

TAKE YOUR PLACE

GUIDE TO APPLYING FOR UNIVERSITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

2020/2021



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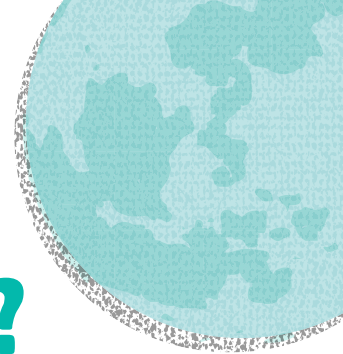


Children's Services
Change Lives, Every Day



**Cambridgeshire
County Council**

WHAT IS HIGHER EDUCATION AND WHY SHOULD YOU BOTHER?



Higher Education is any study and qualifications that you gain above Level 3. The table below shows the different types of qualifications you can achieve and what levels they are.

Most people going to university study A'levels first but many universities will also accept people who have studied BTEC's or taken an Access course.

You can study for a degree full time or part time at a university. You can also access higher education through a Degree Apprenticeship where you work and study at the same time. Many large employers are now offering these schemes which are a great way to earn money and gain experience whilst completing your degree.

People go to university for many reasons, gaining a degree can improve and widen your career choices. Going to university is an opportunity to explore a subject you enjoy, make new friends, have new experiences and gain skills.

There can also be financial benefits to gaining a degree. Recent statistics show that 75% of employers look for a degree in any subject and that the average graduate starting salary is £30,000. Studies have also found that a graduate can earn £200,000 more than a non graduate over their lifetime and that 65% Of graduates are in full time employment within 6 months of graduating.



QUALIFICATION

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION
LEVEL 7/8	NVQ 7, Master's Degree/Doctorate
LEVEL 6	Honour's Degree
LEVEL 5	Higher / Degree Apprenticeship (NVQ 4 - 6), HND, Foundation Degree, Diploma of HE
LEVEL 4	HNC, Certificate of HE
LEVEL 3	Advanced Apprenticeship/NVQ 3, BTEC Cert/Diploma, AS/A2
LEVEL 2	Apprenticeship/NVQ 2, BTEC First Diploma, GCSE A* - C / 9 - 4
LEVEL 1	NVQ 1, GCSE D - F / 3 - 1
ENTRY LEVEL	Basic Skills/Skills for life

CHOOSING A COURSE

The most important thing to consider is what you enjoy! You will be studying a subject in depth and you need to have a genuine interest to keep you engaged and motivated.

Gaining a degree in any subject will give you an advantage but some careers do require a specific degree. It's a good idea to do some research first especially if you already have an idea of what you would like to do in the future.

For most careers it's the skills you gain from your degree that are important.

For example, History is a broad degree and the skills you will gain including; analysis, investigating, debating, reflecting, evaluating, researching and critical thinking are applicable to multiple careers.

There are over 37000 courses available at nearly 200 universities in the UK so there is plenty of choice! There are subjects you will have studied at school but there will also be subjects you won't have studied before like Criminology, International Relations and Law.

You can research courses using UCAS or by going onto University websites. Take time to read the course descriptions and take time to understand what topics you will be studying. Also look at how the course will be taught and assessed. If you don't like exams try finding a course which is more assessment based.

Courses can be structured in different ways, you can study one subject or you can combine two subjects with a Joint or Combined Degree. If you choose a Joint Degree you will study both subjects equally, Combined Degrees are often split 60:40 between the two subjects.

Some universities offer Sandwich courses where you study for 2 years, spend a year working in a related job and then spend a final year at university.

There are lots of options so it's really important to spend some time researching and finding the best choice for you.



APPLYING VIA UCAS

To apply to a UK university you need to complete a UCAS application online. You complete one application and this is then sent to the universities of your choosing. You can apply to 5 universities, you can apply to less, but not more. The closing date for UCAS is 15th January 2021 unless you are applying for Oxford or Cambridge, Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Studies which is 15th October 2020.

You will be asked to add your personal contact details, education so far including all the grades you have received for any qualifications you have taken.

Most people complete their UCAS application when they are at school or college but it is possible to apply as an independent student. If you aren't currently studying then you may need to apply independently.

A reference is required and this is usually added by your teacher or personal tutor. If you are applying independently you will still need a reference and ideally this will be an academic reference so you may need to contact your previous school or college for help.

Remember to tick the box on your UCAS application to let the university or college you're applying to know you have been in care.

This is confidential and won't be used against you! It does, however, let the right person at the university or college know that you might need financial or other support, and can help you put that in place before you start your course.

Social care can cover the cost of the application for you. Ask your Social Worker or Personal Adviser.



WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

Your personal statement is your opportunity to tell the university why you want to study your chosen subject and to demonstrate that you will be an engaged and motivated student.

You write one personal statement that is sent to the 5 universities of your choice. You are limited to a maximum of 4000 characters or 37 lines of text so it's important that you are clear and concise.

Try following this 4 step plan to ensure you have included all the key elements.



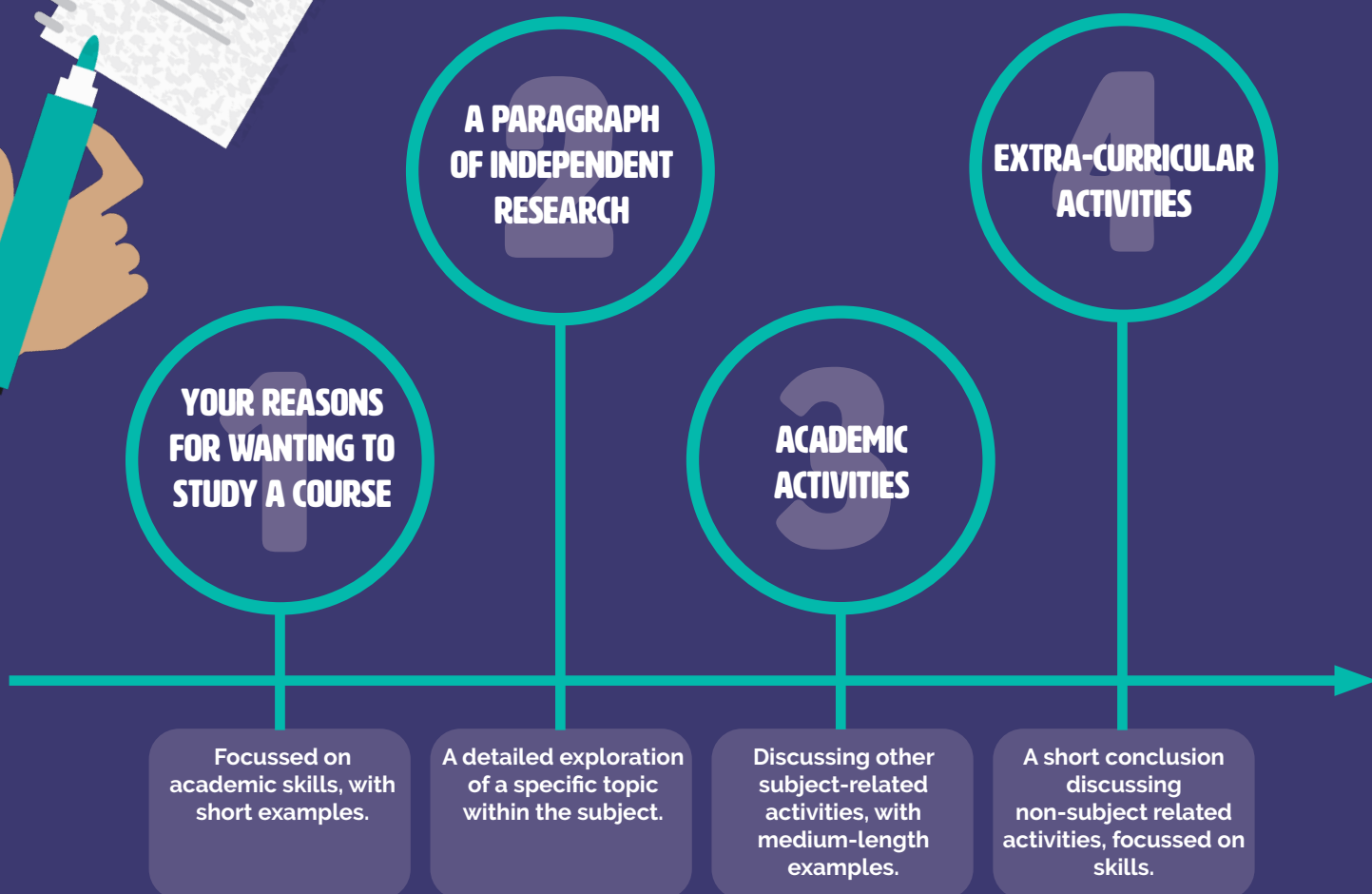
Adding a paragraph of independent research is a really good way to show your enthusiasm for your subject. Try using the FAR method which is demonstrated below:

- Give a **Focus** – narrow the topic down to a specific interest
- Offer some **Analysis** – what are the most interesting or significant points?
- Finally, **Reflect** – what has exploring the topic taught you about the subject?

Focus: *I am particularly interested in how the principles of bioinformatics are used in detection and identification of microbes.*

Analysis: *This is used in Forensic Science for detecting bio-crime attacks and to identify and examine skeletal remains of victims after long periods of time. For example, the type of microbes present in remains can indicate the length of time the person has been dead.*

Reflection: *This demonstrates the importance of attention to detail and scientific understanding in forensic science.*



OPEN DAYS

What to ask at open days?

Visiting a university is the best way to get a real feel for the place. If you are going to move somewhere and study there for 3 years then you need to visit to know that it is the right place for you.

Most universities employ Student Ambassadors to show visitors around. These are current students at the university and are a great source of information. You might also want to visit the Student Services or Academic Support departments to find out about support for care leavers.

Social care will cover the cost of travel to two open days and, depending on your circumstances, we may cover the cost of someone to travel with you. This will be paid at 20p per mile or train fare up to the value of £280. Similarly we will cover the cost of three applicant days, interviews or auditions up to the value of £370. You may also be able to get some money from your college or sixth form.

Some universities offer summer school or open days specifically for Children in Care/Care Leavers. Please contact the Education, Training and Employment Coordinator for care leavers for more information.

Some questions you might want to ask include:

What is the accommodation like? Do most people live in halls of residence?

What is the town or city like? Is it student friendly?

Is there good transport to the university and around the local area?

Is there a student services or support department that can help if you are having any difficulties?

Are there any jobs available on campus or locally for students?

What bursaries, scholarships or fee waivers are there and how do you apply?



MONEY FOR UNIVERSITY

As a care leaver you will be entitled for a range of financial support whilst you are in higher education.



Student Finance

Applications for student finance are completed online at student-finance.gov.uk. You don't have to wait till your place is confirmed to make your application. You need to apply for a loan to cover your tuition fees, which will be paid directly to your university, and a maintenance loan, which will be paid into your bank account.

As a Care Leaver you will be entitled to the full maintenance loan which is paid in three annual instalments – September, January and April of each year. You will receive your first payment after you have registered with your institution. The amount you will receive depends on where you are studying and the length of your academic year.

Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)

Disabled student allowance covers the extra costs you have because of a mental health problem, long term illness or any other disability. You can apply for DSA when you apply for student finance online and will need to supply supporting evidence such as a letter from a GP, a dyslexia assessment or similar completed after your 16th birthday.

Once you have applied you will be asked by Student Finance to arrange a "needs assessment" with the University. This will determine the nature of the help you need such as specialist IT equipment or a non-medical helper. Usually the DSA will be paid directly to the organisation providing you with the service or the equipment. You don't generally receive cash but may be offered support like printing credits. You will have to pay the first £200 towards the cost of any computer equipment.

Bursaries

Many universities offer bursaries or scholarships to Care Leavers. These typically involve money off the cost of student accommodation, but can be a direct cash payment. These are usually applied for at the start of the academic year although you may not receive them until the summer term.

Look at <http://propel.org.uk> the website for care leavers applying to higher education to see what different universities are offering.

Higher Education Bursary from the county council

As a Care Leaver we will pay you a higher education bursary of £2250 a year plus £2,000 over your course (i.e. plus £500 a year if you do a 4 year course). We pay the bursary up to and including the academic year in which you turn 25. We typically pay this as 10 monthly instalments of £275/285 directly into your bank account.

The higher education bursary is paid for 3 years or 4 if your course includes a Foundation year or compulsory unpaid work experience element. If you are retaking a year or chose to study abroad/undertake work experience you can request a fourth year of funding. Only in exceptional circumstances will a higher education bursary be paid for more than 4 years.

It is a condition of receiving the bursary that you keep in regular contact with your social worker/Personal Adviser. You will be asked to sign that you agree to this and that should there be concerns about your wellbeing or academic progress we can contact your university.

Summer Accommodation Money

If you are live independently we will give you £600 towards the cost of your summer accommodation. If you are Staying Put with your former foster carers then they will get money from us instead and you will be expected to pay the young person's Staying Put contribution (as per your licence) for the weeks you are there.

Household items to take to University

You can have up to £250 from your Setting Up Home Allowance to buy small items ready for university such as bedding, towels, plates, cups and cooking equipment. You can have this as vouchers if you want to get your own things or, if it is more convenient for you, then your Social worker or Personal Adviser can get the items for you. We may also fund a cycle or laptop computer for you if you have not had these previously.



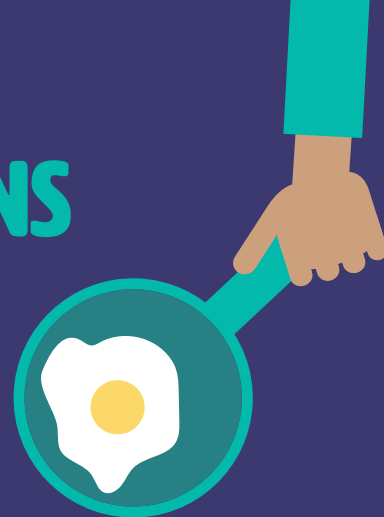
ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

Halls of Residence

Most first year students chose to live in self-catering halls of residence. You can generally apply for accommodation at your first choice university from spring onwards. These are typically single bedrooms with (tiny) ensuite bathroom and shared kitchen facilities, divided into small flats of 8-10 people. Hopefully you will have had a chance to have a look at the halls of residence of your chosen university before you start there and generally you are asked to pick 2/3 accommodations in order of preference.

Almost all universities will prioritise Care Leavers for accommodation in the first year. You need to check the length of the contract i.e. does it include Christmas and Easter breaks, and when does it finish in the summer? Most universities will offer accommodation to Care Leavers over the summer vacation but this might mean moving to a different accommodation block. Remember that if you choose to stay for extra weeks you will have to pay for these.

Once you have been offered a place in hall you may have to pay a deposit to secure your room (usually around £300). This can be paid as an advance from your Setting up Home Allowance. The council cannot act as a rent guarantor for you so if you are being asked to provide one please seek advice from your worker or the education, training and employment coordinator.



Unfortunately rooms in student halls can be small, which may be a problem if you have to take all your belongings with you. If you are worried about this please contact the Care Leaver contact for your university, they may be able to offer advice on the most suitable accommodation options for you - <http://propel.org.uk>.

Shared Houses

Most second and third years go into shared student houses and there are usually university approved landlords that you can go through to find a property. If you are a bit older when you start university, and don't want to live with 18 year olds, you might want to look at shared student housing as a first year too.

Staying Put

If you choose to study at a local university you may have the option to do Staying Put with your former foster carers and commute into University. As a Care Leaver you will still be entitled to the full maintenance loan in this scenario. You will be expected to pay your staying put providers £68.66 weekly (i.e. £34.33 + £34.33 to cover rent, meals and bills) in years 1 and 2 and £75 a week in year 3. CCC will pay your staying put providers the remainder of the Staying Put Allowance. You will not be able to claim housing benefit.

Staying In Your Own Accommodation

If you have your own council/housing association property you may decide to retain your property and commute to university. As a care leaver you will be entitled to the full maintenance loan in these circumstances. You will not be able to claim housing benefit, unless you have dependents, but will be entitled to council tax exemption. You will also receive the £600 summer holidays money. You will need to contact your local council about claiming the council tax exemption.



TIPS AND ADVICE FOR CARERS

Many young people in care may not consider university as an option for them, so one of the most important things you can do is to talk about university. Encourage your young person to stick with their education and not to get disheartened even if they get some disappointing assignment or mock exam results. Universities are looking for potential and can make contextual offers that take into account the fact that children in care have often had a disrupted education.

Arm yourself with as much information as possible and if you are not sure ask at PEP meetings or contact your supervising social worker. Some young people don't like the label of "being in care" and so won't ask about any extra support or financial help that they are entitled to receive. You can find details of what each individual university offers by looking at the Propel website and by contacting the care leaver lead at individual universities. <http://propel.org.uk>

Try to accompany your foster child to 2/3 university open days if possible. You should be able to take younger foster children along and this may in turn motivate or inspire them. If that will be difficult for you then ask for some respite/day care.



What you can say to encourage young people

- You will be able to live independently and make your own decisions.
- You will always feel proud of your achievement and get confidence from it.
- You will find clubs and societies for every interest imaginable.
- You will have access to more jobs when you qualify (40% of jobs ask for a degree).
- You will fit in. Higher education welcomes all kinds of people from all types of backgrounds.
- You can study a subject you're good at and care about.
- You will have the potential to earn more money (on average graduates earn 55% more over their working lived than those who start work at 18).
- You will have the chance to choose a city or town you would love to live in.
- You will meet new people and make lasting friendships.
- You will have access to lots of support to help you get there, and stay there, so why not take advantage of it?

Advice for when your young person starts university

Send lots of texts when your foster child first goes away. If you have a Staying Put arrangement expect that your young person will want to pop back and use your house as hotel. This is normal teenager behaviour! Encourage your young person to get involved in student clubs and societies especially if they are commuting to university or if they are quite shy.

SUMMARY OF USEFUL WEBSITES

Propel

The website specifically for Care leavers planning on going to university <https://propel.org.uk/UK>

UCAS

The website through which you will need to make your application. Also includes lots of information and video clips on choosing and filling in the application form. Links through to the websites of each individual institution <https://www.ucas.com>

Take Your Place

Aims to help young people from East Anglia with little or no experience of university to explore the world of higher education. <https://www.takeyourplace.ac.uk/>

Uni4me

Everyone should have the chance to go onto higher education. Uni4me gives you access to online events, activities and resources from UK higher education organisations that support your learning and enable you to find out more about your future opportunities. Uni4Me is your gateway to higher education. <https://uni4me.co.uk/>

The student room

The student room bills itself as the UK's largest student online student community. Includes chat functions and a tool to build your personal statement <https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk>

The Uni Guide

The uni guide (now part of the student room but formally part of Which website) includes subject by subject profile on each university <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk>

The student Room

The complete university guide- Good for league tables and subject rankings <https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk>

Unifrog

Your school or college may give you a login for this website which includes general careers information <https://www.unifrog.org>

Fast Tomato

Your school or college may give you a login for this website which includes general careers information www.fasttomato.com



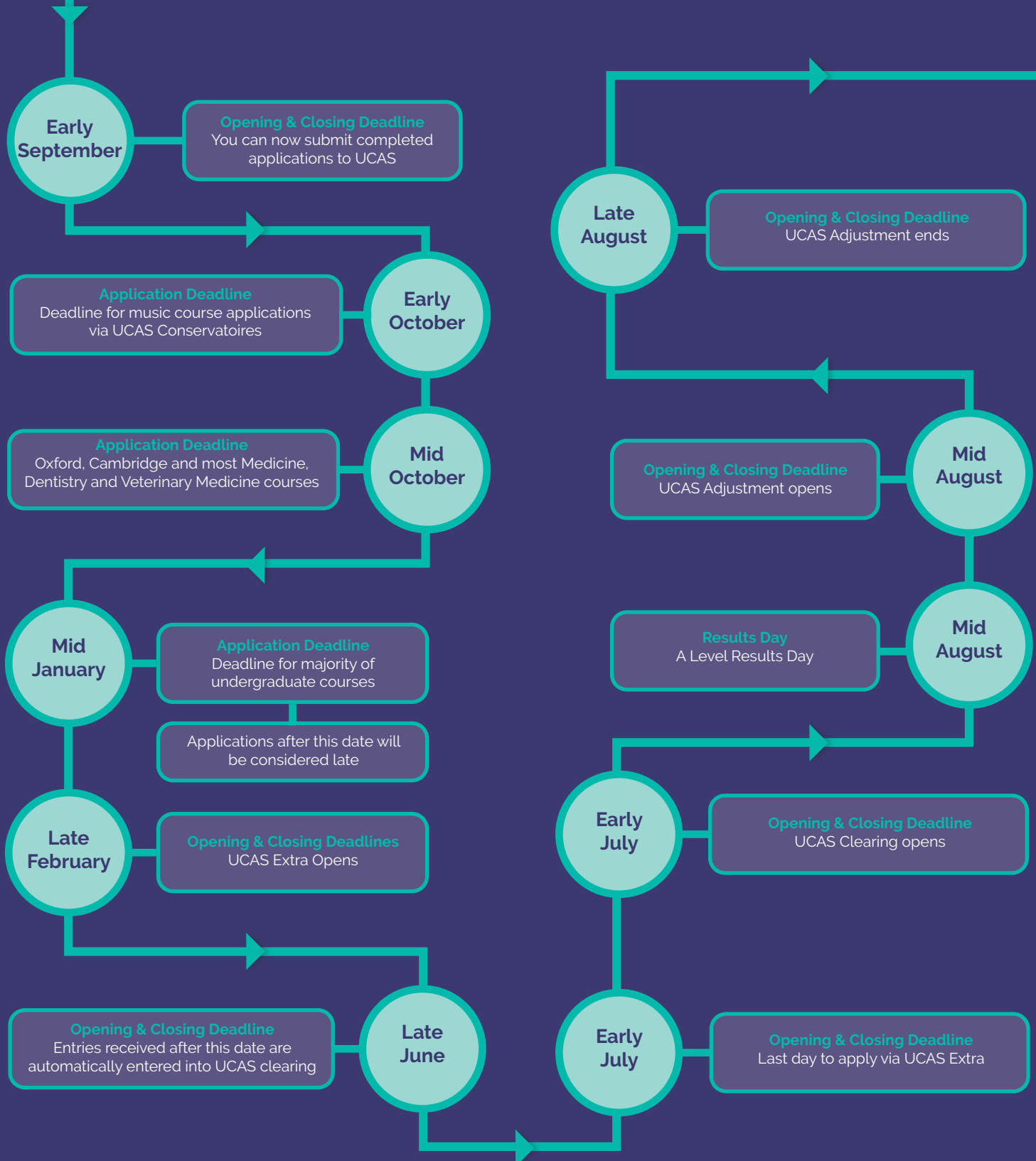
**Need more help? Got more questions?
Contact us:**

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cambs@takeyourplace.ac.uk

UCAS APPLICATION TIMELINE

Key dates for applying to university



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