

# Parents and Carers' Guide

Birkbeck Schools and Colleges Liaison Team

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# **Why university matters**

Choosing to go to university opens doors to new ideas, new opportunities and a future your young person can shape with confidence. This section explores the value of higher education, helping you understand the benefits and support to feel assured as you guide them towards this important milestone.

## **Builds confidence and independence**

University gives students the space to take ownership of their learning, manage their time and make decisions that shape their future. At Birkbeck, students learn alongside people of all ages and backgrounds, which helps them grow in confidence as they see their own abilities reflected in a diverse community.

## **Opens career pathways**

A degree remains one of the most reliable ways to access a wider range of careers. With support from Birkbeck's Careers and Enterprise team, students can explore internships, placements and employer connections that strengthen their career prospects.

## **Develops critical and independent thinking skills**

University teaches students to analyse information, question assumptions and communicate their ideas clearly. Birkbeck's research-led teaching encourages students to engage deeply with their subject and apply their learning to real-world challenges.

## **Expands social networks and opportunities**

University introduces students to new people, perspectives and experiences that broaden their horizons and build lifelong friendships. With Birkbeck being based in central London, students have access to industry-leading employers, cultural institutions and professional networks right on their doorstep.

# **How you can support your young person's decision**

Supporting your young person through this choice is about guidance, reassurance and understanding what matters most to them. In this section, you'll discover practical ways to help them weigh their options, feel confident in their decision and know you're by their side throughout the journey. Things to consider include:

## **Course content**

When researching the best match, looking at the course content is the best approach. Course content is usually found under 'modules'. University websites typically break down each module on the course page, so you can see exactly what your young person will study and get a feel for whether the course is the right fit.

## **Teaching style**

Teaching styles can differ widely between courses. Some degrees focus on theory, with most learning happening through independent study, reading and online resources, while others include hands-on elements such as lab work, workshops or practical sessions. Understanding the balance can help you get a clearer sense of how your young person will learn day to day.

## **Location**

Your young person may prefer to stay close to home or move away for their studies, and thinking about what will best support both their academic progress and personal growth can help guide the decision.

## **Flexibility of studies**

Many universities now offer flexible teaching modes to fit around your young person's busy schedule. Birkbeck offers full-time and part-time study, as well as some of our undergraduate courses offering both daytime and evening teaching. This allows your young person to balance studies with work and other non-academic commitments.

## **Student support services**

It is important that your young person has access to pastoral care when they make the move into higher education. Ensuring that a university has a wide breadth of support services is a great way to ensure this. Birkbeck has a Study Skills programme, a Wellbeing Service, and a Careers and Employability Service to name a few, all designed to support your young person from the beginning of their journey.

## **Questions to ask together**

- What are your goals after university?
- What do you think you will get out of university?
- What kind of learning environment supports you?
- Do you prefer supported or independent study?
- Do you need any kind of extra support?

## **Additional guidance**

### **Encourage exploration rather than pressure**

Young people often feel they need to have everything figured out. Reassure them that it's normal to explore different subjects and pathways before settling on a choice. Birkbeck's flexible entry routes and wide range of courses make it easier for your young person to find the right fit.

### **Talk about practicalities**

Discuss finances, travel, accommodation and how they'll balance study with other responsibilities. Birkbeck students often work alongside their studies due to our flexible teaching model, allowing students to gain financial independence whilst studying.

### **Encourage use of support services early**

Let your young person know that asking for help is a strength, not a weakness. Birkbeck offers academic skills workshops, wellbeing support, disability services and personal tutors – all designed to help students thrive.

### **Visit campuses together**

What matters most is choosing a place where your young person feels supported, motivated and able to grow. Birkbeck's diverse community shows that there are many routes into higher education, and many ways to succeed once they are here.

### **Let them lead**

Your guidance is invaluable, but ultimately this is their journey. Encourage independence while offering steady support.

# How university differs from school or college

University brings a new rhythm – more independence, more responsibility and a learning experience shaped by your young person’s interests and goals. The environment will feel different from secondary school or further education, both academically and personally, and it may take time to adjust. To help you feel prepared, the table below highlights some of the key differences.

<b>School/College</b>	<b>University</b>
Structured timetable with set hours	Flexible timetable with more choice and responsibility
Smaller classes with close supervision	Larger classes (especially lectures); seminars typically small and discussion-based
Teacher-led learning	Independent, self-motivated learning supported by academic staff
Daily contact with teaching staff	Less frequent individual contact – students are expected to reach out when they need help
Pre-determined course content	Course content shaped by independent reading, research, and optional modules
Frequent homework and regular check-ins	Fewer assessments, with more emphasis on essays, projects, and exams (varies by course)
Progress closely monitored	Students take the lead in tracking progress and managing deadlines

## How you can support them through the transition as they:

### Take on more responsibility for their learning

You can encourage them to plan their week, including study, rest and social time. Help them recognise when they may be struggling and who they can contact. Reinforce that they don’t need to have everything figured out straight away.

## **Adapt to more independent academic work**

You can ask them what they're working on and what they find most challenging – this helps them reflect. You could suggest starting on big assignments early and breaking them into smaller milestones. Your young person can be reminded that workshops, academic office hours, and study skills support exist to be used, not as a last resort.

## **Find their feet in a more independent environment**

Your young person should lead in their decision-making, even if they get things slightly wrong – this is all a part of gaining independence. Encourage them to connect with others through societies, sports, volunteering and events. Check in on how they're feeling without pressuring them – adjusting to this new environment takes time.

# Understanding the UCAS process

The UCAS process can feel unfamiliar, but it is a clear and structured way for your young person to apply to university. This section breaks down each stage, helping you understand what's involved so you can support them with confidence at every step.

## **1. Research courses and discover your young person's passion**

Help your young person explore subjects they enjoy and review course options together. Open days and course guides make it easier to see what suits them.

## **2. Write a personal statement based on your young person's course preference**

Once a course is chosen, your young person will write a statement that highlights their motivation, experiences, and interest in the subject.

## **3. Submit application via UCAS website**

After finalising choices and their personal statement, the full application is submitted through UCAS with all required details.

## **4. Receive offers from prospective universities**

Universities review the applications and respond with conditional, on particular grades, or unconditional offers, giving your young person a range of options.

## **5. Choose firm and insurance university choices**

Your young person selects a firm choice as their top option and an insurance choice as a back-up with lower entry requirements.

## **6. Prepare to enrol at your university**

Once results confirm their place, your young person can arrange accommodation, organise finances and get ready for university life.

# Accommodation options

Where your young person lives can shape their university experience just as much as what they study, so understanding the accommodation options available can help you feel confident supporting them as they make an informed decision about the place that feels best.

## Living at home

Living at home will likely incur the lowest costs. The location needs to be within a realistic commutable distance from their campus. Benefits include lower costs and financial pressure, a familiar support system and a stable routine for studying.

Negatives include less independence, longer commutes and it may be harder to join social activities.

## Halls of residence

Halls of residence will vary in cost dependent on each university and their locations. Birkbeck's halls of residence are based close to campus in central London. Benefits include an easier way to make friends, on-site security and safety measures and being close to campus and transport links. Negatives include the cost being more than living at home, handling noise and shared spaces and having less privacy.

## Private renting

Privately renting is typically the most expensive accommodation option. Your young person has a choice of where they wish to live across the town or city they are moving to. Benefits include greater independence and life skills, having a choice over location and housemates and control over their living environment. Negatives include higher, less predictable costs, no built-in pastoral support and having to navigate contracts and landlords.

## University of London Intercollegiate Halls

Birkbeck is a member of the University of London, and our halls of residence are managed through the UoL Intercollegiate Halls. These provide a supportive, community-focused environment in central London, with the added reassurance of on-site support and easy access to campus and transport links. [Find out more about Intercollegiate Halls](#). UoL also recommends several registered independent halls of residence, which provide additional choice in terms of location, facilities, and price. [Find out more about UoL's Independent Halls of Residence](#).

# Fees, funding and financial support

Understanding the costs of university can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to navigate it alone. This section explains tuition fees, funding options and the financial support available, helping you feel informed and confident as you guide your young person through this important part of their journey.

## Tuition fees

For most UK undergraduate students, tuition fees and living costs are covered through Student Finance England. For the upcoming 2026/27 academic year, tuition fees will rise to **£9,790 per academic year**. This amount is subject to change each year and is determined by the government.

## How Student Finance works

Most UK students cover their tuition and living costs through Student Finance England, which offers two main loans:

- Tuition Fee Loan – paid directly to the university
- Maintenance Loan – paid directly to the student to help with living expenses

Repayments only begin once your young person is earning above a set income threshold, and repayments are based on what they earn, not the total amount borrowed. Applications typically open in the Spring and applying early helps ensure funding is in place for the start of term.

## Financial support at Birkbeck

Birkbeck offers a range of scholarships and financial support for undergraduate students, including awards for students from low-income families, care-experienced or estranged students and those facing financial hardship. Our financial support is designed to ease pressure and help students focus on their studies, no matter their background. [Find out more about our financial support options.](#)

## Support for parents and carers

Our Student Advice team is here to support both you and your young person with any questions about fees, funding or financial support. They can explain loan eligibility, guide you through timelines and help you understand the financial support available. Their expertise can be especially valuable for families navigating university finance for the first time.

# Student support at Birkbeck

Every student deserves to feel supported, both academically and personally, and at Birkbeck, this support extends to families too. This section highlights the wide range of services available to students, as well as the resources parents and carers can access, helping you feel informed, involved and confident as you guide your young person through their university journey.

## Student Advice

Birkbeck's Student Advice Service helps students navigate practical matters, from enrolment to funding, to accommodation and wellbeing, so you and your young person always know where to turn. [Find out more about our Student Advice Service.](#)

## Study Skills Support

Birkbeck's Study Skills Support programme offers workshops, one-to-one guidance and online resources to help students build confidence in academic writing, time management and independent learning. [Find out more about our Study Skills Support programme.](#)

## Wellbeing and Counselling Service

Birkbeck's Wellbeing and Counselling Service provides professional, confidential support to help students navigate personal, emotional or psychological challenges, offering guidance and resources that empower them to maintain their wellbeing and thrive throughout their higher education journey. [Find out more about our Wellbeing and Counselling Service.](#)

## Disability Service

Birkbeck's dedicated Disability Service ensures that students with disabilities, long-term health conditions or specific learning differences receive the adjustments and guidance they need to thrive on their higher education journey. [Find out more about our Disability Service.](#)

## Careers and Enterprise Service

Birkbeck's award-winning Careers and Enterprise Service helps students explore career paths, develop employability skills and connect with workplace opportunities across London and beyond. The service is here to help after graduation too. [Find out more about our Careers and Enterprise Service.](#)

Together, our services create a strong network of support, helping your young person settle in, succeed academically, stay well and plan for life after university. As a parent or carer, knowing what's available means you can feel assured that your young person is never navigating university life alone.

## **Come and meet us**

Seeing Birkbeck for yourself can make all the difference. Whether you'd like to explore our campus, speak to our team or simply ask us a question, please get in touch and we will gladly provide you with the information you need to support your young person with confidence. Visiting, connecting or even having a quick conversation can help you understand what life at Birkbeck is really like, and give you the reassurance that your young person will thrive in a welcoming, supportive environment.

### **Visit us – see Birkbeck for yourself**

- [Book an open day](#)
- [Book a campus tour](#)
- [Take a virtual tour](#)

### **Contact us – we're here to help**

- [Contact Student Advice](#)
- [ASK us a question](#)
- [See the work of our Schools and Colleges Liaison team](#)