

The Astley Cooper Sixth Form

Futures Week Handbook



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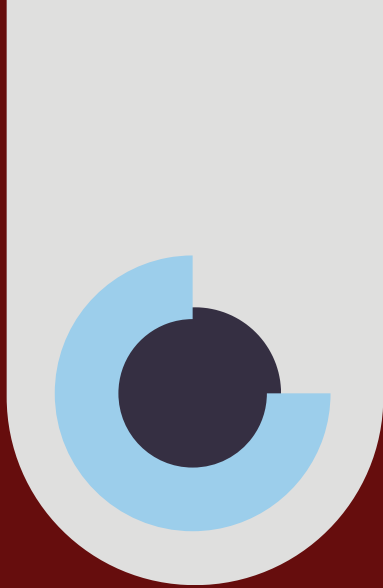
Information

We hope that you will find this handbook useful in supporting you and your child in their next journey Post 18.

What your child chooses to do Post 18 can be an exciting part of life but for many it can be overwhelming particularly as there are lots of different options available and understanding the best pathway is important so they choose the right way for them.

It's not just figuring out whether to carry on with their education or to go straight into employment, but it's also deciding what course, what university, what level of apprenticeship, what company to do the apprenticeship with, how will they finance this next step, living expenses, course fees, practical or academic route and so on.

This handbook goes alongside our parents information evening and gives you an introduction as to what is involved.



Post 18 Options

What options are available?

Levels of Education, The Parents Guide

This graphic explains the different qualifications that are available as well as the levels for both academic, vocational and work based routes to higher education.

The Parents' Guide to www.theparentsguideto.co.uk

Level	Qualification / educational route				
8	Doctorate (PhD)			NVQ 8	
7	Masters degree (MA)			Degree apprenticeship / NVQ 5, 6, 7	
6	Bachelors degree BA or BSc				
5	Foundation degree FdA or FdSc	Higher National Diploma (HND)			
4	Higher National Certificate (HNC)			Higher apprenticeship / NVQ 4	
3	A levels Grades A-E	International Baccalaureate	T Levels	BTEC diploma BTEC certificate	Advanced apprenticeship / NVQ 3
2	GCSE Grades 4- 9 (C, B, A or A*)			BTEC first diploma	Intermediate apprenticeship / NVQ 2
1	GCSE Grades 1- 3 (D,E,F or G)			Foundation diploma / entry level qualifications	Traineeship / NVQ 1
	Academic route			Vocational route	Applied / work route



Post 18 options

	University Degree	Degree Apprenticeship	Non-degree apprenticeship	Higher education course at College
Qualification type	Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science	Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science	Advanced or Higher apprenticeship	HNds HNCs, Foundation Courses, Diplomas Vocational course
Length of commitment	3-4 Years (Some degrees, such as medicine, are longer)	3-4 Years (Some can be longer, even up to 7 years)	6 Months – 3 Years	1 – 3 Years Some are part-time.
Tuition Costs	£££ Students take out a “tuition fee loan” to pay course costs. No repayments are made until the student is earning £25k in the April after graduation. Any outstanding debt is wiped clear after 30 years.	£0 Course costs (at university) are paid by the company and government.	£0 Course costs (usually at college or by an education provider) are paid by the company and government.	££ Tuition fees need to be paid but these are less expensive than university fees. Students can apply for an “advanced learner loan” where repayments are made as a percentage of earnings above a certain threshold. Any outstanding debt is wiped clear after 25 years.
Accommodation Costs and living expenses (i.e. food, book, travel, going out)	£-£££ May receive a “maintenance loan” dependent on parents’ income; however, this is rarely sufficient to cover all costs and students will either need to supplement by working or have help from their parents (or both!).	£-££ A salary is paid, but parents may need to subsidise living expenses, especially if relocating to an expensive area.	£-££ A salary is paid, and shorter apprenticeships may be local so students can continue living at home, but parents may need to subsidise living expenses, especially if relocating to an expensive area for longer apprenticeships.	£ Students can often find suitable courses at colleges commutable from home, but there are still living expenses to be covered.

Apprenticeships and Employment

What are apprenticeships?

Apprenticeships combine on-the-job training with study, allowing individuals to earn a wage while gaining job-specific skills and a nationally recognised qualification. Anyone over 16 can apply for an apprenticeship which offer a pathway to a variety of careers.

What levels can you get?

- Intermediate (Level 2) – GCSE level
- Advanced (Level 3) – A-Level equivalent
- Higher (Levels 4-5) – Foundation Degree/HNC
- Degree (Levels 6-7) – Bachelor's/Master's Degree

What are degree apprenticeships?

Combine on-the-job experience with academic study, leading to a bachelor's or master's degree. They are designed to equip individuals with both practical skills and a degree qualification, allowing them to earn a salary while learning and gain valuable work experience.

Application process

- 1 - Search for apprenticeships or employment using the useful website links
- 2 - Apply online
- 3 - Write/Update your CV and Cover letter
- 4 - Assessment Center stage a vigorous process which includes interviews and tests
- 5 - Job offer



Apprenticeships and Employment

There are lots of benefits and disadvantages to apprenticeships and employment and these are a few of them.

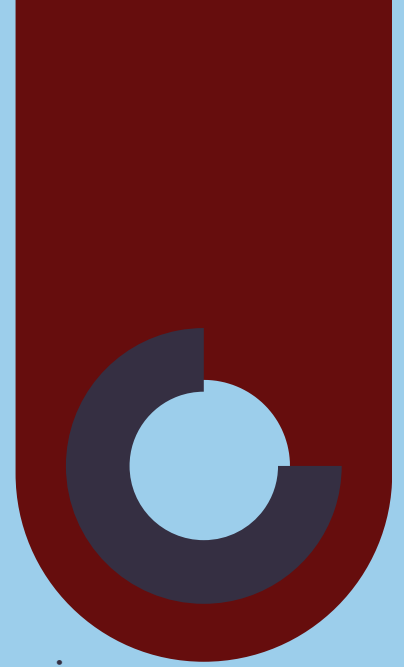
It is worth thinking what it is you really want to do as apprenticeships are very specific to certain career sectors and roles.

Benefits	Disadvantages
Earn while you learn	Highly Competitive application process
No student debt	Less student lifestyle
Industry-relevant experience	Time management required
Workplace skills development	Location specific roles
Progression opportunities	

Tips and Guidance

- ✓ Start looking early
- ✓ Tailor applications
- ✓ Prepare for interviews
- ✓ Explore different industries
- ✓ Get support
- ✓ Have backup plans

University Application Process



What is UCAS?

- UCAS = Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
- Central system for applying to UK universities
- Students can choose up to 5 course choices
- Covers undergraduate degrees, some foundation degrees, degree apprenticeships

Personal Statements

This is an important part of the application process

It's a chance for you students to sell themselves and explain why they would like to study a particular course or subject, and what skills and experience they possess that show their passion for their chosen field.

4,000 characters

3 questions to answer

Question 1 - Why do you want to study the course?

Question 2 - How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Question 3 - What else have you done to prepare outside of education and why are these experiences useful?

Do not plagiarize and do not use chat GPT - it is not personal and UCAS will put your statement through a checker

University Application

Breakdown of the UCAS application

- Personal Details
- Course Choices (up to 5)
- Education History
- Employment (optional)
- Personal Statement
- Reference and Predicted grades - Completed by Mrs Ollerenshaw-East using subject teachers references

Offers

- Conditional Offer: Subject to grades
- Unconditional Offer: Guaranteed place
- Rejection
- Firm Choice: First preference
- Insurance Choice: Backup
- Results Day: Confirmation, Clearing, Adjustment

What are contextual offers?

These are offers that are typically lower than their generic entry requirement grades

- 🎯 Universities consider your background, not just your grades
- 🎯 You may get a lower offer if you've faced challenges
- 🎯 Recognises potential and resilience

Universities will take into consideration where students live, whether they have been eligible for FSM or receive bursary payments as well as the context of the school they have attended to give a contextual offer.

Clearing

Clearing Matches applicants without offers to available courses for those who:

- Didn't receive offers
- Didn't meet conditions
- Declined offers
- Applied after 30 June

Clearing is not failure! Think of clearing as an opportunity and something not to be worried about. Clearing is a valid route to university and many top universities use Clearing.

University Application

How Clearing works

1. Opens from 5 July 2026, students can check clearing options already available
2. Check UCAS Track on Results Day
3. Search for courses on UCAS and university websites
4. Contact universities directly over the phone to speak with them about your results and options - each university has a dedicated clearing number and team to help
5. Receive verbal offer
6. Add course in UCAS Track

How can parents support with the process?

The university application process can be daunting for students so it is important that parents are involved too.

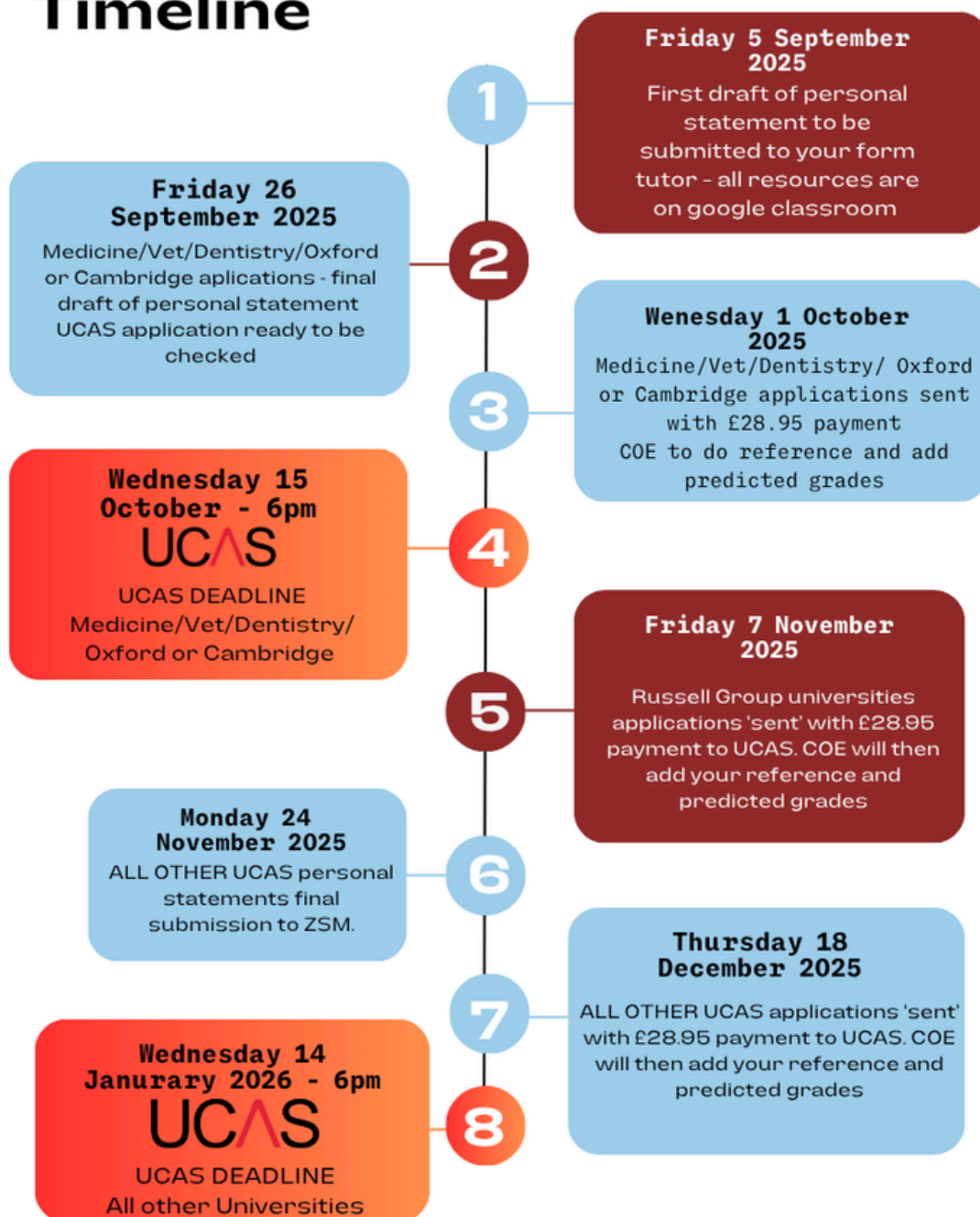
- Discuss options together
- Encourage Open Days
- Support with deadlines
- Review Personal Statement
- Help organise, but don't pressure

The logo for UCAS Clearing is displayed on a white rectangular background. The word "UCAS" is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. The letter "A" is stylized, with its top two strokes forming a red triangle. Below "UCAS", the word "Clearing" is written in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

University Application

Internal Deadlines for UCAS Application

UCAS Timeline



Choosing the Right University

Choosing a university is one of the biggest decisions your child will make. While the final decision is theirs, your guidance, questions, and emotional support can make all the difference.

What makes a university right?

Factor	What to ask?
Course Content	Does the course offer modules they're excited about? Any placement or study abroad options?
Teaching Style	Do they prefer coursework, exams, group work, or lectures?
University Type	Would they thrive on a large campus or in a city university?
Location	How far from home? Cost of living? Safety? Lifestyle?
Entry Requirements	Are they realistic and achievable?
Student Support Services	Is there support for wellbeing, academics, and careers?
Graduate Outcomes	Where do graduates go next? Are there internship opportunities?
Social Experience	What's the student life like? Are there clubs, societies, a good student community?

Choosing the Right University

Final Thoughts for Parents

- Support, don't steer: Let them explore and choose.
- Stay informed: Learn about the process together.
- Be patient: This is a big decision. It's OK if they're unsure at first.
- Trust their instincts: Fit matters more than prestige.

Student Finance

PARENT'S GUIDE TO STUDENT FINANCE ENGLAND

sfe

Student Finance England (SFE) relates to English domiciled students studying higher education courses at universities or colleges in the UK

What is Student Finance?

Student Finance is a combination of loans, grants and other financial support available to help students pay for higher education courses at university or college. www.ucas.com/sfe

To be eligible for SFE support, students must be undertaking an eligible Higher Education (HE) course at university or college and meet the set nationality, residency and previous study criteria.

For a comprehensive overview please visit: www.gov.uk/student-finance/who-qualifies

There are two core parts of the SFE student finance package, a Tuition Fee Loan and a Maintenance Loan.

Tuition Fees

Providers who meet government standards can charge full-time undergraduate students a maximum tuition fee of £9,250 a year (up to £11,100 for Accelerated Degree courses).

A non-means tested Tuition Fee Loan is available to eligible students, which SFE pay directly to the university or college once your child has started their course.

Maintenance Loan

A Maintenance Loan can help with a student's living costs, such as rent, food, travel and other costs.

The amount paid will depend on where a student will live while they study, including if they live in the parental home, live away from home or study an approved year abroad as part of their UK based course.

For an estimate of their student finance entitlement, students can use the calculator on GOV.UK: www.gov.uk/student-finance-calculator

A Maintenance Loan is income assessed, which means the amount a student may receive will be based on the taxable income (wages, interest in savings, taxable benefits etc) of their parents or a parent and their spouse/civil partner or cohabiting partner.

Household income is confirmed via HMRC and is based on the last complete tax year, e.g. if your child starts university in academic year 24/25, your income figure from 2022/23 is what will be used.

If your income has reduced by at least 15% in the current tax year, you can request a new assessment is carried out based on the new, lower amount which can entitle students to additional levels of support.

See www.gov.uk/support-child-or-partners-student-finance-application for more information.

Other Support

Students with a disability, a mental health condition, or specific learning difficulty can apply for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) which can help with additional study related costs they may face as a result of their disability.

If they study on an eligible healthcare course (such as nursing) then they could also get additional support from the NHS Bursaries Service. www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/student-services

Many universities and colleges also offer a range of bursaries and scholarships to students based on criteria varying from academic performance to household income or being from an underrepresented student group.

See university/college websites and www.thescholarshipclub.org.uk for more information.

Student Finance

Application and Assessment Key Messages

Ensure your child applies for their student finance as soon as the application service is launched.

They do not need a confirmed place in order to apply, they can state their preferred choice of course and change it later if need be.

Make sure any evidence/information needed as part of your child's application is supplied right first time so they can be assessed and paid on time.

They'll need things like their National Insurance number, passport, personal bank account details and your email address, which we will use to prompt you to create an account to support your child's application.

If your household income is over a current level (currently £42,875) then the final Maintenance Loan paid to your child will be subject to a process known as an 'Assessed Contribution'.

The 'Assessed Contribution' is a government estimate of the level of financial support parents can provide towards their child's living costs based on the declared level of income.

If you have other child dependants make sure you provide this information in the relevant section of the application form, particularly if they are also in higher education.

This will allow SFE to accurately assess a student's entitlement.

How do repayment's work?

In the April following on from your child leaving/withdrawing from their course they will 'enter their repayment period, but this does not necessarily mean they will need to start making repayments at this point.

Students must earn above a minimum threshold before they start to repay and the threshold for undergraduate students who started their course from **1st August 2023 will be £25,000**.

These are known as Income Contingent Plan 5 Loans and from April 2027 the threshold is set to increase annually in-line with average earnings increases (RPI).

Once your child is employed and earning above the threshold, deductions of **9%** on what they earn above this will be made from their pay via the HMRC tax system.

For example, based on the current thresholds, if they earn **£30,000 annually** with a monthly salary of **£2,500 then their monthly repayment would be £37**.

Any outstanding loan balance will be written off **40 years** after your child enters repayment, so they may **NOT** repay their entire balance. Repayments are linked to what they earn and not what they have borrowed.

Repayment Key Messages

It is important that your child reads and understands the full conditions of their student loan. Particularly the interest rate, as this will be applied throughout the life of the loan based on the Retail Price Index (RPI) which gets adjusted each year.

It is the student's responsibility to inform SLC of any changes to their circumstances, including if they change address, they stop working or if they leave the UK for over three months to live, work or travel overseas.

A student loan will not impact your child's credit rating. A lender will likely ask for details of the repayments, but they are not seen as negative borrowing on a credit score rating.

Students can choose to make extra repayments towards their loan balance in addition to the repayments they must make when their income is over the threshold.

Because a loan will be written off at the end of the 40 year term, students should carefully consider their situation before making any voluntary repayments as these cannot be refunded. For more information, please see: www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan

Useful Links

University

UCAS Course Search - www.ucas.com

Discover Uni - www.discoveruni.gov.uk

The Uni Guide - www.theuniguide.co.uk

Unifrog - www.unifrog.org

Apprenticeships

Government apprenticeships

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>

Amazing Apprenticeships

<https://www.amazingapprenticeships.com/>

UCAS apprenticeships

<https://www.ucas.com/explore/search/apprenticeships>

Student Finance

<https://www.gov.uk/student-finance-register-login>

Martin Lewis Student Finance Decoded -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mO_rAsMuAlM&t=2s

Key Contacts

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