Higher Education: A Guide for Parents & Carers

A partnership of Sheffield Hallam University and The University of Sheffield
"University has been a good investment for my young person. Having a degree means they have progressed on their chosen career path without barriers."

Parent/carer
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What is Higher Education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Why do people go into higher education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Higher Education Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Additional Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jargon Buster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Application Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Open days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>UCAS requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Student Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Repayment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Fees for degree apprenticeships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Your Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Resources/Websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp) works across South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire to encourage more children, young people, and adults to consider higher education opportunities.

We are jointly funded by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield. We also work closely with our sister project, HeppSY, which is part of the Uni Connect Programme, funded by the Office for Students. Between Hepp and HeppSY, we provide impartial advice and guidance about higher education to all schools and colleges in the region.

The aim of this brochure is to equip you with the information needed to support your young person to make informed decisions regarding their choices around higher education. The decision-making process at this stage may be daunting and confusing for both you and your young person, but it is a very important decision to make. Throughout, we will clarify different choices, timelines, and information with the aim to answer questions you and your young person may have. We hope to provide you with the knowledge needed so that you can help your young person make the best decision for their future.

"University has turned my daughter into a confident, capable young woman, able to stand her ground and aspire to what she wants in the future."

Maureen, parent/carer
1. Barnsley College Higher Education
   barnsley.ac.uk/higher-education
2. Dearne Valley College
   dearne-coll.ac.uk/higher-education
3. Doncaster College University Centre
   don.ac.uk/university-centre
4. University Centre Rotherham
   ucr.rotherham.ac.uk
5. Sheffield Hallam University
   shu.ac.uk
6. The University of Sheffield
   sheffield.ac.uk
7. The Sheffield College
   sheffcol.ac.uk
8. Chesterfield College
   chesterfield.ac.uk/university-level
9. North Notts College
   nnс.ac.uk/higher-education
What is Higher Education?

Higher education refers to study taken at level 4 or above after your young person turns 18. There is no upper age limit; higher education is open to all ages above 18.

These qualifications are gained after sixth form or college, where level 3 qualifications are taken. A well-known route into higher education is gaining a degree through a university, however, there are many other qualifications that could allow your young person to study at a higher level in a college, university or in the workplace.

Below are the various level 3 qualifications that can lead to higher education:

A Levels

A Levels offer classroom-based learning across a range of academic subjects. A Levels can be completed either at a school sixth form or college and involve written work and exams.

BTECs & Technicals

BTECs & Technicals offer learning linked to a specific career path, for example Information Technology or Sport but without the workplace experience an Apprenticeship offers. BTECs normally involve written work, coursework and exams. They can be studied at school or college.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships offer practical learning in the workplace alongside time studying in college. Find out more about Apprenticeships here apprenticeships.gov.uk

T Levels

T Levels have been developed in collaboration with employers and businesses so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for work, further training, or study. You'll combine classroom learning with real work placements. T Levels usually involve exams, projects and practical assignments.
Why do people go into higher education?

People choose to study at a higher level for many different reasons; often a combination of a few. We like to use the F.A.C.E acronym:

Financial – having a higher level qualification can lead to higher earning potential. While this won’t be true for every individual circumstance, on average, graduates (those with a higher education qualification) earn £9,500 more per year than non-graduates.

Academic – from state-of-the-art facilities to subject-expert tutors, higher education offers a range of high-reaching academic benefits that are completely different from the school experience. Students can learn specialist skills that are directly transferable to the workplace.

Career – your career opportunities increase with a higher education qualification (as some jobs require a degree) and graduates are more likely to be employed than non-graduates. Specific degrees are essential for certain professions, such as medicine and teaching.

Experience – the student experience is a common reason why people go on to higher level study. From moving to a new city or town, joining exciting and inclusive societies, studying abroad or following a passion for a subject there are so many experiences to be gained from higher education, aside from academia.
Higher Education Options

Higher education is flexible, with many options available, from part-time options to work and study combinations.

Higher level qualifications don’t have to be gained through university study; your young person can gain these qualifications at:

- University
- Colleges offering higher education courses
- Distance learning providers

Although the most known route into higher education is through a traditional degree, there are alternative routes for your young person to consider.

On the next page is a table to help you and your young person easily understand the options available.

"Diversity is really important for me as a parent. I was looking for a diverse mix of students when we visited. When I saw the multi-faith prayer room, it showed me the university's awareness of faith and cultural differences. It reassured me that the university knows their cohort well."

Parent/carer
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Bachelor Degree (BA, BSc, BEng)</th>
<th>Foundation Degrees</th>
<th>Higher National Certificate (HNC)/ Higher National Diploma (HND)</th>
<th>Higher and Degree Apprenticeships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study at a university, college or distance learning provider.</td>
<td>Study at a college, distance learning provider or some universities.</td>
<td>Study at colleges or some universities.</td>
<td>Work alongside degree level study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Usually take 3-5 years when studying full-time. | Usually take 2 years when studying full-time. | HNC: usually 1 year (full-time).  
HND: Usually 2 years (full-time). | Between 2 and 6 years, depending on the level of the course. |
| Options to study full-time, part-time or distance. | Focus on a particular job or profession. | Vocational - focus on a particular job or profession. | Degrees are awarded at an equal standard to traditional degrees. |
| A huge variety of courses and providers to choose from. | Can be studied full-time or part-time. | Can be studied full-time or part-time. | Developed through partnerships of employers, universities, and professional bodies. |
| Often, courses offer study abroad or work placement opportunities. | Equips graduates with specific skills that employers are seeking. | Usually designed to prepare graduates for specific careers. | There are around 75 options to choose from. |
| Some jobs and professions require university degrees. | Upon graduation, students can raise their qualification to a degree. | Can be used for entry to a degree at university. | Degree apprentices are in paid employment from their first day. |
Additional Barriers

Higher education and the opportunity to study at a higher level is an option for everybody, however, some people face additional barriers to progressing to higher level study.

From young carers to mature students, there is support available for these learners, from local authorities, directly from institutions and from external providers. If your young person is included in one of these groups, or faces other barriers, it is always worth checking the support available directly from the institution, as well as local and national support.

Hepp have resources available for the following groups:

- **Young Carers**
  hepp.ac.uk/who-are-you/young-carers

- **Care Experienced**
  hepp.ac.uk/who-are-you/care-experienced

- **Mature Students**
  hepp.ac.uk/who-are-you/mature-students

- **Disabled Learners**
  hepp.ac.uk/who-are-you/disabled-learners
Jargon Buster

The language used around higher education can be full of confusing terms, phrases, and acronyms. We have pulled together a ‘jargon buster’ for your reference:

**Clearing**
This system allows prospective students without a university place to apply for courses with remaining vacancies.

**Conditional offer**
An offer of a place of study which is dependent on students reaching certain grades in their post-16 study.

**Deferred entry**
A student can apply for a place on a course but request to start the following year.

**Entry requirements**
The grades, qualifications or other requirements an applicant needs for a certain course.

**Foundation year**
This is a course to prepare students who don't have the appropriate level or coverage for a specific degree course.

**Student loans**
Loans available to help students pay their living and study expenses during university.

**Tuition fees**
Students have to pay fees for their course. In 2022/23, the fees for undergraduate home students are £9,250 per academic year.

**UCAS**
The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is responsible for processing applications for courses at universities and colleges in the UK.

**UCAS tariff**
The tariff system is a points system to convert grades for entry into higher education. Through UCAS.

**Unconditional offer**
An offer of a place of study which is not dependent on students reaching certain grades in their post-16 study.
Researching the best options for your young person is a key part of the process. This decision may be made based on location, student experience, facilities, courses, or many other factors! The choice of higher education provider is just as important as the course choice.

"University is building my son as a person. He appreciates what is on offer academically but has also immersed into student life - making new friends, joining clubs and societies. He would never volunteer himself for anything previously. It's building him as a character and makes it all so much more enjoyable."

Sam, Parent/carer
How can you help your young person research their options?

- **Begin your research online.** There is an abundance of information online and this is a great place to start. There are various websites that can provide impartial advice on higher education options. See page 21 of this brochure for useful websites.

- **League tables.** Higher education league tables rank universities and other providers on different criteria, so it's important to be aware of that when conducting research this way. A more general league table, such as Discover Uni may be a good place to start. [discoveruni.gov.uk](http://discoveruni.gov.uk)

- **Home or away?** Many students choose to move away from home to another city/town, for higher education, but they don’t have to. Lots of young people choose to stay at home and study in their hometown. This is an important decision for your young person, and they should make their choices based on what suits them and their study preferences the most.

- **Courses.** With over 50,000 options in the UK, it may feel like being spoilt for choice. It’s important that your young person makes their own decision for their course choice. At higher education you can choose one subject area (single Honours), or two subjects (joint/dual Honours). With so many options for the same or similar courses, your young person may want to explore the assessment and study methods, options for study abroad/placements and the different module options offered. [ucas.com](http://ucas.com)

- **Student experience.** Higher education isn’t only about academia; the student lifestyle plays a huge role in most students’ experiences. Some students want a fast-paced city lifestyle, whereas others prefer a close-knit campus lifestyle. They can be very different environments so it’s important to visit them to see which feels ‘right’ for your young person.

- **Entry requirements.** Entry requirements are the grades (tariffs) that higher education providers require before they offer a place on a course. These vary widely between courses and providers, so it is important that these are considered before applying. Most institutions accept A Levels, BTECs and other qualifications, but it’s important to check each institution and individual course, as they may have specific requirements.
Application Process

Open days

Before applying for higher education, you should organise open day visits for your young person to look around and speak to members of staff and current students. Every provider will hold open days throughout the year, usually taking place at the weekend. They may also be held virtually.

Although you can do lots of research from home, there is no substitute for physically checking out the place your young person could potentially be living and studying. Open days also give opportunity to view facilities, teaching buildings, accommodation, and social spaces. There are often talks for all subject areas, where there is chance to ask course-specific questions.

See below for our suggested process (degrees and foundation degrees):

1. **Choose** – courses and providers. You can make up to five choices. Attend open days, help your young person to do their research and make a decision.

2. **Apply** – Applications must be made through UCAS. The deadline is in January for most courses, but some have an earlier deadline so make sure you check!

3. **Student finance** – Applications open from January onwards. As a parent, you will be asked to support an application by providing information on your household income. Your young person does not need a confirmed place at a university before applying, so don’t put it off. (If you are a care leaver you will be assessed as an independent student).

4. **Offers** – Both conditional and unconditional offers will be coming in from around February onwards. An offer must be accepted by your young person before it is confirmed, this usually has to be done around May.

5. **Accommodation** – Find and apply for accommodation. If your young person is leaving home for university, it’s time to search for options – private or halls of residence.

6. **Results day** – If your young person has achieved their expected grades, they will get an automatic confirmation from the higher education provider. If not, they may still be accepted, or be able to enrol at another institution through clearing.
UCAS Requirements

UCAS stands for Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. It's the online centralised service that students use to apply to higher education courses.

A UCAS application has a cost depending on the number of choices the student makes and consists of several sections:

- **Personal details**
  This section involves getting a username, creating a password, and setting security questions, as well as naming a parent or guardian as a nominated person on their application.

- **Additional information**
  Ethnicity, disability and other additional questions.

- **Student finance**
  This section might appear depending on the answers given in the personal details section.

- **Course choices**
  Your young person will be able to choose up to 5 courses to apply for.

- **Education**
  This is where your young person will enter all their qualifications from secondary onwards, including those results which they are still waiting for.

- **Employment**
  This section is relevant if your young person has had any paid jobs, part-time or full-time.

- **Personal statement**
  This is a key part of UCAS applications. It provides an opportunity for your young person to show their commitment and passion for the chosen subject, stand out from other applicants, highlight work or volunteering experience, and discuss their career aspirations. It is used by universities to assess capability for higher level study and ability to write effectively.
The financial side of higher education is often confusing and daunting for both parents/carers and students. There are a lot of myths surrounding the funding of higher education, which we hope to clarify below.

For full-time undergraduate degrees, students can apply for two types of funding through Student Finance England:

**Tuition fee loan**

This covers the cost of the course. In 2022/2023 it is up to £9,250 per year of study. This is paid directly from Student Finance England to the course provider. Every UK undergraduate student applying for their first full-time course will receive this funding.

**Maintenance loan**

This loan covers living costs. The maintenance loan is available for every UK undergraduate student applying for a full-time course, but the awarded amount is variable. This loan is means tested based on household income. There is also variance depending on if your young person will live at home, away from home, or in London. (If you are a care leaver you will be assessed as an independent student). To find out how much maintenance loan your young person would be eligible for check out: [gov.uk/student-finance-calculator](http://gov.uk/student-finance-calculator)
Repayment

These figures are correct at time of writing (May 2022) but are subject to change for students starting courses from 2023/24.

Your young person will only begin to repay their loans when they earn over £27,295 a year. At this point, they will only repay 9% of any income over this threshold.

For example, if they earn £28,295, they must repay 9% of £1000, or £90 a year. This will be taken from their earnings, along with taxes, in each pay packet. Using this example, they would repay £7.50 per month.

If their earnings never reach the £27,295 threshold, they will not have to make any repayment for either loan. Additionally, after 30 years, any outstanding debt is completely written off. The student loans do not affect credit ratings and can never be passed on to a family member.

For example:

Your young person's annual salary before tax is £28,295

£28,925 minus £27,295 = £1,000

They must repay 9% of £1,000

= £90

Yearly repayments = £90

Monthly repayments = £7.50

Fees for degree apprenticeships

Students applying for degree and higher apprenticeships cannot apply for funding through Student Finance England because the employer sponsors the entire tuition costs.

Additionally, those who choose this route will be in paid employment from day one and as such students are not eligible for maintenance loans.
Many students choose to live in student halls of residence in their first year. They are an exciting introduction to independent living. Student halls are a brilliant way for students to make new friends and develop skills in a comfortable environment.

There are usually a wide range of options to suit different preferences and budgets. University halls of residence are a safe and secure environment, with 24-hour security and on-site help in most sites.

Most students will move into private rented accommodation in their second year and beyond. This could be in a shared house or flat, with friends made in their first year. Some students may choose to live in private accommodation from their first year, too.

Students may rent through a private landlord or through a student letting agency.

Many students choose to stay at home for one or all years of their higher education. Whether this is for financial, cultural, geographical, or personal reasons – it can be the right choice for some students. Students who choose to stay at home can still get involved with all aspects of university social life through involvement in societies, the students’ union, and meeting peers on their course.
Support

Higher education providers offer a range of support through various services across the institution. There is support available for academic, career, wellbeing, mental health, and other areas. This can vary between different universities and colleges.

If your young person needs additional specialist support, most institutions will offer this. If you contact the institution directly, you can find out what additional support may be available for your young person. Many higher education providers will have departments that help students with the following:

- Specific learning difficulty (dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- Long term health condition (including epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, Crohn’s disease)
- Autism spectrum condition (Autism and Asperger syndrome)
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Mental health conditions
- Physical impairment or mobility difficulty (including cerebral palsy, fibromyalgia, arthritis)
- Speech, language, or communication difficulty
- If your young person requires specialist equipment or facilities to assist their learning, most universities will provide (or find a way to provide) this.
Your Role

As a parent or carer, your role will have a big impact on your young person's choice, experience, and decision-making process. While your input and advice may be needed in some areas, it's important that your young person decides which is the right route for them.

- To help your young person get the best out of their future, encourage active independent research so that they're a big part of the process.
- Encouraging your young person to engage in extracurricular activities or work experience may be advantageous to their application for some courses and providers.
- By engaging in open conversations with your young person about their future, you can help them to start thinking about their next steps themselves.
- Speaking with teachers or tutors at their school, sixth form or college can be useful when dealing with and understanding entry requirements.
- Finally, encourage your young person to have an open mind. With so many options on offer today, there is no wrong path or route for your young person to take. Encouraging an open mind will help them make a decision based on what's best for them, as opposed to doing what they think is expected of them.
Resources/Websites

hepp.ac.uk
heppsy.org
Information for students, teachers and parents/carers. Free, downloadable resources and videos on topics including pathways, higher education benefits and student finance. Specific sections for care experienced, young carers, disabled and mature students.

ucas.com
Information for students and their parents/carers on course choices, applying to higher education and student life. You can also sign up for a parent newsletter.

gov.uk/student-finance
Information about student finance, with a tool that allows you to see an estimate of what your young person may be entitled to.

apprenticeships.gov.uk
Information on apprenticeships, how to apply and what makes a good application.

whatuni.com
Information about university courses, reviews, and offers advice.

theuniguide.co.uk
Information on where to go, what to study and how to get there.

thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk
Independent university rankings, course information and expert advice.

prospects.ac.uk
This website provides information about career paths and how best to achieve career goals.

targetcareers.co.uk
This website helps school leavers explore options for careers, university and apprenticeships and helps with the application process.

thestudentroom.co.uk
This website is an online community of students from GCSE up to higher education. It hosts discussions, forums between students themselves and provides information for students of all ages.

discoveruni.gov.uk
Discover Uni is an official source of information about higher education. It is owned and operated by the UK higher education funding and regulatory bodies and includes official statistics about higher education courses.

gov.uk/student-finance-calculator
This page can help you calculate student finance entitlements for your young person.
The Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp) works across South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire. Our mission is to ensure that every young person knows that higher education exists and could be an option for them.

hepp.ac.uk
@Hepp_YES
facebook.com/hepponline