OfS Uni Connect Programme

Higher Education APPLICANT GUIDE 2026/27

Everything you need to know about the application process

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HIGHER EDUCATION APPLICANT GUIDE

If you are considering studying a higher education (HE) course at university or college, and don't know where to start, this guide will provide clear and unbiased information.

From deciding where and what to study, and how to best approach visiting a university/college, or UCAS exhibition; to understanding student finance, other funding options and budgeting for your studies - we've got it covered!

This is a step-by-step guide to the HE application process for 2026/27. Please be aware that the dates and figures listed are for entry onto a full-time HE course at a public university/college in England in academic year 2026/27.

ABOUT UNI CONNECT

Uni Connect is funded by the Office for Students and brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college.

The programme was set up in 2017 and supports the strategic goal that students' access to higher education is not limited by their background, location or characteristics.

So far over 1.7 million young people from underrepresented groups have engaged with the Uni Connect programme. In 2023-24 the partnerships continued to work with 2,843 schools and colleges.

For more information visit: **officeforstudents.org.uk/uniconnect/**

OfS Uni Connect Programme

APPLICATION TIMELINE

To apply use UCAS Hub, and create an account to access all the tools and information you need. You can explore subjects, research apprenticeships, shortlist your final five courses, and prepare your personal statement or CV.

Most students begin their application in their final year of A-levels, or Level 3 qualifications. These are the UCAS deadlines but your school or college may have their own deadlines, and support available. **These dates are for those applying to start an HE course in September 2027.**

September 2nd
The earliest you can submit completed UCAS applications.
October 15th
Application deadline for music, medicine, dentistry and veterinary courses, and for Oxford and Cambridge.
January 27th
Application deadline for most HE courses.
February 24th
UCAS Extra opens, so you can add extra choices.
Early Spring
Apply for student finance (inc additional funding eg Disabled Students' Allowance) based on previous years the application window runs from early Spring.
March
Application deadline for some Art & Design courses.
May 13th
Universities and colleges make their decisions for applications received by January 27th.

May (usually the beginning)
Reply to offers received by 31st March (if you receive offers at others times, they will have their own response deadlines).
June 30th
Applications received after this date will automatically be entered into Clearing.
July 4th
Last chance to add an Extra choice to your application.
July 5th
Clearing opens.
August 19th
A-level results are released.
End of August
Remaining offer conditions must be met and adjustment closes.
October 20th
Last date to add Clearing choices, and for universities and colleges to make decisions.

To start your application go to:
ucas.com and click on 'sign in'

CHOOSING A COURSE

Research is the key to finding the right course. Try looking into a range of courses you're interested in, as many different universities and colleges will offer the same (or similar sounding) courses, but what and how you learn might be very different.

Degree apprenticeships may be a good option for those wanting to combine paid workplace experience with structured training, for more information visit:
apprenticeships.gov.uk

- **Modules** – What are the specific modules for this course, and how do they compare to others, even those that sound the same?
- **Entry requirements -** These may differ from one institution to another.
- **Type of assessment -** Some courses may put more emphasis on exams, others on coursework or practical assessments.
- **What's your motivation -** To do a vocational course/something you enjoy.
- **Facilities -** Work spaces, equipment, and study environments can vary. Ask if there are plans for anything new.
- **Contact hours -** The amount of 'contact time' can also be variable. Ask yourself honestly if more 'independent study' time is really better for you, or would you benefit from more structured timetabling?
- **Study opportunities -** Are there opportunities to study abroad, or work in industry for a year? Is this something you would want?
- **Length of the course -** Could you do it part-time if you wanted to, or could you do an integrated masters?
- **Campus setting -** is the campus spread out or in one place.
- **Distance from home -** maybe you don't want to go too far from home, maybe you do, consider travel options and expenses.

To help you decide on the right course for you, make the most of online comparision tools such as:

discoveruni.org.uk and **whatuni.com**

COMPARE COURSES

University / College	Course	Modules	Entry requirements	Course length	Distance / cost from home	Other factors: Study abroad / employability rates / Contact hours

VISITING A UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE

When exploring HE, we recommend visiting a university or college, because it can make or break your decision. It's best to attend with a clear action plan. From study options to student unions, consider what your deciding factors are.

Finding Your Way

- Check nearby **carparks in advance** if you're driving, as many campuses operate a green travel policy with limited on-site parking.
- If travelling by train or bus, **check the distance from the station to the campus**. Also, check to see if the institution is running a discount fare for Open Day attendees.
- Note the **cost of a ticket** back and forth from your hometown to the university or college. How much would it cost you to visit home and other parts of the UK from this location?
- Is there a **campus map?** Most events will share a map with you in advance or have a printed guide ready for you upon arrival. You may even be shown an event app to download, full of easy-to-access info.
- Tours & talks may be **bookable in advance**, whilst some activities repeat throughout the day. If you're unsure of the time and location or need help planning your day, simply ask a student ambassador or staff member to talk you through the event schedule.

Before Your Visit

Do your research - you can easily compare elements of a course such as modules and assessment criteria online or in a prosepectus. Use the time you're there wisely. It's a good opportunity to **find out things that can only be done in person**, and to get a feeling for the place and its surroundings.

“You get to see the facilities that the university has to offer... You also get to meet the lecturers that will be delivering content to you for the next three years. You don’t get a real feel for the university without going to an Open Day and experiencing it for yourself”.

Questions to Ask

- Is the campus all in one place or spread across multiple sites?
- Is it close to local amenities, e.g. supermarkets and shopping centres?
- What facilities do they offer students? On-site GPs? Bars and cafes? Recreational sports facilites and gyms? Libraries?
- Where is the Students’ Union and what clubs and societies do they run?
- Are work experiences offered and what careers do people get onto after your course, what are the employability rates?
- What kind of accommodation is available? On or off campus? Shared house or halls? Often, official accommodation providers will have stalls at Open or Applicant Days.
- What internal support, often known as Student Services, do students have access to? Find out if there are dedicated teams to advise you on student finance, exam support, student welfare, study skills and careers, for example.
- Where can you get IT support, and is there a place to borrow other equipment?

TOP TIP
Use the comparision chart on page 4 to help you compare courses.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

Which Universities/Colleges would I like to visit?

What questions should I ask?

What factors are important to me?

Which activities can I attend? (Note time and location)

UCAS EXHIBITIONS

UCAS Exhibitions are large-scale events, hosting UK universities and colleges, HE experts, employers and voluntary agencies. It's a great opportunity for anyone who is unsure of their future, and those who have an idea but would like to explore their next steps.

You'll have the opportunity to sign up for inspirational talks, application advice, and subject-specific workshops, as well as getting the chance to explore degrees and school leaver options such as apprenticeships. Plus, discover various volunteer and gap year opportunities, and get first-hand feedback from real students.

You might feel overwhelmed by the event, but with a little preparation you can be sure to leave knowing you've made the most of it. There are various exhibitions throughout the year. To check the next or nearest one go to: **ucas.com/ucas/events-exhibitions**

"A UCAS exhibition will focus your research and get you thinking about what you really want from your future".

Charlotte, BA (Hons) English student

In Advance

- Make sure you have a **sturdy bag** – you'll collect lots of information and materials.
- Check the **activity programme.** Will there be any guest speakers or interactive activities on the day? Which will be the most useful for you to attend?
- Make a **list of stands to visit**.
- Visit the university/college's websites or comparison websites to find the answers to some of your questions, freeing you up to **ask the interesting stuff in person**.
- Think of questions to ask that really matter to you. For example, "What kind of support services are there?" or "What sports can I take part in?". **Student ambassadors are great to talk to** as they've been in your shoes!

On the Day

- When you arrive you'll be given a unique barcode to scan at each of the stands you visit. When prompted, **tick the 'send me info' box** and UCAS will share personalised information with you after the event, based on your visit.
- **Don't follow the crowd!** This is a chance to find your own calling, which might not be the same as your friends'.
- If you're waiting to speak to someone, **listen to other people's questions**. They may ask something that never occured to you but turns out to be helpful.
- **Don't weigh yourself down** by collecting a prospectus from every university or college. Most of them are available digitally, or you can request a printed copy in the post.
- The staff on each stand may not be academics, but student ambassadors, so utilise their experience as an opportunity to learn about the institution's values or local area. **Course content is best discussed with the programme team at an Open Day or interview**.
- It's not about who's got the best freebies – **don't be dazzled by branded merch!**

TOP TIP
Use the table on page 6 to help you plan your day.

What's Next?

- **Read the prospectuses** if you've collected some.
- Visit the websites of any universities or colleges for extra information – some will offer **virtual campus tours.**
- **Keep researching** things like bursaries and scholarships that you might be eligible for.
- **Talk** to your friends, family, tutors or career adviser about what you found out – get their opinions too.
- Book onto **Open Days** – They will help you get the 'feel' for different universities or colleges.
- **Don't worry if you change your mind** after a visit; they are designed to help you narrow down your options.

TOP TIP
When you know where and what you want to study, it's time to apply. Visit ucas.com to start your application.

RESULTS DAY AND CLEARING

If things don't work out as you'd hoped, don't worry there may still be options available to you - speak to the admissions teams at the universities and colleges, and research your Clearing options.

Depending on circumstance some students maybe eligible for contextual offers, to find out more go to: **ucas.com and search 'contextual'.**

Clearing

If things don't go to plan on results day you might be interested in Clearing, which is **an opportunity to apply for courses that still have availability.**

There may be places on a different course at the same institutions you originally applied to, or you could look at somewhere new!

Once I started looking through the openings available, and saw how many there were, I started to relax. There are so many different options in Clearing".

Ella, BA (Hons) History with English graduate

High Tariff

(top ranking) UK universities also enter courses into Clearing.

41,200 **UK students were accepted through Clearing in 2025.**

+4% **on 2024 applicants**

UCAS, 2025

There are many reasons people use Clearing...

- your plans have changed, and you now prefer another course
- if you've not met the conditions of your offer
- you didn't receive any offers; or you declined a place
- you haven't already applied

Clearing applications can be made from **early July to late October.**

For more information about all results day eventualities, visit: **ucas.com**

UCAS TARIFFS

UCAS Tariff points are allocated to many Level 3 qualifications; however, some universities and colleges use grades instead, and some qualifications aren't part of the Tariff points system.

For a complete list of all qualifications, points and to calculate your Tariff points visit: **ucas.com** and search **'Tariff'.**

Tariff points	AS level	A level	BTEC (Nationals)	T Level (3 x Tariff points)*	Level 3 Diploma (UAL)*	Level 3 Extended Diploma (UAL)*
56		A*	D*	D*		D
48		A	D	D		
40		B		M		M
32		C	M	P2 (C or above on the core)		
28				P2 (D or E on the core)	D	
24		D				P
20	A				M	
16	B	E	P2 (C or above)			
12	C				P	
10	D					
8			P2 (D or E)			
6	E					

*** T Levels and UAL qualifications (that are awarded by the University of the Arts London) are the equivalent of 3 A Levels and are therefore worth three times as many UCAS points, e.g**

T Levels: low P = 84, high P = 96, M = 120 etc

Level 3 Diplomas: P = 36, M = 60 & D = 84

Level 3 Extended Diploma: P = 72, M = 120 & D = 168

STUDENT FINANCE

For the 2026/27 academic year, the maximum UK undergraduate tuition fee that universities and colleges can charge "home" (UK-domiciled) full-time students is £9,790 per year.

Up from £9,535 in 2025/26. This increase is set by the UK Government and reflects inflation-linked adjustments.

Tuition Fees

Tuition fees are paid directly to the university or college. The tuition fee loan is not based on your household income. They are available to eligible students to cover the cost of tuition fees.

Maintenance Loans

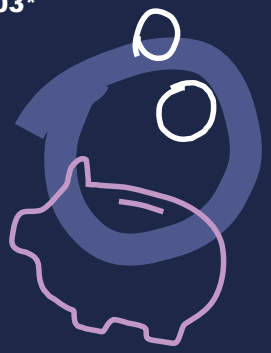
Maintenance loans are paid into your bank account each term, so you'll get 3 payments a year. This is to cover the cost of living while you study. **How much you get depends on where you reside whilst studying and your household income.**

Maintenance Loan

- Living at home - up to **£9,118*** per year
- Living elsewhere - up to **£10,830*** per year
- Living in London - up to **£14,135*** per year
- Studying overseas as part of a UK course - up to **£12,403***

TOP TIP

Apply as soon as possible - the application window usually runs from early Spring.



Bursaries and Scholarships

You may be able to access additional money that doesn't need to be repaid if you qualify for a bursary or scholarship.

Bursaries are usually awarded to students based on their personal circumstances, or if they come from a low-income family.

Scholarships are usually rewarded to students who are outstanding in a specific subject, sport or in music. They generally (but not always) need to be applied for, and are often competitive. Contact the university or college dircetly to enquire. You can also search "scholarships, bursaries & grants" on UCAS.

If you're under 25 and have no contact with your parents, you might be able to apply as an **'estranged student'.**

Students who meet the definition of a care leaver in education will automatically be entitled to receive maximum rates for loans for living costs from academic year 26/27, therefore removing the income assessment for living cost loans.
For more information about what is meant by the term **'care leaver'** visit:
practitioners.slc.co.uk/care-leavers/

Repaying Your Loan

- The student loan repayment comes out of your monthly pay once you **earn over £25,000 per year*** (before tax), and you don't have to calculate it yourself, **so it's more like a tax on earnings.**
- If your earnings drop for whatever reason, you don't have to keep repaying your loan at the previous amount. So you will **never have to pay more than you can afford.**
- Student loans **don't affect your credit report.**
- You'll pay back **9% of what you earn over £25,000***, so if you earn £26,000, you'll pay back 9% of the £1000 you are earning over the £25,000 threshold. As this currently stands this would be **£7.50 a month***.
- Interest will be applied to the loan at a rate of: Retail Price Index +0%*.
- **After 40 years any remaining loan is wiped off!***

2023 employment rates:
- Graduate **87.6%**
- Non-graduate **68%**

Graduates earned on average **£7,000** more than the average non-graduates'.

gov.uk, Graduate Labour Market Statistics, 2025

- You don't need to start repaying until the April following completion or withdrawal from your course and even then, not until you're earning over the threshold.
- Remember, what you pay is **based on what you earn, not what you owe**.

Approximate monthly repayments for a range of salaries

Annual salary	9% deducted from	Monthly repayment
£25,000 or less	£0	£0
£27,000	£2,000	£15
£30,000	£5,000	£37.50
£35,000	£10,000	£75

* Figures are subject to change, but correct for academic year 2026/27. To see the most up-to-date and conclusive information visit: **gov.uk/student-finance**

OTHER FUNDING

Aside from tuition fee and maintenance loans there may be other funding available in the form of bursaries, scholarships and grants.

Disabled Students Allowance:

Often called DSA, this Student Loans Company grant is to support study-related costs you may have because of a mental health problem, long-term illness or other disability.

You could get up to **£27,783***. The actual amount you will receive does not depend on household income, but on your individual needs. This is a grant, not a loan, so it won't need to be repaid.

You can apply for DSA if you have a disability or condition such as a:

- learning difficulty, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, or ADHD.
- mental health condition, such as anxiety or depression.
- physical disability, such as if you're partially sighted or have to use crutches.
- long-term health condition, such as cancer, chronic heart disease, or HIV.

For more details visit: **gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa**

Medical, nursing, midwifery and allied health profession students can apply for:

- **NHS Learning Support Fund** if you're studying pre-registration nursing, midwifery and other allied health profession courses at English universities/colleges.
- various **NHS bursaries** if you're studying certain medical or dentistry courses.
- a **grant to cover some travel expenses** if you're studying a medical or dentistry course abroad or as part of a UK clinical placement.

For information on all NHS funding visit: **nhsbsa.nhs.uk/student-services**

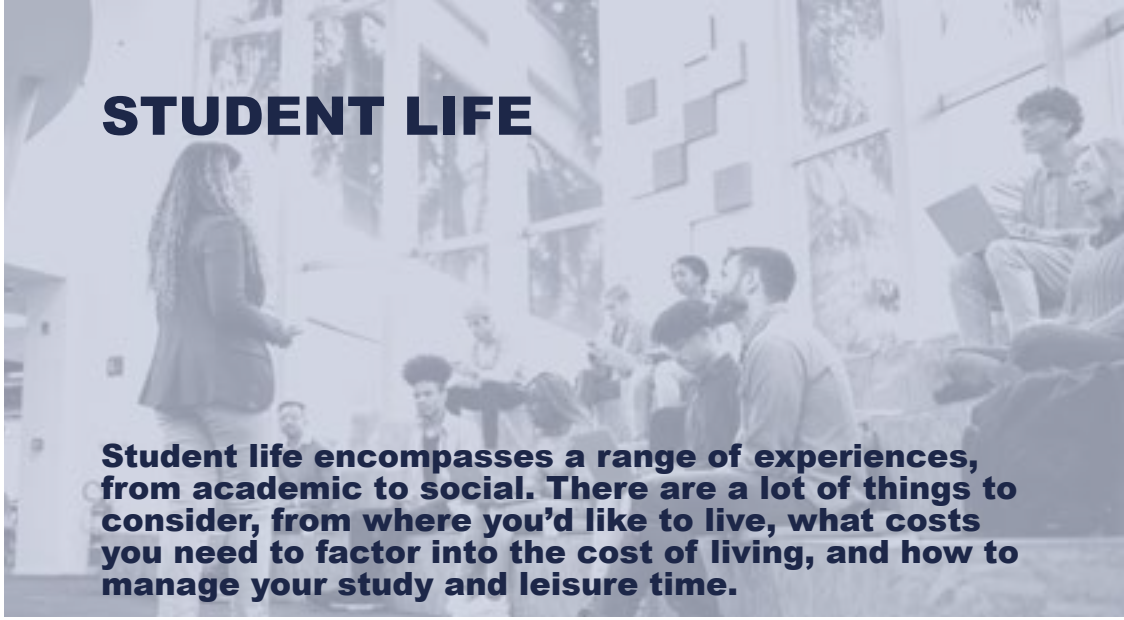
For students who have received UK government funded free school meals (FSM) during the last six years up until the end of their final year at school or college, UCAS have waived the application fee.

Students with children or dependent adults:

- **Childcare Grant** - up to **85%*** of childcare costs (with a maximum of **£199.62*** per week for one child, capped at **£342.24** for two or more children).
- **Parents' Learning Allowance** - grant of **£50 - £2,024*** per year.
- **Adult Dependants' Grant** - up to **£3,545*.** (Overseas-resident dependants no longer eligible for Adult Dependants' Grant).

***These figures are for the academic year 2026/27**

gov.uk/student-finance/extra-help



STUDENT LIFE

Student life encompasses a range of experiences, from academic to social. There are a lot of things to consider, from where you'd like to live, what costs you need to factor into the cost of living, and how to manage your study and leisure time.

Location

Where do you want to be?
- On campus or in the city
- Transport links
- Local area and amenities
- Distance from home
- Distance to shops
- Clubs and societies

Accomodation

Where would suit you best?
- At home
- Halls of residence (the facilities and prices of student halls vary)
- Shared, independent or private accommodation.

Academic

HE gives you more freedom and more choice in the way you study, but there are other significant changes you'll have to adapt to:
- Self motivation
- Time management
- Different teaching and assessment methods.
- Reduced contact time

Costs to Consider

- Food and other essentials, e.g. toiletries and cleaning products.
- What's included in accommodation costs (i.e. bills and internet).
- Travel between campuses if they are spread about.
- Travel around the area, and cost to get home.
- Books and other course equipment (there may be bursaries for this).
- Field trips.
- Is having a car necessary? Would you need a parking permit?
- Could you get a part-time job? (Go to a jobs fair or sign up to become a student ambassador).
- Insurance - what needs to be covered, and how much will it be?
- Entertainment, socialising and clothes.

TOP TIP

Check what student discounts are available, e.g. student railcard and NUS card. Visit savethestudent.org/money/student-budgeting

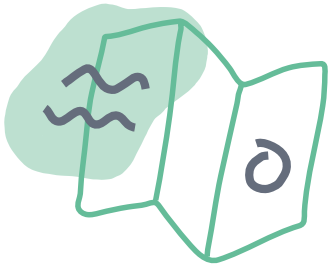
USEFUL SITES

We recommend visiting the sites below for the most up-to-date and comprehensive information.

discoveruni.org.uk	Official information, course data and course comparison tool
gov.uk/student-finance	The most up-to-date student finance information
ucas.com	Universities and College Admissions Service
whatuni.com	University and college comparison site
icould.com	Inspiring stories from industry professionals
prospects.ac.uk	Job information and careers advice
brightknowledge.org	Need-to-know information about HE
startprofile.com	Explore career options
careerpilot.org.uk	Research job sectors and map your skills
thestudentroom.co.uk	Talk to current students and get real answers
moneysavingexpert.com/students/	Money advice from Martin Lewis
opendays.com	The university and college open day directory

Visit your local Uni Connect's website for impartial information and support on all things HE, including:

- **Why FE and HE matters to you**
- **Career paths and job sectors**
- **Courses, subjects and qualifications**
- **Local events and activities**
- **Student stories**
- **Frequently asked questions**



HE GLOSSARY

Applicant day	A chance to visit a university/college if you've already applied and received an offer. Often subject specific, it gives you a chance to see in more detail what studying would be like.
Adjustment	A two-week period for HE applicants to change to a different course after achieving higher A-level grades than expected.
Campus university	A university situated on one site with accommodation, teaching/research, leisure facilities all together.
City university	Normally distributed throughout a city/town with student accommodation, teaching/research, leisure facilities spread out.
Clearing	The process of applying to a university or college that still has places on its courses after receiving (level 3) results.
Firm choice	The HE course offer a student accepts as their first choice.
Integrated masters	A course that usually takes four years, incorporating a degree and a masters.
Joint/Combined degree	A degree usually made up of two or three areas of study.
Lecture	Large classes, often with tiered seating and a lecturer talking at the front while you take notes.
Personal statement	A statement describing your skills and experiences, and why you would be a good candidate for the course.
Prospectus	A guide produced by universities/colleges giving details about all their courses and facilities also available online.
Open day	A day where you can visit universities and colleges to see the area and facilities and to ask questions.
Seminar	A small group of students who discuss what they've learned with an academic/teacher.
Student loan	Borrowed funding to cover the cost of tuition fees. It includes a separate maintenance loan to support living costs.
Students' Union	Run by students for students to support them, as well as promoting an active social life.
Tuition fees	The annual cost of studying at higher education. Student loans are available to cover these costs.
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. When applying you will submit your application through UCAS.
UCAS Tariff	A system used by UCAS to allocate points to post-16 qualifications

GET IN TOUCH

officeforstudents.org.uk/uniconnect/ & discoveruni.org.uk

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