

A parent and carer's guide to university: Supporting your child with applying to university



Contents

Welcome to our guide to help you better understand your child's journey to Higher Education. We hope this will give you a better understanding of the process of applying and university jargon!



1
Application
timeline

2-6
Pre-application
and planning
phase

7-9
Application phase

10-13
Post-application

14
Results day

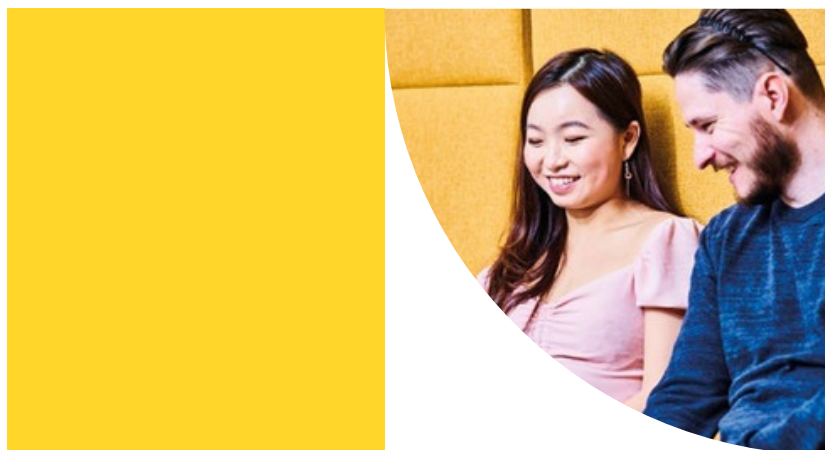
15
Glossary

Application timeline (key dates)

Application timeline

- **September:** UCAS opens for applications for entry the following year.
- **October:** UCAS deadline for Oxbridge (University of Oxford and University of Cambridge) and most courses in Medicine, Veterinary Medicine/Science, and Dentistry .
- **January:** UCAS equal consideration deadline for courses that did not have an early deadline.
- **February:** Student Finance opens for applications.
- **May:** Deadline for universities to make decisions on applications and send out offers.
- **June:** Applicants reply to their offers.
- **July:** UCAS Clearing opens.
- **August:** A Level Results Day.

Exact dates will change each year and are always updated on the [UCAS website](https://www.ucas.com).



Pre-application and planning phase

Choosing a course

Firstly, it's important to encourage and support your child to research courses which interest them. Some useful websites include:

- **The UCAS Course Search Tool.**
- University websites/social media.
- Online prospectuses.
- Unifrog (your child should speak to their education provider about this platform).
- **Prospects.**
- **What Uni.**

Through the **UCAS Course Search tool**, you can explore the range of different subjects available. By using the subject filters, you can narrow down your search. For example, if your child is keen to study in the North East, this filter can be used to condense the available results.

Unifrog is another great platform as it enables students to directly compare university courses. As students are typically able to access this through their schools' subscription, we recommend that they speak with their teacher/adviser to find out more.

Visit our **website** for more information about in-person opportunities to learn about available courses, including open days. Virtual resources are incredibly useful to help your child make those all-important decisions.

Did you know?

As stated on the **UCAS website**, there are 'over 50,000 undergraduate courses at more than 395 providers in the UK'.



What courses are available?

No two courses are the same, even if they have the same name. Each university has its own range of modules (units of a programme of study). Therefore, it's important to encourage your child to research the course content as well as the course itself. They can begin to narrow these down by asking themselves a few questions:

- Do I want to study a more practical/vocational course i.e. Nursing, Veterinary Science, Dentistry, or something more academic e.g. History, Mathematics, Geography?
- Do I want my course to include an apprenticeship element? Or am I interested in a placement year?
- Would I enjoy studying more than one subject?

What degree is the right degree?

Types of courses

Students will typically graduate with a bachelor's degree. There are two main types of bachelor degree awards, depending on the course that is studied:

- **Bachelor of Arts (BA):** awarded for the completion of degree courses in arts and many humanities or academic subjects, e.g. English, History and Philosophy.
- **Bachelor of Science (BSc):** awarded for the completion of degree programmes in science subjects, e.g. Physics, Computer Science and Biology.

For some courses, such as Geography, Psychology and Economics, there are options to study a BA or a BSc in the subject.

Studying joint courses

At Durham, we offer flexible courses to ensure that students get the most out of their academic pursuits. These include:

- **Natural Sciences:** opportunity to study two or more science courses.
- **Liberal Arts:** can study up to four subjects in and beyond Arts and Humanities.
- **Combined Honours in Social Sciences:** study modules in up to four subjects in Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities.

Find out more about courses offered at Durham by accessing our [course list](#).

Integrated Masters and Masters Degrees

A Master's degree is a postgraduate qualification. This is often studied after the completion of a three-year bachelor's degree. Also available are integrated Master's courses lasting four years, which are applied for through the UCAS process. Alternatively, students can decide whether they wish to pursue an integrated Master's while they are doing their undergraduate course.

Master's degrees are not compulsory, and many students enter the job market after completing their undergraduate degree.

Often, students choose to do a Master's degree at a different institution, while others decide to take a few years out, whether that's to work, travel or something else, before entering education again.



Choosing a university

Factors to consider

Campus vs City University

At campus universities, the majority of university buildings are located in one place. To name a few, University of York, Lancaster University and Edge Hill University are all campus universities. Meanwhile, at city universities, such as the University of Leeds and the University of Oxford, department buildings are spread out across the city.

Collegiate universities

As well as being campus or city, institutes of higher education can also be collegiate. A collegiate university is one which has multiple separate 'colleges'. Colleges may provide community activities and accommodation, but some deliver teaching. The most well-known collegiate universities are Oxford, Cambridge and Durham.

Location

Live at home or move away for university? If your child is unsure, you can help them to make a decision by discussing things such as transport links, accommodation costs and the student experience. Durham is located in the North East of England – 12 minutes by train from Newcastle. There are also direct trains from Durham to Manchester and London.

Size

Would your child like to move to a big city, i.e. London? Or would they rather go to a university somewhere smaller, i.e. Lancaster, with more of a rural environment? With a student population of 20,268 (2021), Durham is considered 'small to medium' in size, compared to other universities such as Manchester and St. Andrews. Class size is also something to consider, for example some practical science courses teach in much smaller groups.

Teaching and learning

More traditional universities, for example, Oxford and St. Andrews, tend to offer more academic subjects such as Mathematics, English, and History, while newer universities, such as Teesside, may offer more vocational courses i.e. Graphic Design. Helping your child to recognise their academic needs and preferences will help them to thrive academically at university.

Russell Group Universities

Russell Group universities are defined as 24 leading-UK universities which prioritise research and wield a reputation for academic achievement. Durham is one of the UK's leading Russell Group universities.

Did you know?

You can only apply for up to four choices if applying for Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Science Courses. The fifth choice can either be for a different course or left blank.

Opportunities

What other opportunities does the university offer within the course? For example, the option to study abroad or carry out a work placement in an industry or organisation. It is also important to consider the wider opportunities a university may offer outside of studying. This could include events, nightlife, sports, music or societies.

How many choices do they have?

Once they've decided what subject they would like to study, or at least has narrowed down their options, they should turn their attention to entry requirements. These are usually available on university websites or via online prospectuses.

Applicants can apply to up to five courses. Applying to university courses which have different entry requirements is a good approach. This means, if students miss the entry requirements of one university, they may still receive other offers. It's generally recommended that students take the following approach:

- One aspirational university choice e.g. if they are predicted AAA, they could apply for an A*AA course.
- Two or three choices they are on track to achieve e.g. if they are predicted AAA, they could apply for two or three AAA courses.
- At least one safe choice they are highly likely to meet e.g. if they are predicted AAA, they could apply for a course which requires ABB or BBB.

Additional entry requirements

It's important that your child has thoroughly checked the entry requirements for their chosen courses on university websites. Alongside academic qualifications, some universities require entry tests as part of their application process for certain subjects.

For example, when applying to law courses, Durham and many other universities require applicants to sit the Law National Aptitude Test (LNAT). You can find out more about LNAT, including registration and testing dates, how to prepare for the test and sample papers on the [LNAT website](#). Some universities may also interview applicants for some or all of their courses.



Choosing a range of courses means that your child can be confident that they have given themselves the best chance possible to succeed at university.

Exploring your options

Open Days

To help make sure that your child is making the best choice for them, we recommend they attend and, if possible, bring along a parent or carer to a range of “Open Days”. Open Days are fantastic opportunities to:

- meet university staff and students.
- learn more about available courses.
- explore student spaces (i.e. accommodation).
- get a feel for the city/town more generally.

Get the most out of your visit.

Think of questions you'd like to ask – entry requirements, student life/societies, support structures, and employment prospects are just a few things you may wish to ask about.

Plan your day – most universities require attendees to book in advance to attend sessions. Keeping your own itinerary of where you need to be and when, and what your young person would like to see beyond these commitments, is a great way to get the most out of the open day.

Explore the area – if possible, exploring the local area is a great way to help them decide if they can see themselves attending that university.

Stay grounded – it is easy to get swept up in the excitement of the day. Remember to help your child research the institution before and after the open day, to make sure they don't make any hasty decisions.



Virtual activity

Many universities run virtual open days. They are fantastic ways of learning more about institutes of higher education, when an in-person visit isn't possible.

Durham University tours app

Durham University Tours is available to download in the Store and the Google Play Store. It offers you the opportunity to take virtual tours of the city from the comfort of your own home. You can find out more by visiting the Self-guided Tours page on our website, or click [here](#).

Access pathways

Year 12 access programmes at Durham

At Durham, we currently offer three summer schools to help Year 12 students realise their potential, as well as support them in their journey towards higher education.

STEP (Space to Explore Potential):

offers a dedicated space for young black students, who are typically underrepresented at Durham, to explore not only their own potential, but all that Durham has to offer as a potential university destination.

Sutton Trust Summer School:

gives young people the opportunity to experience student life here at Durham, including social activities and academic sessions.

Supported Progression:

our Supported Progression programme offers a range of support and opportunities for young people to find out more about the University, to help them apply to Durham and allow them to sample academic taster sessions. We host events throughout Year 12, ending the academic year with a summer school.

Find out more by clicking [here](#).



Application phase

Making an application to UCAS

Following on from all the research and planning, your child has narrowed down their options and made decisions on up to five choices. It's now time for the next step: beginning the application process.

Applications for undergraduate degrees are made via UCAS. UCAS applications open in early September and students usually apply in Year 13 or their second year of college. Although the online application form itself is relatively straightforward, it's very important to start the process well in advance and plan ahead. UCAS operates under strict application deadlines so it is important to encourage your child to be mindful of this to prevent them leaving it to the last minute.

The first step is for them to register with UCAS via the Hub and link their account to their school using their 'buzzword'.

Top Tip!

If your child is applying using their school email address, it is important that they change this to their personal email once they leave.

Top Tip!

It is best to draft the personal statement on Microsoft word or similar, then paste it into the application once complete.

Did you know?

Applying to UCAS has a small application fee.



Sections to complete

Personal details - e.g. contact information and residency status.

Additional information - e.g. ethnicity, care and parental education, occupational background. Questions on these topics do not form part of the application and are just used for reporting purposes and in some cases, to identify any further support that may be required.

Student Finance Arrangements - although UCAS do not manage the Student Finance process, providing financial details in the application can speed up this process for when the time comes to apply for loans.

Course choices - can choose up to five options. Universities are unable to see where else your young person has applied to and there is no preference order.

Education history - qualifications, exam results, details and dates of exams.

Employment history - details of past work including company names, employment dates etc.

Personal statement - you can read more about this on pages 10-11.

References - a written recommendation from a teacher or advisor which will be provided by your young person's school or college.

Top tips for supporting your young person with making a UCAS application

- 1** - Ensure your child has all the information they need, for example dates and details of GCSE examinations.
- 2** - Save each section as they go along.
- 3** - Keep UCAS updated with any changes of personal details or contact information, such as a change of address.
- 4** - Encourage your young person to check and double check before they submit their application. It is really important that all the information they provide is correct.

Personal statements

A key part of the application process is the personal statement. This is where each applicant writes a statement which reflects their interest in their chosen subject(s) and why they are suited to studying it. They will be asked to answer three questions. Your child's school, sixth form or college will support them to create and refine their statement as well as university recruitment and admissions staff.

Key information

- The personal statement is limited to 4000 characters (including spaces) which works out as roughly 500 words.
- Each section has a minimum character limit of 350 characters.
- The same statement is submitted for all choices.
- It should combine academic AND extracurricular information.
- Although the personal statement is not an exact science, it is generally recommended that the structure should be 80% academic information and 20% extracurricular.

Universities cannot discuss applications with anyone else apart from the applicant unless they have been nominated. This needs to be done at UCAS and with each university they apply to.

Why does it matter?

Applying to higher education is a competitive process and many universities have significantly more applications than places on their courses. The personal statement is their chance to stand out from the crowd and showcase the person behind the application. This is their opportunity to show why they are the perfect fit for their chosen course. An effective personal statement can make all the difference when admissions are making offers.

Question 1: Why do you want to study this course or subject?

It should demonstrate ambitions, interests about the course and subject(s) and they want to study a higher level.

- Why the subject.
- Specific subject knowledge.
- Enthusiasm, skills and achievements.
- How the course ties into longer term ambitions or goals.



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

Focus on what's most recent and relevant to your subject or course, examples might include:

- How your studies or training relate to the chosen course(s) or subject area.
- What relevant or transferable skills have you got that make you a great candidate.
- Any relevant education achievements.
- Universities will see their grades so they need to make sure they focus on other accomplishments like competitions or holding a position of responsibility.

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

- Work experience, employment or volunteering
- Personal life experiences or responsibilities.
- Hobbies and any extra-curricular outreach activities.
- Achievements outside of school or college.

Check out UCAS website for more in-depth advice: <https://www.ucas.com/>

Do	Don't
Draft multiple times	Use clichés
Be specific; use examples and give evidence	Mention specific institutions
Avoid clichés	List things
Be authentic, enthusiastic and persuasive	Provide a life story
Start with a short punchy sentence	Repeat information from UCAS application
Stay focussed and relevant.	Overuse adjectives
Make it personal	Forget about spelling, punctuation, and grammar



Post-application

What happens next?

Once your child has applied they can then track the progress of their application in the UCAS hub. However, universities will often also contact the applicant via email.

Student finance

To cover costs for studying and living, an application to Student Finance is also required. This will generate access to loans to help support your young person. There are different processes depending on where the person applying is from. You can find out more by visiting [Student Finance](#) website.

Applications usually open in February/ March, with a deadline in May to guarantee financial assistance is in place for when they start university.

Many universities also have scholarships and awards for young people from under-represented groups or areas, so it's worth checking to see if there is additional financial support available.

durham.ac.uk/study/scholarships

Receiving offers

Universities can take several months to consider applications and will make offers from October until mid-May. It is important that applicants wait to hear back from all universities before they make their decision.

Applicants receive one of three decisions from universities:

- Conditional Offer.
- Unconditional Offer.
- Unsuccessful.



Interviews

For some courses, universities may invite applicants to attend interviews or selection days before they make a decision on their application. For example, at Durham we interview for our Primary Education course where applicants are considered based on their professional and interpersonal qualities and their commitment to teaching. If an applicant is invited to interview they will be informed by UCAS and will also receive details from the individual university by email.

Contextual offers

Contextual offers are given by some universities, including Durham, to ensure that academically able students receive an appropriate offer. As outlined on the UK University Search website: 'Contextual offers recognise that academic potential is not always indicated in grades and considers how personal circumstances may have impacted achievement.' At Durham, our contextual offer scheme enables admissions selectors to vary our published grade offer by one or two points. For example, if the standard entry requirements for your young person's course are AAA, they may be lowered to AAB or ABB with a contextual offer.

Often, prospective students must meet one or two of these criteria to be eligible for a contextual offer:

- First generation higher education students (the first in their immediate family to attend university).
- Students from low socio-economic groups.
- Students from schools with low progression.
- Students living in low-participation neighbourhoods.
- Students who have spent time in care.
- Students who are refugees or asylum seekers.

Decisions and replies

Once your child has heard back from each university (via UCAS Hub) they need to decide which of the course offers they would like to accept as their firm and as their insurance places. They would then need to reject any other offers received.

Applicants can only accept two offers and must choose one firm and one insurance offer.

- **Firm:** this is the first choice – the course a young person most wants to study and the University they most want to attend. By accepting this conditional offer, when an applicant meets the conditions of the offer (grades and qualifications), they will have a confirmed place to study.
- **Insurance:** this is the 'second favourite' course and University. An applicant would have this place available to them if they didn't meet the conditions (grades and qualifications) of their firm choice. Often the insurance place is also a conditional offer. This means in order to take up the insurance place, the conditions for the course and University would need to be met.

UCAS Extra

If your child didn't get any offers or they changed their mind about their choices, try not to worry. They can use UCAS Extra which allows them to apply for courses which still have vacancies between the end of February and the end of July.



Accommodation

Typically, university students live in halls of residence during their first year of undergraduate study. While some universities require prospective students to submit their accommodation choices in advance, others do not. Your child will need to research the accommodation options for their firm and insurance institutions to understand what is available and how and when to apply.

If given the option to apply for university accommodation in advance, it's important to encourage them to think about the following things:

- Accommodation cost vs their budget.
- Catered vs self-catered (if available).
- Location.
- Ensuite or shared bathroom.

If your child has personal or medical needs which means that they require an ensuite, for example, this should be made known to the university, to ensure that they are given access to the necessary facilities.

What is a College?

The collegiate system at Durham

As a collegiate university, Durham's student accommodation differs to most other UK universities. Although most second and third year students choose to live in town in private, rented accommodation with other students, typically, first year students live in college accommodation. Colleges offer much more than typical halls of residence and are best described as smaller communities within the wider university. Durham's colleges are hubs of events and activities which help students to form their own identity at university, as well as meet students from across different departments. Colleges provide a unique student experience through events such as college balls and formal dinners, as well as clubs, societies, sports teams and music opportunities to name a few.

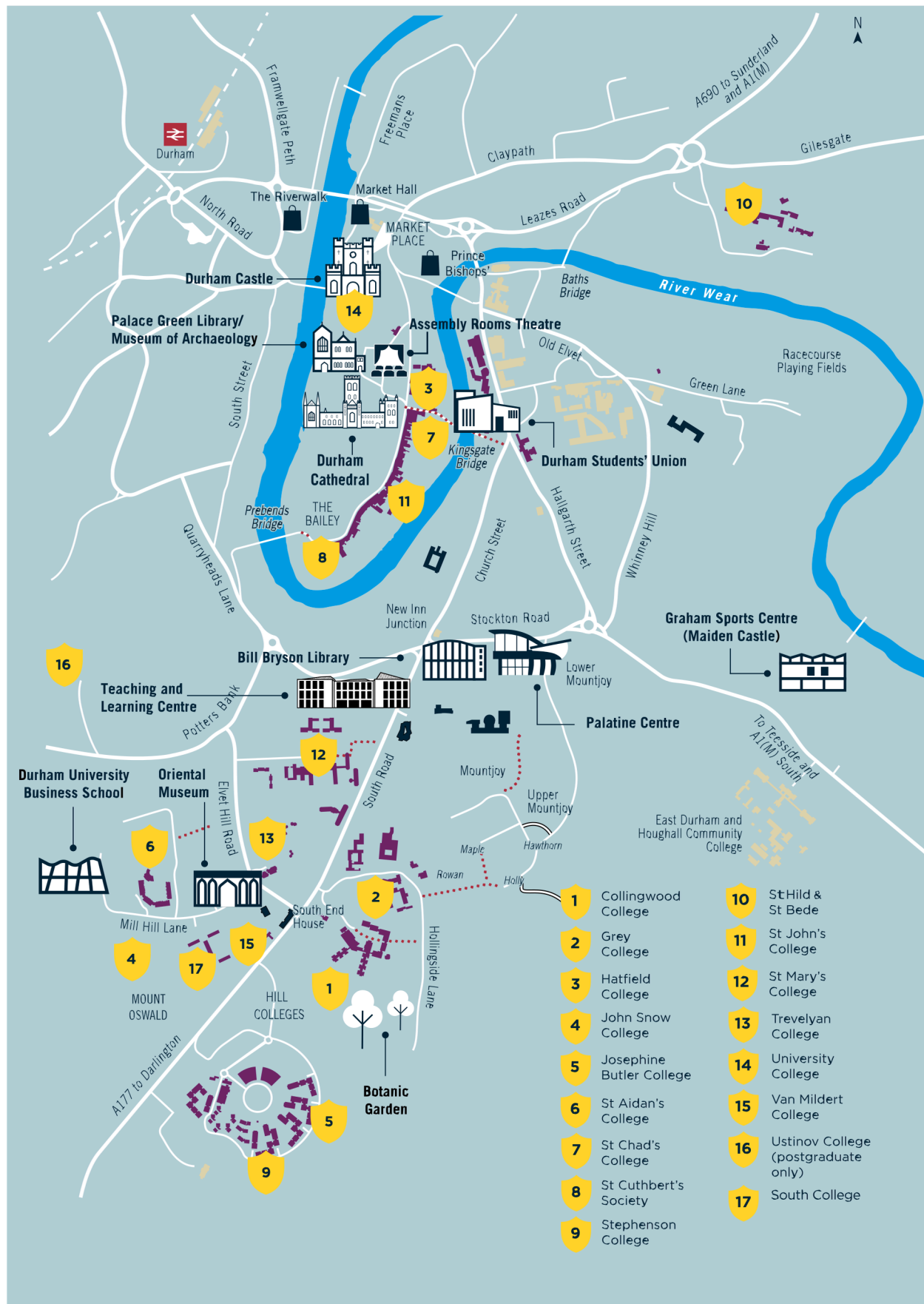
Durham has **16 colleges** that are open to undergraduates. Colleges are dotted around the city, some, referred to as 'Bailey' colleges, are on the same grounds or not too far away from Durham Cathedral. Others, called 'Hill' colleges, are a bit further out. Hill colleges (e.g. Van Mildert) are located near Lower Mountjoy, where lectures take place. Meanwhile, Bailey colleges (e.g. Hatfield) are located nearer to the centre of the city.



Top Tip!

Use the [Colleges Guide](#) which provides a great introduction to all our colleges.





It's results day

What happens?

Results day is towards the end of August, usually the second of last Thursday that month. Hopefully your child will get the results that they want and they will be guaranteed a place at their firm choice university. If they haven't achieved the conditions of the firm choice but have for their insurance then they are guaranteed a place at their insurance choice. If things don't go to plan on results day, or they have since changed their mind about their course or university or they have achieved better results than predicted, there are still options available to them. They may be eligible to enter clearing.

Clearing is a process that matches applicants to Universities that have places available on their courses.

You can find out more about Clearing [ucas.com/undergraduate/ results-confirmation-and-clearing/what-clearing](https://ucas.com/undergraduate/results-confirmation-and-clearing/what-clearing).

We hope this guide has been a useful tool to find out more information on how to support your child in applying to university!

If you would like further advice please complete an [Ask Us](#) enquiry form.



Glossary of terms

BA - A Bachelor of Arts degree.

BSc - A Bachelor of Sciences degree.

Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) - A bachelor of Engineering degree.

Bursary - a non-repayable sum of money designed to assist students who meet specific financial criteria.

Campus University - a university where the majority of university buildings are located in one place.

City University - a university where the majority of university buildings are spread out across the city.

Clearing - the system employed by UCAS and UK universities at the end of the academic year to fill course places that are still available.

Colleges/Collegiate System - universities that organise students into colleges upon commencing their higher education journey. Combined Honours - a course that allows you to study a range of different subjects, usually up to four.

Conditional offer - an offer of a place on a course that is subject to certain conditions e.g. achieving predicted grades.

Contextual offers - a grade reduction below the standard entry requirements Deferral - postponing an offer to study until the following year.

Firm - your first choice course.

Fresher - a first year undergraduate university student.

Grant - a non-repayable sum of money designed to assist students who meet specific financial criteria.

Halls of Residence - a place where university students live that is managed by the University.

Insurance - your second choice course in case the conditions of the firm choice are not met.

JCR - Junior Common Room that is often a physical room, but also a group of students elected by fellow students to represent the collective student voice.

Joint Honours - a course that allows you to combine two subjects simultaneously. You might study then 50:50 or major in one and minor in the other.

Liberal Arts - a course that allows you to combine mainly Arts and Humanities courses. Usually up to three or four.

Master's - a level 7 qualification, above a bachelors. It involves conducting a research project.

Maintenance Loan - a student loan that you can take out to help towards your living costs at university. This is repayable after graduation, when you start to earn above a certain amount.

Module - unit of study.

Natural Sciences - a course that allows you to combine a number of science subjects, usually up to two or sometimes three in the first year.

Personal Statement - part of the UCAS application that tells a university why you should be made an offer.

Placement year - a year spent working for an employer gaining relevant work experience.

Postgraduate - the next level of higher education study once someone has completed a undergraduate qualification.

Pre-requisite - something that you will be required to have to study the course you're applying to.

Reference - a recommendation from a teacher, tutor, advisor or other professional as part of a UCAS application.

Russell Group - a group of research intense universities – usually highly ranked
Scholarship - financial aid that is awarded to students usually based on certain criteria and is not repayable.

STEP (Space To Explore Potential) - Durham University's black heritage 3 day summer residential programme.

Student Finance England - a government organisation who provide funding to students in universities and colleges in the UK.

Supported Progression - one of Durham University's access programmes for Year 12 students.

Sutton Trust - a UK based educational charity aiming to improve social mobility and address educational advantage. A range of universities across the UK run Year 12 Summer Schools in partnership with The Sutton Trust.

Tuition Fee - this is what you pay to a university for each year of your studies. Everyone is eligible for loan to cover this cost, through Student Finance England.

UCAS - The UK Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

UCAS ID - you create this when you set up an account to apply to university. This is your unique identifier for your application and entrance to university.

Unconditional Offer - a university might make you an unconditional offer meaning that regardless of A Level results that you are guaranteed a place at their institution. Usually this is because you have already achieved the grades. But sometimes it could be an incentive for you to make them your firm choice. But quite often there are other conditions so do be slightly wary.

Undergraduate - the first level of study in higher education e.g. a Bachelor's degree.

