



Engaging parents in higher education choices

Research overwhelmingly suggests that the more involved parents and carers can be with education, the more successful and more positive an experience that student will have. Parents/carers are a huge resource and often untapped. Many understandably want more involvement beyond attending parents' or option evenings. Equally, those working within education want the support and partnership of parents/carers. A collaborative approach to education is often a challenge but when successful can hugely enrich the experience for students.

The challenge for many parents/carers getting involved in the transitions to higher education can be a lack of confidence and perceived knowledge in the options for their children. In addition to this can be personal fears and perceptions:

- How does the system work?*
- How much will it cost me?*
- How do I know that this course will lead to a job?*
- What does that course mean?*
- Will they cope away from home?*
- Will they be safe?*
- Which institution has the best facilities?*
- What can I tell my child when I don't know?*
- Where do I start to find out?*

Many parents/carers do not feel empowered to support their children with the process of looking at higher education options because of a lack of understanding and knowledge. However, with good partnerships that gap can be bridged and a more consistent impact can be made on those students with the potential to progress to university.

Things to consider first

- **Know your own community** – What are the barriers or issues that may prevent parental involvement?
- **What is the culture of your school or college?** – Do you have strong networks or forms of communication in place already? Do parents/carers use them?
- **Take a whole school approach** – The best ideas come from those who know the students and families well. What feedback do they have from parents? What requests do they get?
- **Remember it is a process that may change** – What works with one set of parents/carers or one year may not work with another; it is something that will need to be reviewed regularly.

Ideas for increasing parental involvement

- **Early information** – Signposting parents regularly throughout key times and transitioning between years can be helpful.
- **Key dates** – Use our UCAS timeline within this pack to guide you. Flagging key application dates and signposting possible events for university visit days can be helpful and alleviate some of the burden on schools. UCAS provides lots of excellent resources for parents and guardians: www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/ucas-undergraduate-parents-and-guardians
- **Communication** – Mailouts are often preferable to parents/carers, however, consider e-comms as an option. You can use a designated parents' page on your website to signpost information, make requests, send 'save the date' messages, make requests for parental volunteers and send links to your web pages. Parents often respond well to text messages if your system can support this.
- **Be flexible** – Many parents with younger children, single parent families, etc, may not be able to make evening events due to childcare or other commitments. Have more traditional events in the evening but consider coffee mornings or 'morning surgeries' at key times to answer queries and questions. Invite universities to join these more informal events.

- **Talk about finance EARLY** – Send out some initial information with the early mailout to put it on the parental/carer radar early. This is a huge barrier and mystery to parents – many still do not understand the system. Please refer to our ‘Demystifying Student Funding Guide’ for general information. Some useful sites for reference are:
www.stmarys.ac.uk/student-support/money-matters
www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/finance-and-support
www.gov.uk/studentfinancesteps
- **Budgeting** – Consider running specific budgeting sessions and prompt discussions at home around this. Where appropriate, invite a university representative to provide advice. Students can sometimes run into financial difficulties and raising awareness around finances can empower students and alleviate concerns. It can be useful to signpost accommodation costs and contingency plans for students unable to secure a place in halls of residence. Accommodation is always limited, particularly at London universities; deposits and charges for the private rental market can be costly.
- **Alumni as speakers** – Those who went to university can provide a positive platform for speaking to students and their families. Request they speak or lead informal Q&A sessions at events you may be hosting.
- **Careers ‘show and tell’** – Consider inviting parents into the classroom through careers education sessions to talk to the students about their own career paths.
- **Nominated Access in UCAS** – In the personal details section of the UCAS form there is a question called ‘nominated access’ where the applicant can provide the details of anyone whom they would like to contact UCAS or the university on their behalf. This is very useful for parents, carers, advisers or teachers to be able to advocate on behalf of the applicant.
- **Joint working** – There is nothing like visiting a campus or having the university talk directly. Many universities have dedicated parents’ events and are open to joint working. Get in touch to discuss the needs of your school and see what they may be able to offer.
- **Sharing good practice** – Engage with other schools in your network – find out what they are doing to engage parents/carers. Can it work in your school? Can you do some joint work?
- **Care leavers** – Please identify any potential students that this may apply to. Additional support, funding and bursaries are available. Further information can be found on the UCAS website:
www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/individual-needs/ucas-undergraduate-support-care-leavers

And please remember, we are here to help!

Recruitment team

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