Going to university
A guide for families

Ulster University
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Parents and families play an important role in helping and supporting students as they take the next step in their education.

This guide is designed to provide you with the information you need to help your family member make an informed decision about higher education.

Whatever your query or concern, from understanding the UCAS application process, to information on tuition fees and accommodation costs, this guide will equip you with the knowledge you need to support your family member and ensure they have the best university experience possible.

Why higher education?
A university degree improves career prospects and earning potential. On average, people with higher education qualifications earn more over their working lives than non-graduates.

Going to university can give graduates a head start as they develop transferable skills valued by employers, such as the ability to work with others, critical and analytical thinking, research skills, problem-solving and communication skills. These skills, together with an academic qualification, offer graduates an advantage in the fast-changing world of employment.
Going to university is an exciting step and choosing where to study is an important decision.

Ulster University is based in Northern Ireland, with four distinct campuses in Belfast, Coleraine, Jordanstown and Derry–Londonderry (Magee).

The student experience we offer is renowned. From great teaching to first class resources and facilities, all within a supportive learning environment, your family member can shape their future at Ulster University.

W: ulster.ac.uk
TOP 25% OF ALL UK UNIVERSITIES FOR OVERALL RESEARCH (REF 2014)

2,000 of our students undertake work placements every year

OVER £42M INVESTED IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (2015/16)

We recruit international students FROM MORE THAN 99 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

TOP 150 We are in the world’s Top 150 universities under 50 years old (SOURCE: TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION)

OVER 27,000 students

190,000 ALUMNI WORLDWIDE

93% OF OUR GRADUATES ARE IN WORK OR FURTHER STUDY 6 MONTHS AFTER LEAVING UNIVERSITY (DESTINATION OF LEAVERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2015/16)
At Ulster, we deliver a learning experience that is career-focused and relevant. Our graduates leave with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be successful in a competitive job market.

Professional accreditation
Most of our degree programmes are developed in collaboration with industry and professional bodies. Many offer an additional professional qualification.

Career planning
Our professional Career Development Centre staff offer friendly and impartial advice and provide a range of opportunities designed to develop students’ employability skills. We advertise graduate vacancies, placement opportunities and vacation or part-time work. We also organise regular fairs and forums for meeting employers and professional bodies.

Work experience
Most employers are looking for graduates who have undertaken work experience. Many of our courses include a period of work-based learning. There is also the opportunity to study or work abroad.

Higher Education Achievement Report
The University provides a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) to all students upon graduation. It is a detailed record of academic and extra-curricular achievements to supplement the degree. The HEAR allows students to showcase their achievements to employers and postgraduate tutors.

W: ulster.ac.uk/careers
Study abroad
Studying abroad adds a desirable international dimension to students’ career prospects. We offer many opportunities with our partner institutions in Europe through the Erasmus+ programme, or further afield in North America, Latin America, Asia or Australia.

There are also a number of shorter study abroad opportunities available such as Study USA, the Washington Ireland Programme or the Generation UK-China and Generation UK-India programmes.

International placement and internship programmes
We can connect students to our international employer partners and provide opportunities to work in Australia, America and Europe for up to one year. These include Mountbatten Institute New York Programme, the US-NI Mentorship Programme, the IBEC EOP Multinational, Tourism and Global Graduates Programmes. Funding for international placements is available through Erasmus+ and British Council programmes.

Additional international work experiences
There is a wide range of short-term work and study options available, including paid internships abroad for computing, science and construction students through IAESTE (the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience), and the Washington-Ireland Programme, allowing students to undertake an eight-week internship in Washington, DC.

Students can also broaden their horizons whilst studying by working in a children's summer camp or through the Project Children Intern Programme, in USA. Other opportunities include the British Council’s Generation UK India Work Placement or Thailand English Teaching programme.
Get the EDGE

Employers are placing more emphasis on recruiting graduates who not only have a degree, but who are also equipped with key transferable skills and have a desire to learn more and improve their skills. The Ulster EDGE Award provides official recognition and evidence of activities outside of study. It is awarded in addition to the degree and offers the opportunity to engage in a wide range of activities that boost career prospects and show a commitment to personal development.
We are one University with four distinct campuses across Northern Ireland – Belfast, Coleraine, Jordanstown and Magee.

While each campus differs in size and has its own distinctive atmosphere, wherever your family member chooses to study, they will still experience Ulster’s unique character.
A new vision for learning

Belfast campus redevelopment

Ulster University is transforming the higher education landscape with the £250 million landmark development at the Belfast campus.

Located in the heart of the vibrant Cathedral Quarter, the visionary new campus is one of the largest higher education capital builds in Europe. It will provide a progressive learning, teaching and research environment supported by the best innovative technology, allowing us to nurture talent and innovation.

The new campus will not only transform the student experience as a centre of academic excellence. It will also be publicly accessible and a valuable asset for Belfast as a city in which to live, work, study and do business.

Over the next few years, the 75,000sqm campus will house up to 15,000 students and staff. By locating our bright, ambitious and creative students in the heart of Northern Ireland’s capital, we will form a lively student community and promote a dynamic environment, which will stimulate and inspire.

W: ulster.ac.uk/belfastcampus
Not everyone progresses straight from school to a full-time course at university. Students come to Ulster with a range of qualifications from schools and further education colleges including BTECs, Access awards, foundation degrees and A levels.

**Foundation degrees**
Ulster validates a range of foundation degrees at local partner colleges. These qualifications are a great way of studying for a vocational qualification to help improve employability, or as a means of progressing to university. Graduates from our foundation degrees typically start on year two of our undergraduate degree programmes.

**Talented Athlete Entry Scheme**
At Ulster University we understand the dedication and commitment it takes to compete at the highest level. Hours of training, intense regimes and competitions can sometimes mean a sacrifice in examination performance.

The Talented Athlete Entry Scheme is designed to support and nurture aspiring athletes by reducing the entry grades required for full-time undergraduate courses.

**W: ulster.ac.uk/taes**
eLearning
eLearning courses offer flexibility allowing students to learn at their own pace, any place and any time. Our graduates come from around the world, all walks of life and have studied a variety of subjects.

Part-time study
We are a leading university for part-time study. Part-time study gives the flexibility to balance personal commitments and study at a pace that suits. Depending on the course, teaching may be on campus, entirely online or a combination of both – often called ‘blended’ learning. Part-time students receive the same teaching, excellent support and use the same facilities as full-time students. In fact, in most cases teaching is alongside full-time students.
Studying at university is not the same as studying at school. University students are expected to be more responsible for their own day-to-day work. A typical university student’s timetable has less taught hours than a typical school pupil’s. However, a full-time student should be studying approximately 40 hours per week. Students are expected to study independently – to organise their time to study effectively by deciding which materials to study and how.

**Academic year**
At Ulster, the academic year is divided into two semesters for most students (some students, e.g. nursing, have a longer academic year). The first semester runs from September until mid-January and the second from late January to May.

Each semester comprises 12 weeks of teaching followed by an exam period. Full-time students will typically study three modules in each semester (18 modules of study make up a standard three-year degree programme). Most modules are assessed through coursework and/or exams. The first-semester exams are in early January and the second-semester exams are in May.

**Work placement or study abroad**
Students may have the opportunity to go on work experience or study abroad during their third year at Ulster. For some medical-related courses, students are required to undertake block work placements throughout the course.
Lectures, seminars and tutorials
Teaching at Ulster is delivered through lectures, seminars and tutorials, and sometimes practicals and fieldwork.

Lectures are formal teaching sessions, often with a larger group of students. Seminars, which usually provide a form of follow-up to lectures, take place in smaller groups and are often used to promote group discussion about a specific topic. In tutorials, a small number of students meet with a tutor to discuss work and to raise points of particular interest or difficulty.
Life as a student is exciting but it can also be demanding. Your family member may face some personal challenges and that’s where we can help. We offer a range of services to ensure they make the most of their university experience. Our professional services are free, confidential and inclusive for all Ulster students.

Health and wellbeing
We provide advice and guidance for many student concerns, such as academic issues, coping with stress, family or relationship problems, and loneliness or isolation.

Financial matters
Our team can help students to budget and manage their money, as well as offer advice on financial matters including tuition fees, bursaries and access to financial support.

Disabilities and medical conditions
Our AccessAbility team will advise on support and funding available if your family member has a diagnosed disability or medical condition, mental health difficulties or specific learning difficulties (e.g. ADHD, dyslexia).

Counselling
All Ulster University students can access face-to-face counselling support from a trained counsellor, on or off campus. A confidential 24/7 counselling helpline is also available.

W: ulster.ac.uk/studentsupport
Your guide to UCAS

UCAS is the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and they process applications to full-time higher education courses at universities and colleges in the UK. Applications are normally made between September and mid-January of the year the course starts. Late applications can be made after this date but may not be considered equally.
1. **Getting started**

Going to university is a big decision and there are a number of important issues to research and consider:

**Location:** Does your family member want to stay at home or venture further afield?

**Cost:** Tuition fees, travel expenses, accommodation costs and any bursaries or scholarships available.

**Facilities:** These include learning resources, sport and leisure facilities; accommodation; careers advice service and student support on offer, including disability services.

**Work experience:** Are there opportunities to undertake a work placement or to study abroad?

By discussing these areas with your family member you can help them as they begin to research courses and universities.

2. **Find a course**

With more than 35,000 courses at over 370 institutions to choose from, research is crucial to ensure your family member finds the right course for them.

**Online**

Websites such as [ucas.com](http://ucas.com) and [unistats.co.uk](http://unistats.co.uk) are valuable sources of information. The UCAS site details the full range of courses on offer across the UK universities, entrance requirements, information on fees and finance and application processes. Unistats allows students to compare courses at different institutions and gives an overview on student satisfaction rates, as well as graduate employment data.

UCAS conventions are a great way to meet and chat to staff from a wide range of universities and other higher education institutions, including professional bodies and commercial companies that offer sponsored degrees. Find out more at [ucas.com/events/convention-exhibition](http://ucas.com/events/convention-exhibition)
Universities also organise their own open days for prospective students to experience university life, speak with staff and students and tour facilities. Find out more about Ulster University open days and information events at ulster.ac.uk/ulster-life/events

Website and prospectus
University websites and prospectuses are useful tools when researching a particular institution. Visit ulster.ac.uk to find out more about life at Ulster, download a copy of our undergraduate prospectus or browse our full range of courses.

It is important that your family member is realistic when considering courses and their specific entrance requirements. Some courses may also outline additional entrance requirements such as completion of admissions test, audition, portfolio, interview or evidence of experience.

3. Apply
If your family member is still at school/college, they will make their application through their school/college, using the UCAS application system at ucas.com. The website has a number of useful resources and videos to guide students through the process and how to complete an application. A maximum of five choices are available and there is a standard application fee.

There are a few different application deadlines:

Mid-October: For all professional medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and veterinary science courses, and all courses at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.
15 January: For all courses (except those with 15 October deadline, and art and design courses with 24 March deadline).

24 March: For art and design courses at Ulster.

Applications received after these deadlines, up until 30 June, are only considered if universities and colleges still have vacancies for the course(s) selected.

Once registered, there are seven sections to complete: personal details, additional information, student finance, course choices, education, personal statement and employment.
Writing a 4,000 character personal statement can be challenging. The personal statement gives students the opportunity to promote themselves by covering their academic interests, work experience, relevant achievements, hobbies and interests which make them suitable for their course/s choices. Visit ucas.com/personalstatement for help and guidance on writing a personal statement.

4. Track
Once all sections have been completed and the school/college reference added, the application is complete. Your family member’s school/college will oversee the submission of the application and advise how the application fee is to be paid.

UCAS will check the application and send it to all the universities the student has applied to. None of the universities will know where else they have applied, so they will be considering the application totally independently.

It is important to note that universities, and different courses, make their offers at different times. The status of an application can be viewed using the online UCAS Track system. They may also get an invitation to attend for interview rather than receiving an offer straight away.

It is recommended to wait until your family member has had a response from all their choices before making a decision on which to accept. These are known as their firm and insurance choices. There is no pressure to make decisions as long as they meet the necessary deadlines.
There are different types of university decisions:

**Conditional offer:** The university will offer your family member a place subject to certain conditions, normally based on exam results.

**Unconditional offer:** Your family member has already met the entrance requirements and the university would like to accept their application.

**Withdrawn application:** Both your family member and the university can withdraw the application either because they didn’t respond to any correspondence from the university or because they didn’t attend an interview.

**Decline:** There are a number of reasons why universities decline an applicant, for example if the course is full.

When your family member receives their offers they need to respond in the following ways:

**Firm acceptance:** Your family member can have one firm acceptance and this is their first choice out of all the offers they have received.

**Insurance acceptance:** As well as their first choice, your family member can also have a back-up, which is called their insurance.

**Decline:** Once your family member has selected their firm and insurance choices they then need to decline all other offers.

Competition can be really high for some courses which can mean that even the best students don’t always get an offer. If all five applications have been rejected or all of the offers have been declined, an application to another course or university can be made through UCAS Extra. UCAS Extra operates from mid-February until the end of June. Further information is available at ucas.com
5. Results day

Once your family member has achieved their grades and met the university's conditions for their firm choice, they will be accepted to that course. If they fail to meet the conditions of the firm choice but meet those of their insurance choice, then they will be accepted to that instead. The university may, at their discretion, accept your family member if they fall slightly short of the entry conditions.

If your family member has exceeded the conditions for their firm choice they can use the Adjustment service via UCAS should they wish to consider an alternative course. This service is available from results day until 31 August.

Should your family member receive lower grades than expected and not be accepted to either their firm or insurance choice, then they may find an alternative course through Clearing.

Clearing is a process which allows them to search and apply for courses with vacancies.

It is important not to panic at this stage but to carefully research options before selecting a course. Following the publication of results we hold an advice day for applicants to discuss their alternatives with admissions and academic staff.

It is possible to progress to university via further education colleges. Your family member may wish to investigate the various progression opportunities available. We work closely with local colleges and offer many courses through collaboration. Options can be discussed at our advice day.

6. Starting university

Information about accommodation, timetables, registration dates and other relevant communications will be sent directly from the university.
University fees explained

It is difficult to put an exact figure on the price of going to university as everyone’s expenditure will be different depending on where and what they study, whether they live at home, in halls of residence or private accommodation, their travel arrangements and lifestyle.

Some families are able to provide financial support but it is important to remember that finance should not be a barrier to university. Loans for tuition fees and living costs are taken by most students. Part-time employment helps to supplement loans and is a good way for students to gain valuable work experience.

Tuition fees for full-time study
Check [ulster.ac.uk](http://ulster.ac.uk) for up-to-date information on current tuition fees. Fees may be subject to increase each academic year.

Fees do not have to be paid up-front – a tuition fees loan can be taken out and payment can be deferred until after graduation and once your family member is in employment and earning above a certain income. Northern Ireland students can also apply for maintenance loans, government grants (part-time students only) and university bursaries.

[W: ulster.ac.uk/apply/fees-and-finance](http://ulster.ac.uk/apply/fees-and-finance)  
[W: studentfinanceni.co.uk](http://studentfinanceni.co.uk)

Republic of Ireland students can transfer their maintenance awards to Northern Ireland.

[W: studentfinance.ie](http://studentfinance.ie)
Funding arrangements for students from England, Scotland and Wales may vary.

Student Finance England
W: direct.gov.uk

Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)
W: saas.gov.uk/student_support

Student Finance Wales
W: studentfinancewales.co.uk
Part-time study
Younger students often overlook part-time study as an option, yet it gives the flexibility to learn at a slower pace and typically costs less than the equivalent full-time course. In most cases part-time students are in the same class as full-time students and are taught exactly the same material. They also receive the same degree certificate.

Part-time students typically complete their studies over 5-7 years. We also offer an up-front payment discount and flexible payment plan.

Up-front payment discount
Part-time students can take advantage of a payment discount. If the full cost of annual fees is paid at enrolment, students will receive a five percent discount. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other discount, offer or scholarship.

Flexible payment
Alternatively, tuition fees for part-time courses can be paid back in instalments, in either five or ten equal monthly payments during each year of study.
A home away from home

While some students chose to live at home, most still move into shared private accommodation or university residences. University accommodation offers students a comfortable and independent lifestyle and is particularly appealing to students who have not lived away from home before.

Our accommodation is well-priced, clean, comfortable and modern, and we offer places across and nearby all Ulster campuses. A comprehensive induction is provided to all students moving into accommodation. We also organise a number of social events throughout the year to encourage students to get to know one another and develop a strong sense of community. University accommodation is particularly recommended for all first year and international students.

We offer a number of accommodation options across our campuses to cater for every budget and taste. These range from ensuite to standard rooms, with costs varying depending on the location, size and quality of the accommodation.

Generally the price includes all utility costs, a housekeeping service, internet access including WiFi (limited to some areas), pastoral support provided through night support and resident assistants, security, CCTV and block insurance scheme for contents and belongings.

Visit our accommodation website to browse the range of accommodation available, take a virtual tour and review price lists.

W: ulster.ac.uk/accommodation
Family plays an invaluable role in the life of any new university student as a source of guidance and encouragement. We hope this guide has given you the information you need to help and advise your family member during this transition period, but if you have any further queries or concerns, just get in touch with us.

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Cromore Road
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BT52 1SA

**Ulster University, Jordanstown**
Shore Road
Newtownabbey
BT37 0QB

**Ulster University, Magee**
Northland Road
Derry~Londonderry
BT48 7JL

You can also find a whole range of useful information and resources on our website and social media channels.

- **W:** ulster.ac.uk
- **T:** +44 (0)28 7012 3456
- **E:** study@ulster.ac.uk

- **F:** /Study at Ulster
- **T:** @Study at Ulster
- **Y:** Study at Ulster
Student Admissions
General
E: admissions@ulster.ac.uk

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E: admissionsjn@ulster.ac.uk

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International
T: +44 (0)28 7012 3333
E: internationaladmissions@ulster.ac.uk
Disclaimer
Correct at time of print (March 2018). The University makes every effort to ensure that the information contained is accurate but it is possible that some changes will occur. Please note that the University’s website is the most up-to-date source of information regarding courses and facilities.

Visit ulster.ac.uk for further details.