was some of the best years of my life and I really enjoyed the experience - I wish I could do it all over again every day.

ACCESS TO HE COURSE...

a qualification which prepares people for study at university if they don't yet have the grades to go straight on to a university undergraduate degree.



STUDENT FINANCE...

UK Nationals and those with settled status are able to borrow money to pay for university tuition fees and to help with living costs. See page 8 for more information.



My name is Lewis and I have a degree in Drama from the Manchester Metropolitan University.

My pathway to higher education was School > College > University. I found the transition from school to college the biggest jump in terms of workload and managing independent study. This challenge made the step up to higher education slightly easier; staying organised and balancing studying/work/social life is key.

University is not for everyone and that's okay! If you really enjoy studying or have a career in mind that requires a university degree, I would 100% recommend it. Not only do you get a qualification at the end of it but you learn so much about yourself. I now work with young people and am really passionate about supporting them to see university as an option for them.

I chose to go to university so I could study a subject I really enjoyed and I had the opportunity to move away from home to a new city which was really exciting to me!

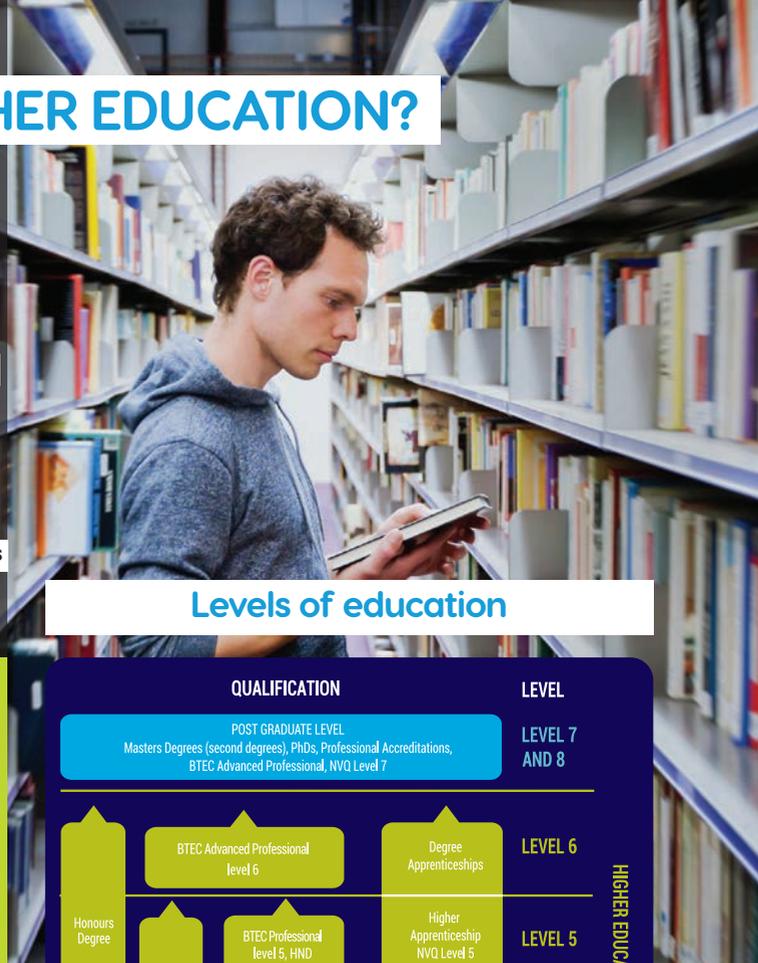


WHY HIGHER EDUCATION?



I think of higher education as a key that unlocks the next level. It builds you up, gives you the skills and the knowledge so that you are able to access better opportunities in the future.

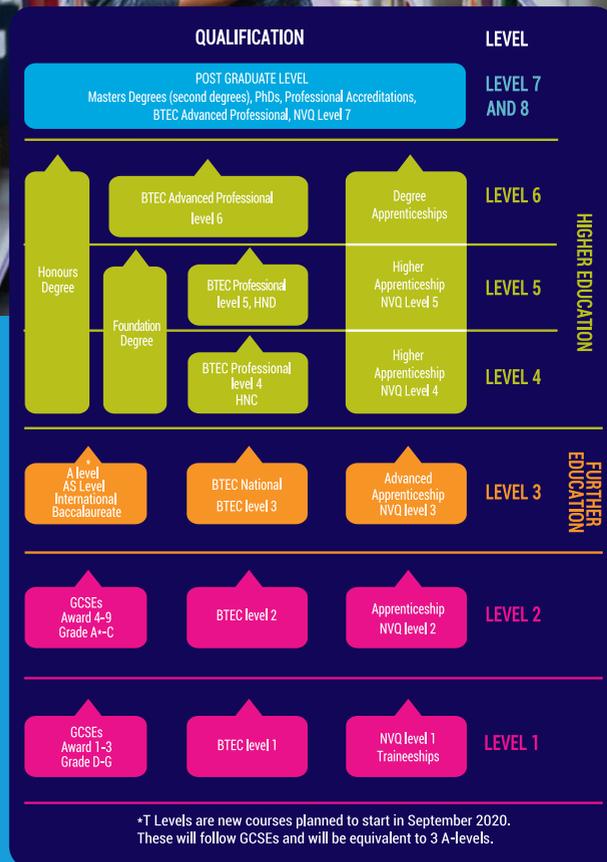
Mickie



Levels of education

Higher Education courses are Level 4 and above, which is the next level of study after sixth form or college (e.g. A Levels or Level 3 vocational qualification). You can study a higher education course at a university, college or even as part of a degree level apprenticeship. Higher education is the final destination of your academic career.

You don't have to go onto higher education / university straight from sixth form or college; it's important to go when the time is right for you.



*T Levels are new courses planned to start in September 2020. These will follow GCSEs and will be equivalent to 3 A-levels.

Why should you go to university?

- To study something you really enjoy
- Opportunity to meet new people and expand your horizons
- Get out of your comfort zone
- Increased career prospects and potential earnings
- Some professions have a minimum requirement of a degree level qualification (e.g. nursing, law and education)



School vs Higher Education - what's the difference?

FREEDOM!

You are in charge of your schedule and HE is often less formal than school. This means that you decide when you want to do things but to be successful; it means that you have to use your time responsibly and study independently. If you move away from home, you'll also need to manage your money, buy your own food and get your own laundry done.

ONE SUBJECT

One of the main differences is you can choose to study one subject that you're really interested in rather than juggling 8 subjects like you do in your GCSEs. Your lecturers will be experts in their field.

CLASSROOM SIZE

Universities come in different shapes and sizes but if you're at a large university you might have lectures with hundreds of people in them. Some love that but if you're nervous about large groups, look at smaller universities.

FACILITIES AND SUPPORT

University facilities are usually bigger and better: more food outlets, better labs, bigger leisure facilities, huge libraries, and comprehensive support services. For example there are 39 food outlets at University of Birmingham! Universities will offer a range of free and confidential services including counselling, disability, academic support and financial services.

UNIVERSITY...

University is a place where people study for a degree or other higher education qualification.



I would recommend others go to university for the personal development and experience. I built a lot of resilience at uni as well as skills like time management and organisation.

Ray

The biggest difference between secondary school and university is that you're treated as an adult. That means you get to take greater control of how you spend your time and what you study. It also means that your education is your responsibility.



My main advice to everyone is that Open Days are the most important thing when picking a university. You wouldn't buy a car without seeing it in person first so why would you pick a city or university if you haven't had a proper look!

Ray

WHAT AND WHERE TO STUDY?

Some people will have had a dream job from childhood so know what they want to study but most young people (and adults) aren't sure yet! There are over 50,000 undergraduate courses at more than 395 providers in the UK, so with so much choice it's important you do your research!

The variety of courses and institutions can seem overwhelming but selecting the best possible option for you is a key decision for any student.



Things to Consider

- Course content - does that History course cover the area you're interested in?
- Qualification title...BA/BSc/BEng/MEng
- Does the course include a work placement?
- Can you do a year abroad?
- Entry requirements - will you have enough UCAS points?

UCAS TARIFF POINTS...

Translate your qualifications and grades into a numerical value, e.g. a C grade A Level is worth 30 points.

Choosing a University / Higher Education Institution

- Industry / Employer links
- Facilities: love to play piano or swim competitively - can you do this at the university?
- Environment: City or Rural?
- Distance: close to home or move away? How direct is the train and bus route to your hometown?
- Book onto an Open Day!

Open Days = a day where you can visit the university and experience it first-hand. You'll get to meet current students, staff, tour the campus and look at accommodation. Attending open days and physically visiting an institution is often the best way to find out about courses and if you like the location! There are also lots of virtual open days on offer which can be a great place to start.

UNIVERSITY ENTRY REQUIREMENTS...

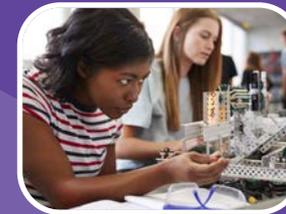
Outline what qualifications or experience you'll likely need to get a place on the course. A University will often ask for a set amount of UCAS points.

No idea what to study?

You don't need to have ALL the answers right now but it's never too early to start exploring your options. Think about what you enjoy, what you're good at and then research which careers involve a combination of the two.

You should also consider what is important to you:

Motivated by money and want a career with high earning potential? Law or Finance.



Are you an adventurer that wants a future career with travel and variety? International Business Management or Journalism

Passionate about saving the planet or supporting others? Environmental Science or Social Work.



I always knew I wanted to move away from home just purely to get the most out of university and being independent. I visited the university through an open day and I really liked the campus and how close it was to the city centre. I encourage people to take advantage of open days so you can see what it would be like to study at different universities as each one is different!

Lewis



I had various part time jobs whilst at university; it helped me financially and boosted my CV for when I came to apply for jobs after.

Lewis

Discover more about student finance here:
www.gov.uk/studentfinance

STUDENT FINANCE

You may be worried about the cost of university; however the facts may not be as scary as you think. Here's a breakdown of what you need to know about fees, living expenses, and repayment:

TUITION FEES

Most universities and colleges charge around £9,250 per year for tuition fees (this includes all of a student's lectures, seminars, tutorials, exams, assessments and marking). Any student in the UK can take out a tuition loan for their first degree so fees do not need to be paid upfront. This money is paid directly to the university and doesn't need to be repaid until you've completed your degree and are in a job earning over the salary threshold*.

LIVING COSTS

You can apply for a maintenance loan to help towards living expenses, such as accommodation, food, and course materials. The amount you can borrow depends on several factors, including where you will be studying and your household income. Those from low income households will usually receive the maximum amount of funding. Like the tuition fee loan, this doesn't need to be repaid until you are earning over the salary threshold*.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND BURSARIES

These are non-repayable sums of money awarded to students who fulfil specific criteria. This could be for academic or sporting achievements or based on factors such as household income.

GRADUATES ON A SALARY OF £27,000 PAY BACK LESS THAN £10 A MONTH!

(Money Saving Expert)

REPAYMENTS

Studying at higher education is an investment in your future. Even with a student loan, there's no denying it, it is a lot of money. Student debt and repayments are often misunderstood though. Here's what you need to know:

Student loan repayment amounts are based on what someone is earning.

- In 2018, the average graduate starting salary was £22,399 (AGCAS) which equals no repayments.
- The starting salary for teachers starts at £24,373 to £30,480 (Prospects.) If earning £30,480, you would repay roughly £33 per month.
- Starting salaries for solicitors range from £25,000 to £40,000 (and higher for larger commercial firms) (Prospects). Earning £40,000 you would repay £100 per month.

AND

- Any outstanding loan is written off after 30 years.
- Repayments are deducted directly from a salary each month before it arrives in someone's bank account.

*At time of writing (2020/21), the student loan repayment threshold is £26,575. Graduates who studied after Sept 2012 won't start making repayments until they are earning this amount or more (Student Finance England).



Many universities offer additional support to students in need such as fee waivers and hardship funds.

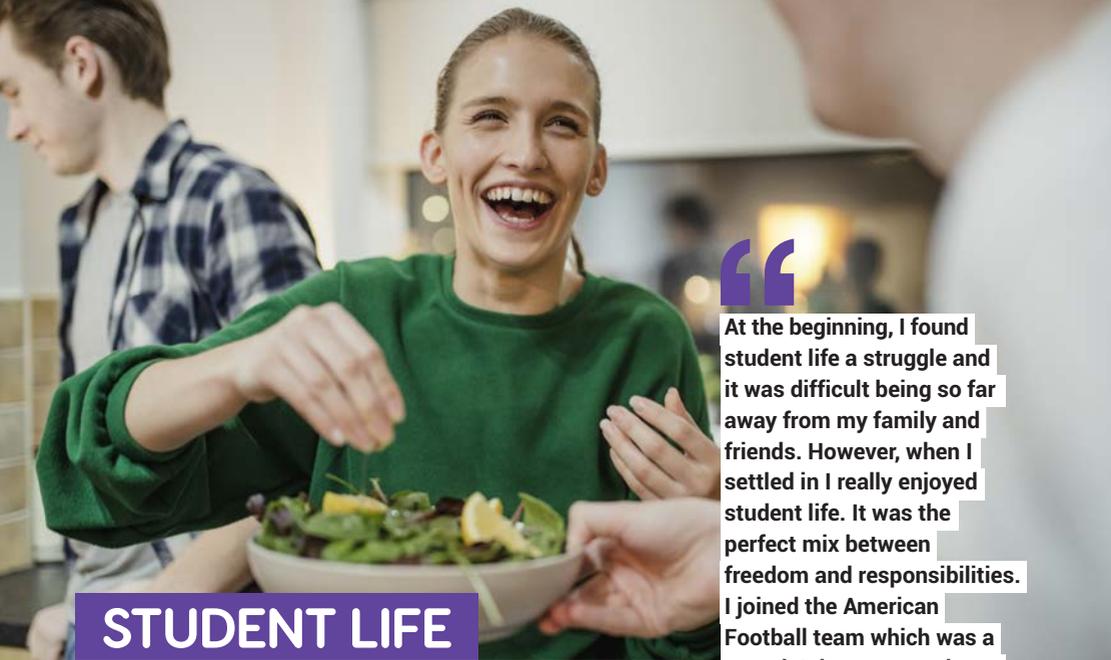
Additional help is available for students with dependents, care leavers and students with disabilities



Before I did my research I didn't even know student loans were a thing! I thought you had to pay for it all yourself. I'm from a low income family and Student Finance meant it was possible for me to get a degree and the job that I'm in now.

Mickie





STUDENT LIFE

Student life is often talked about as the most enjoyable part of university and the great thing about it is that it can be whatever you want it to be!



At the beginning, I found student life a struggle and it was difficult being so far away from my family and friends. However, when I settled in I really enjoyed student life. It was the perfect mix between freedom and responsibilities. I joined the American Football team which was a completely new experience and helped me meet new people. Varsity season was without a doubt the best part of university!

Ray



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

You can also get involved in a wider range of opportunities that will be offered by universities such as volunteering for a local charity or working for the university as a Student Ambassador (often helping out at Open Days and events). This will look great for your CV, whilst also allowing you to gain new skills.

GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

Joining a student led university society (or student club / group) is a great opportunity to take a break from academia and to do something interesting in your spare time. Every university will have facilities, clubs and societies to suit all interests, whether it be sporting, cultural, religious or political. Joining a sport team or society will allow you to meet new friends, gain new experiences and also following an interest that you might have had prior to university...or develop a new one!

SOCIALISING AND MAKING FRIENDS

If you choose to go to university straight from college or sixth form you will be surrounded by thousands of people your own age from all over the world, all of whom want to enjoy themselves and make friends. Student life is what you make it and your social life will be as active or restful as you'd like! Many students enjoy a mixture of nights in cooking or watching films, nights out dancing and random day trips in the local area and beyond.

SUPPORT AT UNIVERSITY



More independence is a huge part of the university experience and for some students this will involve leaving home and learning to look after themselves. This can be daunting and there may be challenges but you'll never have to face them alone!

Additional support is also often also available to carers, parents, low income families, asylum seekers and military families.

It is the student's responsibility to seek out most of these services so if you think you'll need to access any of the support above it's a good idea to contact the University in advance to introduce yourself.



I was diagnosed with dyslexia while at university, which was great because it finally gave me an explanation as to why I found spelling and grammar difficult! I had so much support from Newman, my grades got better and I learned so much about myself and managing my dyslexia. When I struggled with my mental health in my third year, the academic support advisors were understanding and helped me get an extension on my dissertation.

Mickie



CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

If you're a looked after child or care leaver, you will be entitled to extra support from your Local Authority and the University. It's really important that when you apply to university you tick the box on your UCAS application so the university knows. This is confidential and will only be shared with those who need to know in order to offer additional support. For example, some universities offer year round accommodation and reduced tuition fees.

Propel.org.uk has a wealth of information on supporting care leavers to access HE.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)

Over 45,000 disabled students enter higher education each year, meaning there's already lots of on-campus support available. If you have a disability or support needs, it's a good idea to contact a university directly to talk about support available - even before submitting a UCAS application. You may even be entitled to Disabled Students Allowance, a financial grant.

Accessible.co.uk provides accessibility information on 1000s of locations including many universities

WHAT NOW?

Whether you're planning on going to university, applying for an apprenticeship or starting a job search, there's a variety of things that you can start NOW to stand out from the crowd:

- ▶ Work experience
- ▶ Part-time job
- ▶ Volunteering
- ▶ Clubs and hobbies
- ▶ University summer schools

START YOUR RESEARCH! LINKS WE LIKE:

As well as handling applications, **UCAS** (ucas.com) has lots of info on higher education and the wide range of courses available.

Buzz Quiz (icould.com/buzz-quiz) have a careers quiz that tells you what careers match your personality.

Prospects (prospects.ac.uk) has hundreds of job profiles. If you have a job you want to research, this is the place to go for guidance on what qualifications you'll need and earning potential.

What Uni (whatuni.com) allows you to compare courses and read reviews from current university students.



University Summer Schools are a great opportunity to meet new people and get a real taster of university life! You'll stay in student accommodation, attend taster lecturers and experience student life. Aimhigher West Midlands offer 'UniFest' for year 10 and there are lots of other summer schools across the UK; see aimhigherwm.ac.uk and unitasterdays.com for more info.

What did our Graduate Guides do to stand out in their UCAS forms?

I knew I wanted to do a counselling degree so I got some voluntary experience in a relevant field with Samaritans.

Mickie

“

I took a gap year between college and university and applied for jobs as I wanted save money and get some employment experience for my CV and uni application. I was lucky enough to find a mentoring role at my old secondary school. My friends around me went straight to uni from college, but taking a gap year made me excited to start my course and I felt I was fully prepared by taking that extra time... plus I had a year's worth of experience as a school mentor!

Lewis

START THINKING ABOUT YOUR FUTURE TODAY!



1. What are your interests and hobbies?

Answer:

2. Do you like any of your current subjects and want to study them in more depth?

Answer:

3. Do you have a dream job in mind? If yes - what course would help you get that job? (Take a look at prospects.ac.uk for info!)

Answer:

4. Do you have a passion which you could pursue further at university?

Answer:

5. What are you really good at? (If you're not sure ask your family and friends - they know)

Answer:

6. Do you want to do work experience or a placement whilst at university?

Answer:

7. Do you want to live at home or move away?

Answer:

8. How do you like to learn? (Practically, listening, reading etc.)

Answer:

Answered the questions? Ask your school if you can see a careers advisor and get their advice on what jobs and courses you could look at based on your answers.

HOW TO APPLY?

UCAS is responsible for processing applications for courses at universities in the UK. When you apply to university you'll make an application via the UCAS website and they will notify you of responses from universities. Your application will ask for:

- ▶ Personal details and support needs.
- ▶ Course choices - You can choose up to five courses and your chosen universities/colleges won't see where else you've applied.
- ▶ Education and employment history.

- ▶ A reference from a teacher or adviser. If you're applying through school or school they will arrange this.
- ▶ And a PERSONAL STATEMENT.

▶ ADJUSTMENT

If you meet or exceed your firm choice, it is possible to swap where you plan to study.

▶ CLEARING

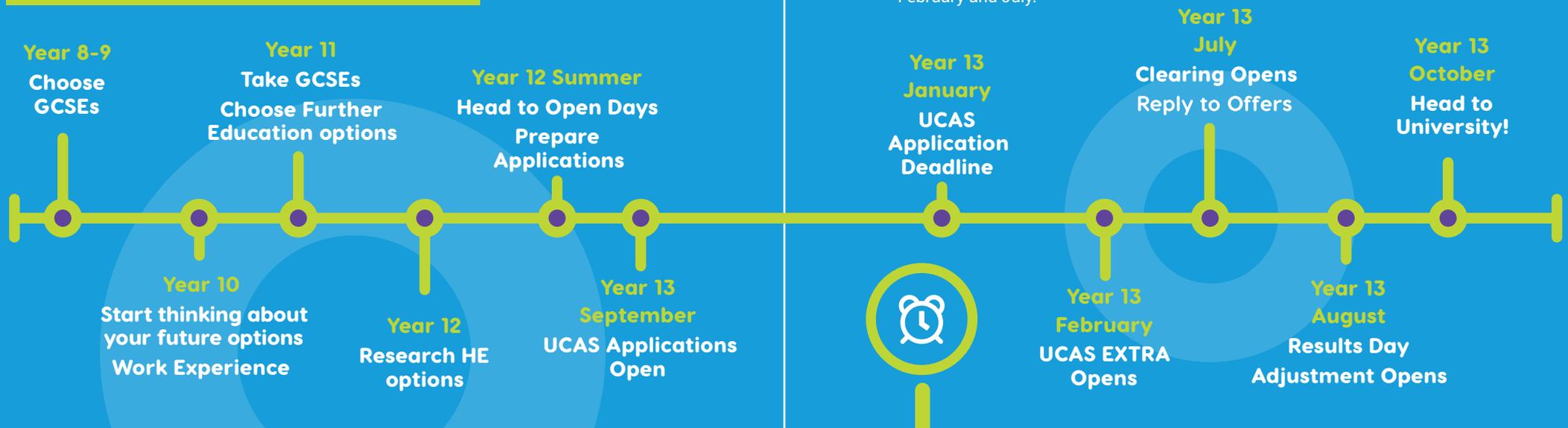
How universities and colleges fill any places they still have on their courses. You find courses with vacancies and contact universities or colleges directly, to see if they will offer you a place.

▶ DEFERRED ENTRY

Applying for a course then taking a year out before going to university.



HIGHER EDUCATION TIMELINE



▶ OFFER

A conditional offer means you still need to meet the requirements (e.g. exam results).

An unconditional offer means you've got a place, although there might still be a few things to arrange.

Some universities make contextual offers to students whose personal circumstances may have restricted achievement at school or college. These offers are often one grade lower than the entry requirements

▶ UCAS EXTRA

If you used all five of your choices on your original application and you're not holding an offer, you'll be able to add another choice using Extra between February and July.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

A personal statement needs to be included in your higher education application and will be the part that requires the most amount of time and effort. It tells the university why you want to study the course and ultimately why you're an all-round good egg that would be an asset to their university!

A personal statement can make you stand out from the crowd and is your opportunity to tell the university about yourself and show your enthusiasm for the subject.

Have you started your own blog? Did you take part in Duke of Edinburgh? Have you gone out of your way to support the elderly in your community? Do you volunteer with your local junior football team? Put it in your personal statement!

“When it came to writing my personal statement, the idea of “selling myself” was quite hard at first, because it almost felt like bragging. Once you get over that it's pretty easy - don't be afraid to talk about your strengths and skills!”
Mickie



USEFUL WEBSITES

Complete University Guide

For information on all UK universities and advice on which university to choose visit:

www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk

Student Finance

Find out more information about Student Finance by visiting:

www.gov.uk/studentfinance

The Uni Guide

Find a subject which suits you at:

www.theuniguide.co.uk

UK universities and colleges

To search for courses at UK universities and colleges go to:

www.ucas.com

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