

More young people are staying in education for longer, and many of them continue their studies at university. This involves applying up to a year in advance, through the UCAS system.

The Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) is responsible for managing students' applications into higher education courses across the UK. As well as processing applications, UCAS offers information and advice on the courses and qualifications that might be best for your son or daughter.

The wide range of qualifications on offer works on a points system, called the UCAS tariff. Your son or daughter will need to achieve a certain number of points – often in relevant subjects – to study their preferred subject at university. However, not all universities apply tariff points but may ask for specific subjects and grades instead.

The UCAS system can be a bit overwhelming at first glance, but it's really very simple and straightforward. It's a case of knowing the stages of the application process and understanding the UCAS tariff. You can find out more about UCAS and applying for university by visiting www.ucas.com

For now, though, here are some of the basics:

- The UCAS application process begins in September of the year before your child hopes to start a university course.
- Application dates differ between universities and courses, so it's important to check these on the UCAS website.
- Your child can choose up to five courses or universities to apply for.
- Your child's teacher can help with choosing suitable degree courses – and with the application process. They'll also write a reference to support your son or daughter's application.
- Even if your son or daughter doesn't receive the offers they'd hoped for, the Extra and Clearing processes can help them find a suitable place at university.

