



2020 EDITION

THE PARENTS'  
GUIDE TO

HELPING YOUR CHILD KNOW

**WHAT'S NEXT**

**The Parents' Guide to** provides parents with the information they need to help their teenage children make the right choices to create successful futures after GCSE and sixth form.

Our online guides are designed to inform, involve and guide parental support. They include the most up to date information on topics such as apprenticeships, universities and revision techniques.

*Wherever we refer to 'parents' we mean 'parents and carers.' This includes grandparents, older siblings or any other person with significant caring responsibilities for children.*

*This guide has been produced to support parents and schools during the coronavirus outbreak. We make recommendations of what we believe to be reliable sources to help you find further information but these organisations have not endorsed this guide. We're happy for you to use or share extracts of the guide, but don't forget to credit The Parents' Guide to*

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## Find out what's new

If you're interested in regular updates about how you can help your teenage children, [www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/join-us](http://www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/join-us)

# Contents

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## Introduction

How can you help your child choose what to do after GCSE or sixth form, if you're not sure what their options are? This guide gives an introduction into different levels of education and what options are most suited to which type of student.

If your child learns best on the go through practical experience, then they may not do as well with academic or classroom led learning. Similarly, if they enjoy quiet, lecture led lessons, getting an apprenticeship and learning on the job would probably not suit

them. We explore how you can guide your child to choices that suit their personality and learning preferences so they have the best chance of success as they enter the next stage of their educational journey or career path.

This guide is not written so you do the work for them! It's a source of ideas so you feel confident and have plenty of suggestions to help encourage and direct your child when they are not sure what to do next.

## What to do after GCSEs

What your child chooses to do after Year 11 can have a big impact on their future. The choices they make now will influence how easily they will be able to get a job or enter further education when they are older. The main options at this stage are for them to go on to full time education or take an apprenticeship/ training. Things they need to consider are the type of qualification they are going to study; what type of learning suits them best (classroom or practical); and which subjects they enjoy.

If they already know the career path they're hoping to take, they may want to choose subjects that offer a more obvious route to that career. In theory that can make choosing subjects easier, but sometimes there's a conflict in the subjects they enjoy and do well at versus the subjects they will need. Of course, they can also go straight into employment, but this must include some guided learning hours.

There's much more choice at sixth form than GCSE, so there will be many subjects available that are new to them. Don't worry about them taking something they have never studied and then finding out they don't enjoy it or aren't good at it; they can make changes at the start of Y12.

It's important to bear in mind that whatever they choose to study in sixth form, whilst it will influence what they do

afterwards, it will not close any doors. If they make a mistake, there's still plenty of opportunity to change direction (of course, this may take a little additional work on their part). Additionally, should they choose to go straight into work and change their mind later, there's always the chance to pick up their education at a later date.

### Summary:

**There are lots of choices available to your child once they've completed GCSEs, so make sure they know what's on offer.**

1. A level and IB are more suited to theoretical learning;
2. BTECs and T Levels are great for those who enjoy practical experience and coursework;
3. EPQ offers the chance to earn more UCAS points as well as undertaking a project centred around your child's personal interests;
4. Apprenticeships, traineeships and internships provide on the job training and valuable experience.



# What to do after sixth form

What your child chooses to do after sixth form (or college) is exciting but can be nerve-racking. There are lots of options available and understanding the pros and cons between different choices can be confusing.

It's not just about deciding whether to go to work or continue further education – although that's a good starting point. Important considerations include how long they want to continue studying, how they will finance living expenses and course fees (and whether you can afford to help them), whether they want to study in a more academic environment or in a more practical environment (such as studying whilst working).

Many qualifications can be built upon, so they may commit to one year of further study and then decide to increase it for another year or two to get a higher qualification. This flexibility can be very useful, particularly for students who are not keen to commit to long-term studies after school, but find that they enjoy it once they've got started. In the case of degrees, they will need to commit to the length of study (minimum three years) from the beginning.

## Summary:

**There are lots of choices available to your child once they've completed sixth form, so make sure they know what's on offer.**

1. Higher education options (such as university or Higher National Diplomas) are more suited to theoretical learning;
2. Apprenticeships trainee and internship are great for those who enjoy practical experience and coursework and are a great way to get first hand experience of what a job is like;
3. School leaver programmes offer opportunities to join the workplace and begin skills development and careers development through experience as well as study;
4. Other options include taking a gap year, starting their own business or entering the world of work.



Level	Qualification / educational routes				
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 apprenticeship / NVQ 4		
3	A levels Grades A-E	International Baccalaureate	T Levels	BTEC (extended) 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	

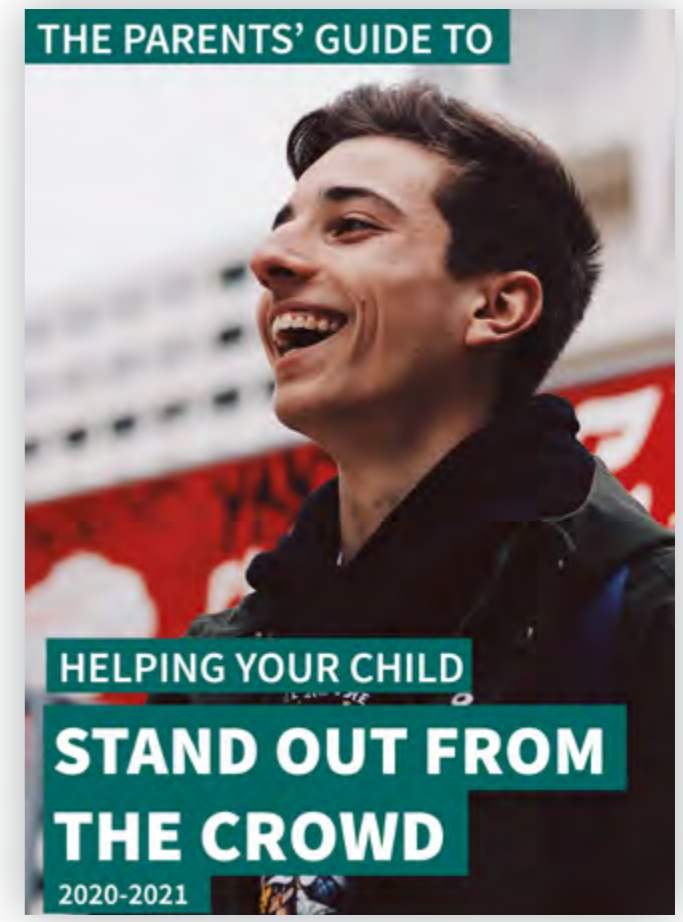
### Levels of Education

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland there are 8 qualification levels (1 - 8) plus an entry level qualification for those just starting. Generally, the higher the level, the more difficult the qualification is. Levels 1-3 are typically taught in schools and colleges.

With so many different qualifications, it can be hard to know what they mean and where they might lead to next. To help you understand, we've created a summary of what the levels mean highlighting academic, vocational and work-based routes to higher education.

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## Apprenticeships

What your child chooses to do after GCSE or sixth form is both exciting and daunting. There are lots of options available and understanding the pros and cons between different choices can be challenging. Apprenticeships should not be over-looked; they offer the opportunity to combine study with paid employment resulting in a professional qualification. There are no tuition fees (these are covered by the employer and the government) and the salary can cover living expenses.

Apprenticeships used to be associated with trade industries (such as electricians, mechanics or plumbers). Nowadays, apprenticeships can be taken in a wide range of industry sectors and provide entry to all types of careers, including accountancy, banking, IT, law, management and television.

Relatively new to the apprenticeship suite are "degree apprenticeships", offering an earn while you learn route to BSc or BA status. In other words, the end qualification

is the same as if your child had attended university full time, the difference is that they will not have incurred any debt in tuition fees and will finish their degree with robust and transferable workplace skills.

Taking an apprenticeship is not an easy option and competition can be fierce. It takes organisation and dedication to balance work, where your child will be expected to contribute to the same standards as everyone else, and study. Holidays are far fewer than at college or university. However, if they have a more practical, work-related bias towards learning this will suit them well and they will obtain valuable experience which will strengthen opportunities in finding rewarding work when the apprenticeship is over.

Selecting the right apprenticeship will require your child to have reasonable confidence in the type of career they wish to follow although there is some flexibility. So how do you help them decide? We'll guide you.

### Useful links

[GOV. UK  
Overview](#)

[UCAS](#)

[The  
Parents'  
Guide to](#)

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you to their website*



# Apprenticeship levels



## **LEVEL 2** *Intermediate apprenticeships*

**Typical length**  
12-18 months

**Entry requirements:**  
None or few

**Qualifications obtained:**  
GCSE, BTEC or equivalent

**Who's it for?**  
Mostly for 16-year-olds with limited or no academic qualifications.



## **LEVEL 3** *Advanced apprenticeships*

**Typical length**  
12-24 months

**Entry requirements:**  
Usually 5 GCSEs

**Qualifications obtained:**  
A levels or equivalent

**Who's it for?**  
Mostly for 16-year-olds with reasonable academic achievements but who don't want to study in sixth form.



## **LEVEL 4/5** *Higher apprenticeships*

**Typical length**  
3-5 years

**Entry requirements:**  
A levels or equivalent

**Qualifications obtained:**  
Higher national diploma / foundation degree

**Who's it for?**  
Mostly for those who want to qualify for professional career paths without attending university or college. Sometimes referred to as 'school leaver' or 'non-graduate' programmes.



## **LEVEL 6/7** *Degree apprenticeship*

**Typical length**  
3-7 years

**Entry requirements:**  
At least 2 A levels or equivalent

**Qualifications obtained:**  
A BA or BSc degree or higher

**Who's it for?**  
Mostly for those with excellent sixth form results that want to study for a degree or similar whilst working. Aimed at attracting high-calibre candidates to bridge professional skills gaps.

## Is an apprenticeship the right choice?

### ADVANTAGES

Apprenticeships provide focused and applied training for those who already have a strong interest in a job or industry.

Not everyone is suited to academic style learning and apprenticeships provide a practical approach to obtaining qualifications.

Apprenticeships provide paid employment. In addition, your child will leave debt free.

Apprenticeships develop key transferable skills which are considered lacking in the labour market.

Apprenticeships may provide future employment within the company and working within an organisation may reveal job roles they did not know existed.

Gaining work experience and on the job training may provide your child with a competitive advantage when applying for full time employment.

Some students flourish with the responsibility and structure of an apprenticeship.

Degree apprenticeships offer the chance to gain a BA or BSc without incurring the debts associated with studying at university.

### CONSIDERATIONS

Apprenticeships may narrow options early on. Your child will need to have a fairly clear idea of the type of career they wish to pursue.

It may be difficult for your child to combine studying with working.

The salary of an apprentice can be quite low and your child will also need to consider financing their travel and living expenses if they are not living at home. Furthermore, your child may need to pay back their course fees if they choose to leave their apprenticeship early.

Your child may feel that they are missing out on the 'student life' offered at universities. However, some universities and colleges still offer their degree apprentices a strong student experience.

Student fairs and networking events at university enable students to explore different career routes that they were not aware of when leaving school.

Many companies provide graduate schemes for university leavers on completion of their degree.

Entering the work place at an early age may lead to fatigue.

Degree apprenticeships are still quite new, so there is only a limited number of vacancies available at the moment.

### Questions to ask:

- Does your child have a clear idea of the type of career or job they want to pursue?
- Is your child more suited to an applied and hands-on working environment?
- Is your child organised and able to balance work with academic study?
- Will your child perform better under the guidance of a supervisor in a work environment?
- Will your child enjoy the combination of different learning environments?
- Does your child enjoy practical / active homework assignments?
- Has your child undertaken any paid or voluntary work and did they enjoy this?

*Don't worry if your child is still unsure which option is right for them. Students can apply for degree and higher apprenticeships at the same time as applying to university through UCAS.*

# Where to find the right apprenticeship

There's a wide range of ways to seek out apprenticeships and we recommend using a selection of options rather than relying on one.

## Government website

Most apprenticeships are posted on the Government's website and can be found using the 'search' function. By creating an account, your child can set up alerts and filters to see opportunities that are of most interest to them and to be emailed when new opportunities arise.

## Companies direct

Another alternative is for them to identify companies that are of interest and check those websites for apprenticeships. Not all companies offer apprenticeships, but many do. Be warned - apprenticeships offered by well known companies such as BBC, Nestle, Virgin or British Gas are likely to be incredibly competitive.

## Useful links

GOV. UK  
Search

Apprenticeship  
Search

Not going to  
Uni

The Parents'  
Guide to

## Job boards

National job agencies will also advertise apprenticeships and options can be narrowed to review within local distances from home or specific job types. This might be a particularly good way to seek out apprenticeships in level 3-5 range.

## School careers advisor

If your child's school has a careers department, then getting them to speak with their careers advisor is a good move. Careers advisors are often the first to hear from companies advertising new apprenticeships.

*For more information on apprenticeships and how to help your child research, apply and prepare for one, you may be interested in [The Parents' Guide to Apprenticeships 2020-2021](#).*

APPRENTICESHIPS COMBINE  
LEARNING WITH ON THE JOB



## Top 10 apprenticeship employers: 2020



*Click me to learn more*



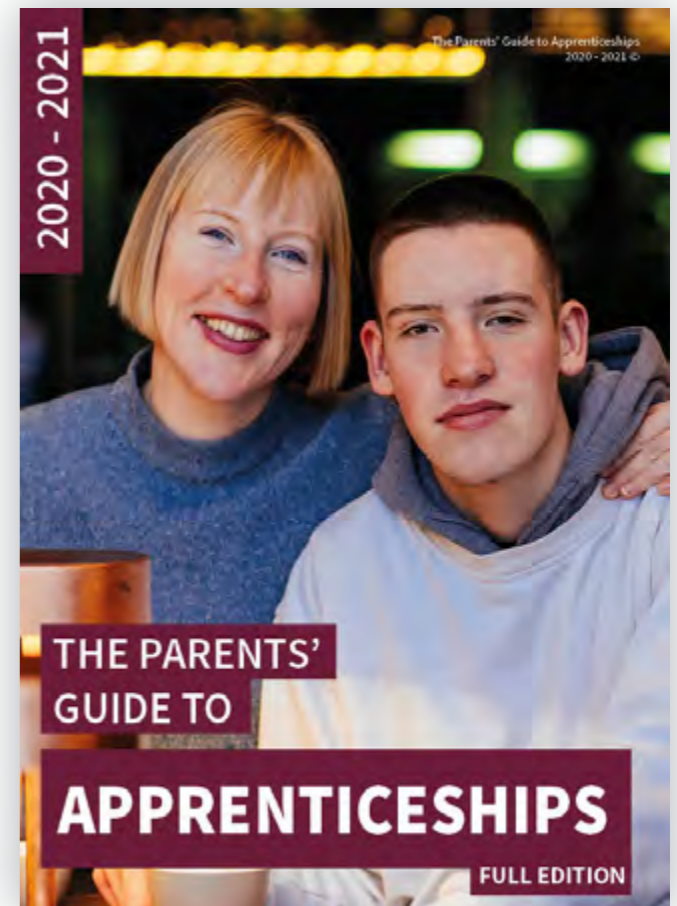
Based on 4,000 reviews - statistics compiled by [www.ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk](http://www.ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk)  
For a list of the top 100 apprenticeship employers click [here](#).

APPRENTICESHIPS WITH THE TOP 20 EMPLOYERS WILL BE VERY COMPETITIVE



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# University and the UCAS process

Selecting the right university and course will be one of the most important decisions your child faces in shaping their future and you will want to help them every step of the way. The “right” university means the right university for them: one which offers courses they’d like to study; where they will fit in and feel comfortable; one that will stretch their abilities without breaking them; and one where they will feel safe and happy. The “right” university will differ from child to child – even within the same family.

Of course, whilst going to university is first and foremost about getting a higher-level qualification, it offers much more than that. It’s about learning to research independently, create professional relationships, develop lasting friendships, living without parental supervision, adopting fun and meaningful hobbies and interests. It’s learning to be a grown-up: self-reliant, resourceful and confident. So how do you decide what is right? We’ll guide you.

## Useful links

[UCAS](#)

[The Parents' Guide to](#)

[University guide](#)

## Researching the right course

With over 30,000 courses available the right course is out there – it just might be tricky to find it! There is plenty of information about university courses available so it's worth researching diligently before making choices, rather than students relying on “my teacher recommends it”, “my parents took it”, or “I like the university”.

### When to step back

This research is something that your child should undertake – not you on their behalf. Avoid the temptation to use this as an opportunity to investigate options you would have liked to take given the chance. It may be tough with the benefit of hindsight and experience, but try not to forget it's your child's life and their choices, not yours.

### Finding focus

Thinking of favourite subject choices is a good way to narrow focus, but don't forget many of the subjects offered at degree level aren't covered in sixth form options, so don't let your child restrict themselves to only considering topics they've already studied. Of course, if they are already set on

a certain career path, their choice of degree may be obvious, which can be helpful. If not, some thought and reflection on things they enjoy that might apply to the workplace can give direction so some research on jobs might help streamline options by providing guidance on routes into industry.

### Too much choice?

If they are struggling with a starting point, investigating what's of interest to them is a good place to start. You think they spend too much time playing video games? How about a BA in Computer Games Design – it can be a lucrative business post-graduation. Not academic but loves sports? BA in Sports Management. A passion for understanding how things work? How about MEng(Hons) in Product Design Engineering? Always reading crime thrillers? Perhaps they'd enjoy a BA in Criminology.

### Predicted grades

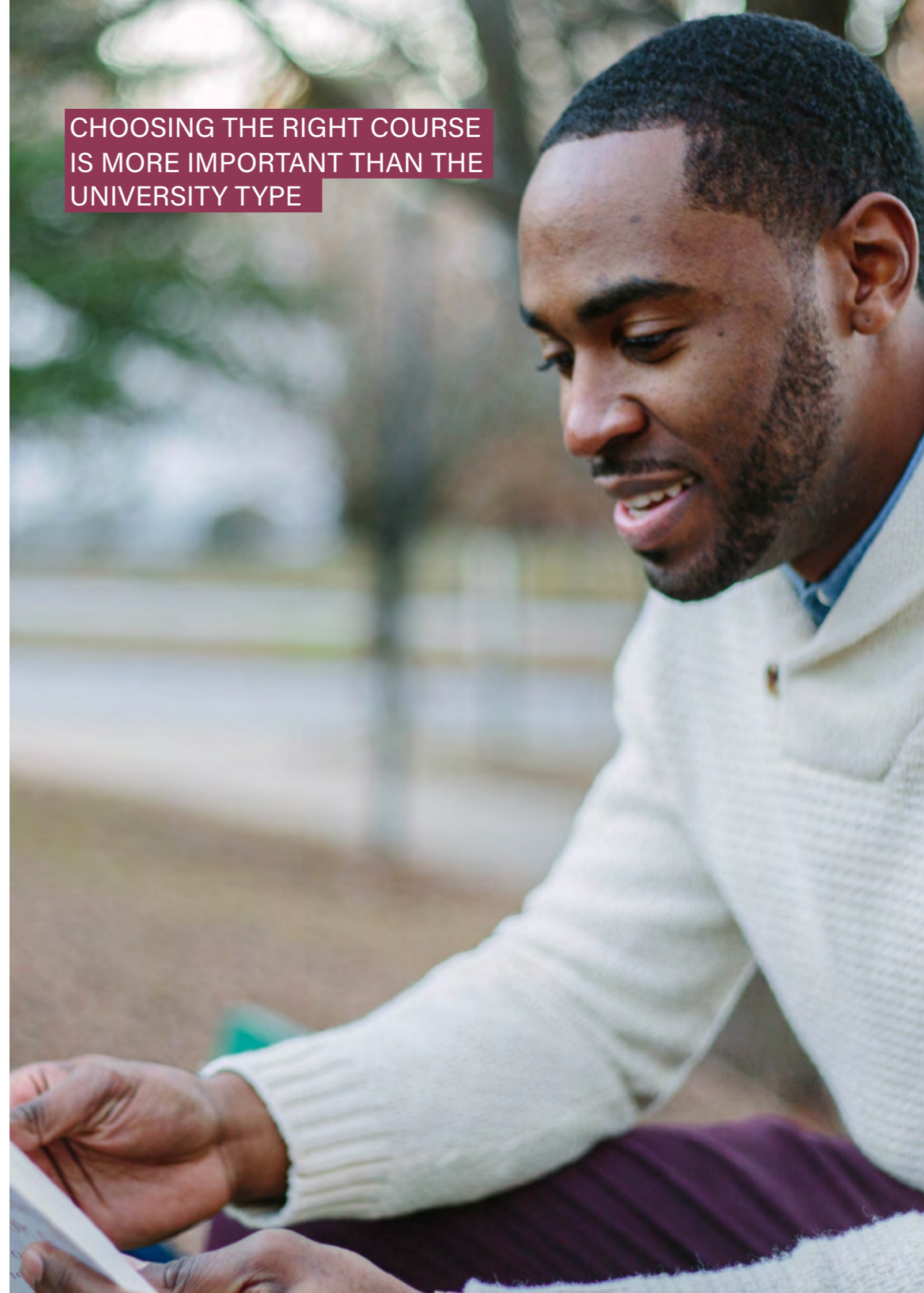
Your child should research courses with entry requirements that are closely aligned to their predicted grades, allowing for some aspirational and safe choices either side.

### Useful link

The Uni Guide  
course search

*I'm interactive! Click me and I'll take you to their website*

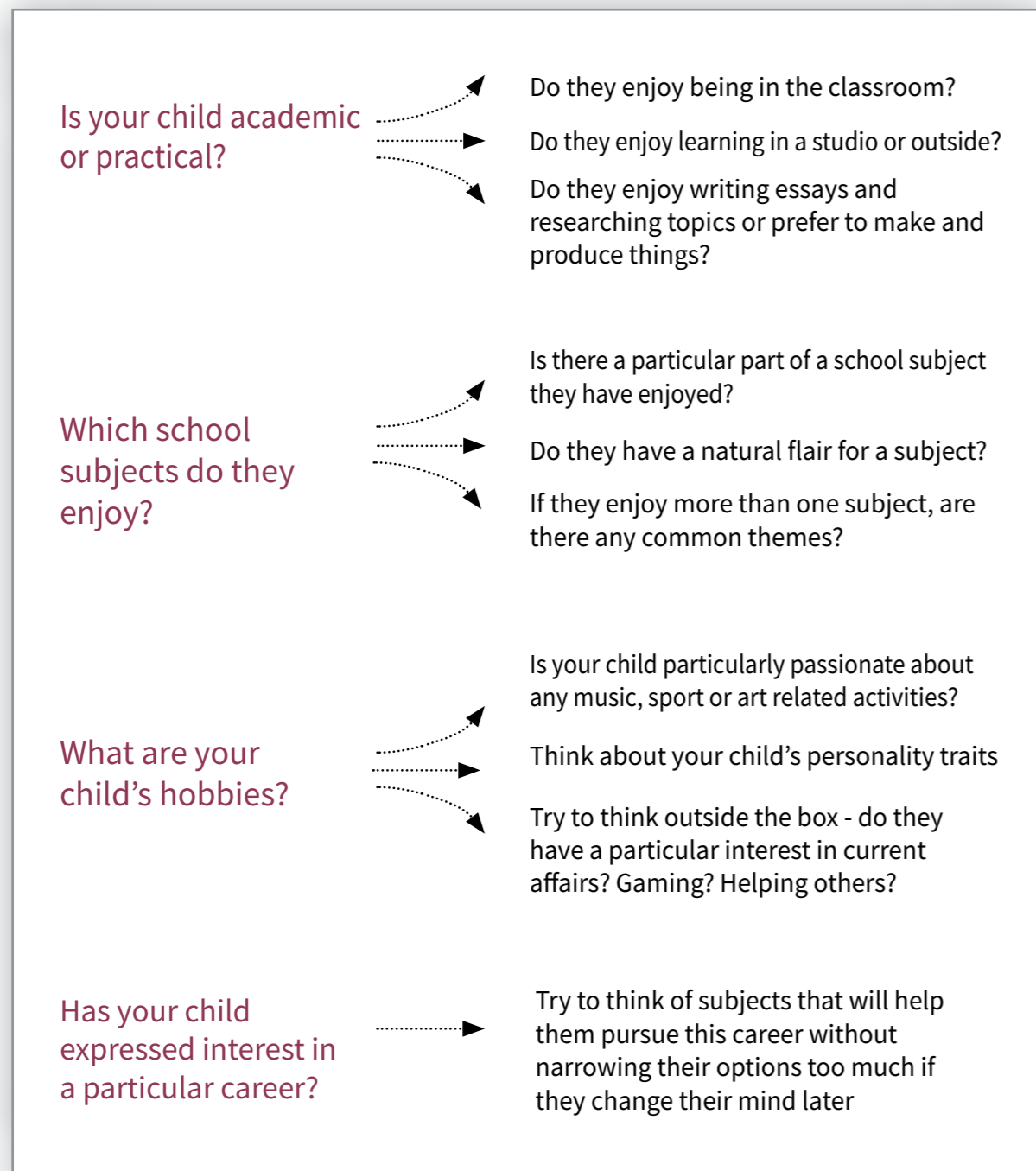
CHOOSING THE RIGHT COURSE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE UNIVERSITY TYPE



## Narrowing choices

There is plenty of information about university courses available, and whilst it's up to your child to do the research, as parents you can help guide them by checking that the courses they shortlist fit their personality. For example, a child that likes to be active and enjoys practical studies

and getting involved is likely to do better on a course that has plenty of experiential learning rather than one that is largely based around lectures and seminars. Here are some suggestions for things to consider when deciding whether a course meets your child's needs:





# Personal statement

**As part of the university application, your child will need to submit a personal statement. Effectively, this is a short (4,000 characters or circa 500 words) advert that lets your child showcase why they would make a great student.**

Content for a personal statement isn't something that can be created overnight. It takes time to assimilate ideas, finesse them, so it's good to encourage them to start thinking about this well ahead of submission time. This doesn't necessarily mean a heavy-handed desk bound session but prompting them with questions on a regular basis to help them clarify why they like something or what makes an experience pleasant / unattractive for them will help consolidate thoughts and prompt an understanding of ways to describe clearly what they like and dislike and why.

## Addressing different course choices

If they have chosen several different types of courses, they will need to focus on themes (i.e. creativity, communications, organisation, mechanics, research etc) rather than specifics (i.e. anything unique to one of the course titles). If possible, they should seek out the themes common to all the courses.

Notwithstanding this, every effort should be made to articulate their suitability and passion for their chosen courses, even if this means articulating in general terms rather than specifics depending on how different the areas of focus in each course may be.

It is worth noting that more academic universities will seek greater evidence of your child's passion for the subject versus their skillset, less academic universities will place more weight on skills.

## Hobbies and interests

Their interests beyond the classroom are especially important, where they can demonstrate initiative for doing something that has not been prescribed, and interests and inspiration that they have discovered themselves. This is a key way to stand out from others because it clearly demonstrates their uniqueness. Voluntary experience can also be included.

## Demonstrating passion

With relatively few words allowed, it is essential that the university understands why this is the right course for your child. Wider reading and relevant work experience associated with their degree choice (even if it is for a day) will help illustrate their interest.

Personal statement mindmap

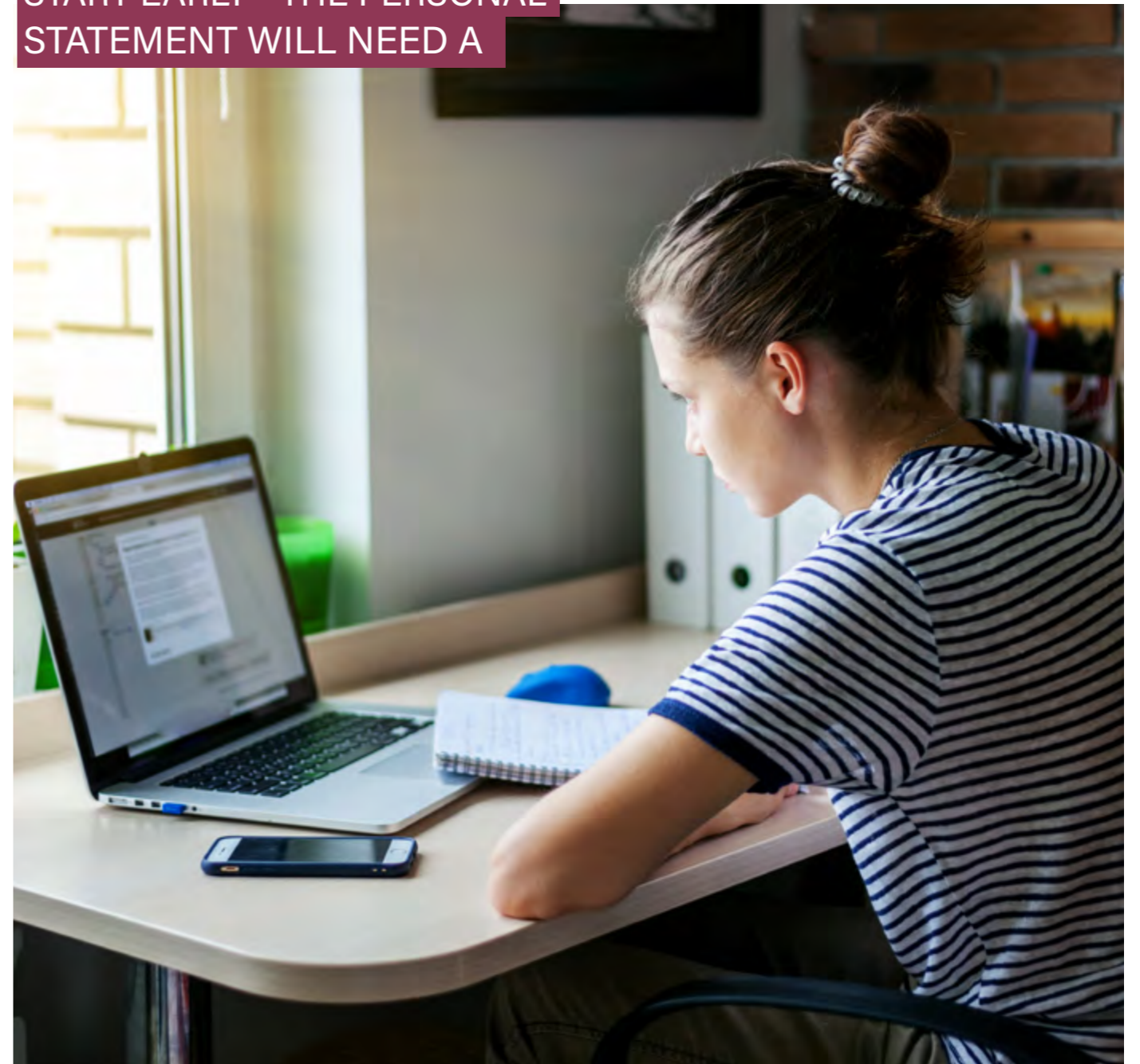
The Parents' Guide to University

## Starting early

Your child will need to be prepared for a pretty long cycle of reading, editing and rereading their personal statement until it is ready to be submitted. If your child is in Year 12, it is a good idea to return to school in September with at least a

first draft of their personal statement completed. If they are still unsure about which course to study once they leave school, they can focus their draft more on their skills, achievements and hobbies until they are ready to include this information.

**START EARLY - THE PERSONAL STATEMENT WILL NEED A**

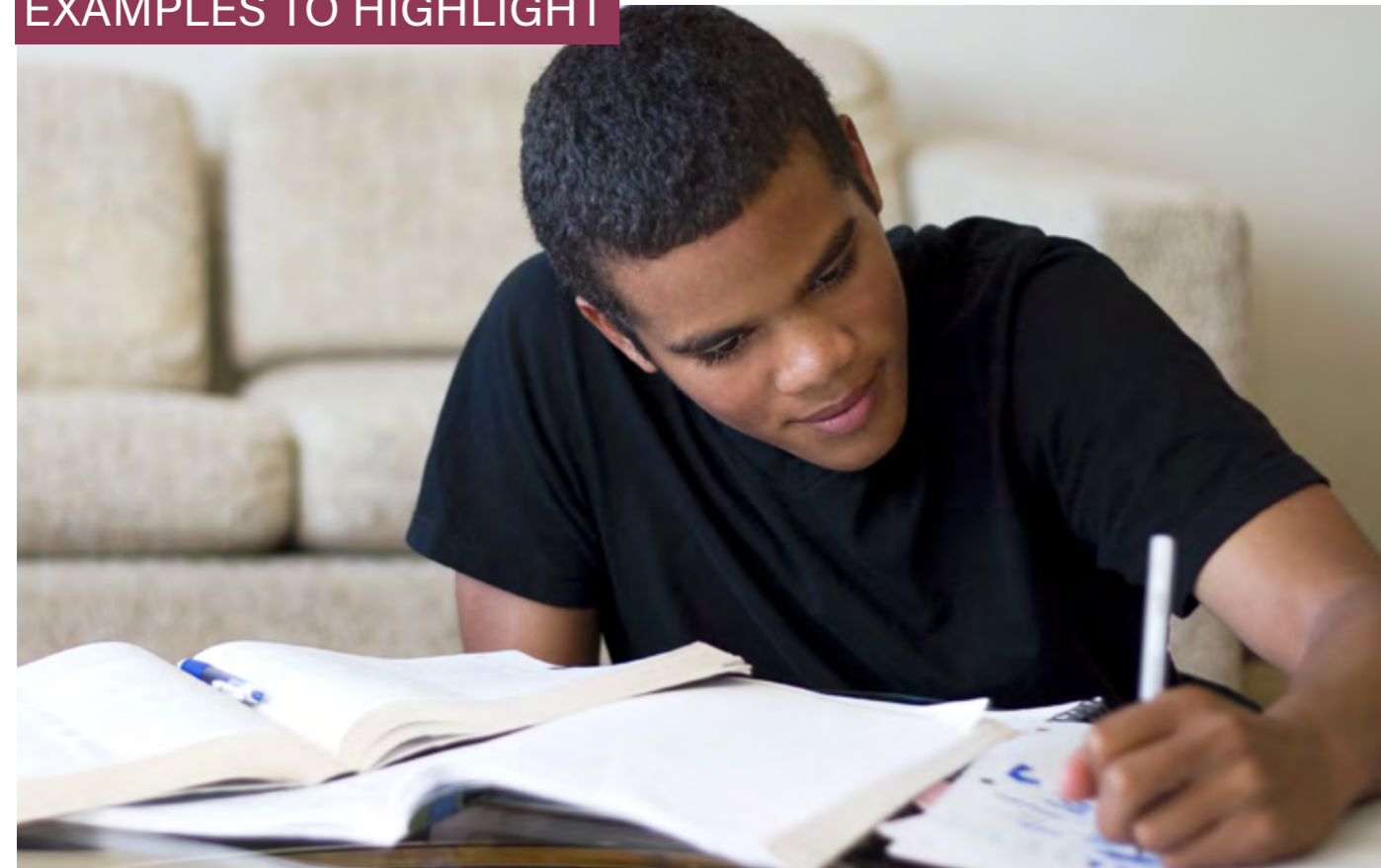


## Setting the right tone

Like CVs, there are certain descriptors that can be over-used (creative, great communicator, diligent, willing to learn, team player, problem solver to name but a few). It's fine to use these expressions, but the focus should be on why this applies (and examples to prove or demonstrate) rather than listing them without qualification.

Sequence, paragraph order and a broad remit covering a variety of aspects of their personality are important. This is no time to be shy or secretive. Your child should share drafts to get feedback and input from a range of people that have unique insight into their different strengths.

### MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD USES EXAMPLES TO HIGHLIGHT



## Getting started

Most students find that starting their personal statement is the hardest part. If your child is struggling to get motivated, encourage them to start by making a list of all the things they might want to include. Don't let them get caught up in trying to think of a catchy opening line - this can be left until much later in the process.

A good way to approach the personal statement is to start off by breaking it into more manageable chunks. This will make the personal statement less daunting and might even help them start to structure it. Try to remind your child that no one is expecting a perfect first draft.

## How to support your child with their personal statement

### DOs

- Start early - the personal statement will need a number of redrafts;
- Create a plan - encourage your child to make a list of all their achievements - academic, work-related, sport, music and art successes;
- Check the university websites to see what qualities and skills they want to see: an aptitude for maths? Creativity?
- Leave time for feedback - teachers, tutors, family members;
- Check for spelling and grammatical mistakes;
- Relate experience, study and hobbies to the course or to what university life entails;
- Write with passion and enthusiasm - can your child demonstrate wider reading? Additional courses completed? Work experience in a relevant field?

### DON'Ts

- Plagiarise or copy any other source - UCAS will check for this and it may have an impact on your child's overall application;
- Exceed the 4000 character limit / 47 lines of text
- Mention a university or course by name (if your child is applying to different universities or for courses with different titles);
- Demonstrate uncertainty or excuse potential bad results;
- Try to be overly funny or waffle.

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AS FEATURED IN THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY



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## Other options

It is important to remember that further education and academic study isn't for everyone. There are plenty of other ways to continue learning, such as apprenticeships, traineeships, paid or voluntary work or gap years.

### Getting a job

The world of work can be an exciting option and doesn't necessarily need to rule out further study at a later date. If your child does plan to get a job after school or college, encourage them to think carefully about the kind of work they want to do and the reasons for doing it. Do they plan to start in an entry level position and gradually work their way up to a higher position as they begin to gain more experience? Or do they want to start earning, and use this time to reflect on what they might like to do next?

### Useful links

Post 16  
options  
summary

Not Going  
to Uni

Post 18  
options  
summary

### Traineeships

Traineeships are a type of vocational training and can last six weeks to six months. They are a great way to prepare for apprenticeships (if your child doesn't have the minimum entry requirements) or to get first-hand experience of what a job is like.

### School leaver programmes

School leaver programmes offer opportunities to join the workplace straight after sixth form studies and commence skills development and career progression through experience as well as studying to obtain a nationally recognised qualification. Entry requirements vary from employer to employer.



ONE IN TEN STUDENTS  
WILL TAKE A GAP YEAR  
AFTER FINISHING SCHOOL



## Gap Year / deferred entry

Taking a year out after school can be beneficial, certainly in terms of the skills and experiences that can be developed, but your child will need to determine whether it's the right choice for them.

A gap year can be taken while entry to university is being deferred, once a place has been accepted (allowing a year between leaving school and starting university), or if university is not the next step at all.

### What does a gap year involve?

Traditionally, this is a year spent travelling overseas, but it needn't focus exclusively on that. Volunteering and work experience can also be incorporated and inform your child's likes and dislikes, as well as giving them valuable first-hand experience in a variety of areas they may not have had chance to try out. Gap years don't have to be expensive, and if

finances are tight, your child can self fund their travels by getting a job first.

### Is a gap year right for my child?

If your child is considering taking a year out after school, it's important to spend some time together and identify what it is your child wants to achieve. Gap years can be an excellent choice for students wanting to gain new skills and experience, earn money, spend time deciding what career path they want to take or have a break from work and study.

However, for some a gap year can be distracting and, if not well-planned, could prove somewhat directionless, which is unlikely to be beneficial. Before committing to a gap year, make sure your child has clear goals to make their time out from work or study a productive and fulfilling one.

### Useful links

GOV. UK  
Foreign Travel  
Advice

Gap 360



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### Parent Guides

Our range of interactive guides provide you with easy to follow advice, hyperlinks to reliable sources and the most up-to-date information.

### Support articles

Browse through our collection of online articles covering a range of topics from supporting your child with their revision to helping them apply to university through UCAS.

### Parent Q&A

Almost every parent has questions about their child's education. Read through answers to commonly asked questions or ask your own.

### Blog

Our blog provides reliable and timely advice and support to changes taking place across UK schools and colleges.

### Parent newsletter

Sign up to our parent newsletter and receive free support, advice and resources on how you can help your teenage children straight to your inbox.

*All our resources are ready for immediate download*



[www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/parents](http://www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/parents)

# The Parents' Guide to Helping your child know what's next

The Parents' Guide to:  
Helping your child know what's next

[info@theparentsguideto.co.uk](mailto:info@theparentsguideto.co.uk)

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