



PARENTS' GUIDE

Birmingham City University's guide for parents and supporters

2010
THE AWARDS
AWARD WINNER

| Winner of 2010 Times Higher Education Award
for '**Outstanding Support for Students**'

PARENTS' AND SUPPORTERS' GUIDE

Choosing a university is often the biggest, most life-changing decision a young person ever makes. You'll no doubt be wondering:

- How can I help my son or daughter through the application process?
- What support will they receive at Birmingham City University?
- What does university cost?
- Will a degree get my son or daughter a graduate-level job?

We've tried to answer these, and many other questions, in this guide.

At Birmingham City University, we pride ourselves on supporting our students at every step of their journey.

We hope we'll be welcoming your son or daughter to study with us very soon!

For more information, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk.

To order or download our prospectus, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/prospectus.

For help with the application process, please visit www.ucas.com.

For information about tuition fees and loans, please visit www.gov.uk.

For advice on how we support disabled students, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/disability-support.

For information on how we support international students, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/international.

90 per cent of our 2012 full-time first degree UK graduates found work or continued studying within six months of their graduation (DLHE 2011/12)

6th out of 130 universities for student teaching time (Daily Telegraph)

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Birmingham City University promotes equality of opportunity in every aspect of its provision. For full details of our Equal Opportunities Policy, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk.

'Outstanding Support for Students' award at the Times Higher Education Awards 2010.

We are investing **£260 million** in new facilities for our students.

Birmingham City University has around 22,000 students from over 80 countries.

WHY BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY?

BENEFITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education refers to university-level qualifications including degrees, foundation degrees and Higher National Diplomas. Those studying such qualifications will usually be at least 18 if coming straight from school or college, but an increasing number of people return to study later in life as mature students.

The first decision a prospective student needs to make is whether higher education is right for them. Here are some points they may want to consider:

- **Job opportunities:** Some professions, such as nursing or law, require a degree-level qualification in that area, while others may require a degree, but not in a specific subject. **According to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), one in three jobs in the UK now require degree-level skills (Education and Skills Survey 2013).**
- **Earning potential:** Graduates generally earn higher salaries than non-graduates – **£12,000 more per year** according to figures from the Office for National Statistics.
- **Personal development:** If your son or daughter does not know what they want to do as a career, university can be a great way to find out. Whether through work experience, volunteering opportunities or joining a student society, university could open their eyes to new opportunities.
- **Academic interest:** Prospective students should also not overlook the potential enjoyment of studying a subject that interests them, and that they are passionate about, in greater depth.

OUTSTANDING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

Our students gain an advantage in the job market because:

- **Birmingham City University attracts some of the best staff** – including academic experts and experienced business leaders with the latest knowledge and industry contacts.
- **We work with companies** like Apple, Cartier and Cisco to develop our courses.
- We offer students opportunities for **work placements, international exchanges** and **sandwich courses** - to inspire their classroom work.
- We offer an **'employer mentoring scheme'**, which gives second and third year students the chance to learn from employers or successful alumni.
- **Our dedicated employment agency**, 'OpportUNlty - Student Jobs on Campus', recruits our own students to a variety of temporary and casual part-time jobs with the University, providing valuable experience of the workplace.

"We have been recruiting students who have completed the horology course at the School of Jewellery for years."

Fabien Pellegrini, Service and Logistics Director, Cartier UK



TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Like at all universities, our students learn in lecture theatres and tutorials. But they also get the added bonus of learning through doing.

- Our nursing students learn in **mock operating theatres**, law students debate in **simulated courts** and our trainee teachers enjoy the use of **replica classrooms**.
- Many of our courses are **practice-based** – most health students, for example, spend 50 per cent of their time on placement.
- Our media and art students enjoy state-of-the-art **blue screen video production suites** and **photographic studios**.
- We've pioneered **online virtual learning environments** for our teaching and nursing students.

EXEMPLARY FACILITIES

We're investing £260 million in our facilities - including a major expansion of our City Centre Campus. The first phase – a new design and media building – opened in September 2013, and construction on a second phase of the development is currently under way, to accommodate business, English, law and social science students from 2015, as well as providing new library, IT, student support and social facilities. Further new teaching space, and a new home for Birmingham Conservatoire, will follow in 2017.

We operate a number of specialist libraries – including the Mary Seacole Library, one of the biggest health libraries in the UK. And our £8.5 million Doug Ellis Sports Centre is available to students and the wider community.

UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

Our thriving Students' Union offers societies as varied as basketball, dance and cheerleading, chess and rock climbing. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved in volunteering, write for the student magazine or even present on the University's TV station.

Employers often tell us they look for self reliance, communication skills and a willingness to learn – skills students develop while enjoying our international and multicultural university experience.

GLOBAL CITY

Birmingham is one of the youngest cities in Europe in terms of average age, with 65,000 students from all over the world studying here. We are the second city of the UK, and not just in terms of population - our nightlife, museums, galleries, shopping, restaurants and sports venues are world famous.

HOW CAN I HELP MY SON OR DAUGHTER THROUGH THE APPLICATION PROCESS?

WHAT TYPES OF DEGREE ARE THERE?

- A **Bachelor's degree** is a three or four-year course (if studied full-time). Students studying an arts subject, such as art, drama or media, will receive a Bachelor of Arts (BA) qualification. Those studying a science subject, such as nursing or computing, will usually receive a Bachelor of Science (BSc) qualification. There are some other specialist qualifications – such as Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) or Bachelor of Music (BMus).
- A **Joint Honours degree** is a course where students study two subjects equally, such as English and Media.
- A **major/minor degree** is a course where students mainly study one subject with another alongside, such as English Language with English Literature.
- A **sandwich course** is a four-year degree (if studied full-time) where students spend their third year on placement in their chosen industry.

We offer other types of higher education qualification – like Higher National Diplomas, CertHEs and foundation courses. These are a great option for students who do not want to study a full-length degree, or do not have the grades needed. Many of these courses are designed so that students can upgrade to a degree at a later date, if they choose to do so.

HOW SHOULD MY SON OR DAUGHTER CHOOSE A COURSE?

Ask your son or daughter:

- What do you like?
- What are you good at?
- What do you want to do as a career?
- Have you considered courses you haven't studied yet?

For full course listings, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/courses.

Try to talk to your son or daughter without putting pressure on them, and make appointments with teachers and school careers advisers if you can.

Our Course Enquiries team can help: www.bcu.ac.uk/enquiries.

“The Birmingham City University Open Day made a massive difference to my daughter's decision.”

Deborah Rowe
Mother of Sophie Rowe, BA (Hons) Criminology graduate

HOW CAN I HELP MY SON OR DAUGHTER CHOOSE A UNIVERSITY?

Ask your son or daughter:

- Would you like to study close to home?
- Would you prefer to study on an out-of-town campus or in the city centre?

Encourage your son or daughter to attend open days and perhaps offer to go along with them – so they can get a taste of what it's like to be a student.

If your son or daughter is torn between the same course at more than one university, try to find out more about the way the subject is taught and take a look at the course content.



HOW DO I KNOW IF MY SON OR DAUGHTER IS GETTING THE GRADES THEY NEED?

You'll find full details of entry requirements for all our courses at www.bcu.ac.uk/courses.

You can also visit www.ucas.com for an explanation of the tariff system and the application process.

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

As the majority of university courses in the UK have no formal interview requirements, most decisions on whether to offer a student a place are made on the strength of their UCAS application form – particularly the personal statement. This offers the best chance for your son or daughter to 'sell' themselves, explaining why they should be offered a place!

These are some of the main areas they may want to include:

- Reasons for course choice
- Future plans
- School and college life
- Work experience
- Other interests and activities.

Other points to remember:

- Always check spelling and grammar
- Give evidence for any claims, providing examples where possible
- Do not be tempted to copy parts of someone else's statement or lift ideas from the internet
- Keep a copy of what is written for future reference.

ACCEPTING OR DECLINING OFFERS

Once your son or daughter has submitted their application, their chosen universities will either make a decision based on their application form and predicted grades, or invite them to an interview or audition before deciding. They will then make a conditional offer (a guaranteed place provided they meet certain conditions, usually exam results), an unconditional offer (if they have already met all the conditions), or inform them their application has been unsuccessful.

Your son or daughter needs to reply to each offer in one of the following ways:

- Their firm acceptance is their first choice which may be unconditional (in which case they should decline all other offers) or conditional (in which case they may also select an insurance choice).
- Their insurance choice may be conditional or unconditional, and it is the university or college they are agreeing to attend if they do not meet the conditions of their firm choice.
- They can only accept a maximum of one firm and one insurance offer and must decline all others – or they may decline all their offers and seek an alternative place.

WHAT IS UCAS EXTRA?

If your son or daughter does not receive any offers, or if they decline all the offers they receive, they may make an additional choice between February and July through UCAS Extra. They can check which courses have spaces on the UCAS website and apply for one course at a time, but if they do not receive an offer, they may then apply for another (time permitting). If they do accept an offer, they are committed to taking up that place, provided they meet any conditions.

WHAT IS CLEARING?

Clearing is the process starting in July, where students not holding the offer of a place (either because they did not meet the conditions of their offer, they did not receive any offers, they declined them all or they applied late) are matched with remaining vacancies. Most students will use Clearing after receiving their exam results in mid-August. They will need to look at the UCAS website for a list of courses which have vacancies and then contact the university or college directly.

WHAT IS ADJUSTMENT?

Adjustment is designed for students who have exceeded the conditions of their original offer, and wish to reconsider their course choice. If your son or daughter would like to use this process, they must register on the UCAS website, and contact university and college admissions departments directly to discuss vacancies. If they are offered an alternative place and accept it, they will be giving up their original confirmed place – if they do not find an alternative place, they will retain the offer from their first choice.

DELAYING ENTRY

If your son or daughter accepts an offer from a university or college then decides they would like to take a year out, they should contact the institution directly to ask if they can defer entry until the following year. If they want to apply to a different course or institution for the following year, they should start a new application, as UCAS cannot re-use applications in subsequent years.

APPLICATION TIMETABLE

Applying to UCAS is a long process – and it needs to be completed while your son or daughter is preparing for their exams!

You can help by noting all the key deadlines in your diary and by encouraging your son or daughter to start researching universities and courses early. Try to be around when the exam results come out, if you can. Perhaps you could offer to read through your son or daughter's Personal Statement too.

Mid-September	UCAS opens for the following year's applications. Students choose up to five universities
October	Most schools and colleges advise students to have completed their applications by autumn half term
1 October	Deadline for CUKAS applications (Birmingham Conservatoire students)
October and November	Opportunity to visit Birmingham City University Open Days
15 January	Deadline for all UCAS application forms
January	Applicant Visit Days and interviews
Late February to early July	UCAS Extra opens
March	Universities to respond to applicants by the 31 March
April	Replies due back from applicants with decisions on which offers are to be accepted (one firm and one insurance choice)
April	If Birmingham City University is your firm choice, you can apply for accommodation
May to June	Exam time!
Mid-June	Birmingham City University Open Day
July/August	Non A Level exam results released
August	A Level results released
Mid-August	Clearing Open Day
September	Freshers' Week!

For more details about writing Personal Statements, using 'Track' and a list of FAQs, please visit www.ucas.com.

FEES AND FINANCE

HOW DO PEOPLE PAY FOR A DEGREE?

Most students will not have to pay for their degrees up front. A range of loans and grants are available including tuition fee loans, maintenance loans, maintenance grants, university bursaries/scholarships, NHS bursaries (for students on NHS-funded diploma or degree courses) and special support grants. For more information, visit our website at www.bcu.ac.uk/tuitionfees.

HOW ARE LOANS REPAID?

Payments will normally be taken automatically, via the tax system, once earnings exceed a certain threshold. If the graduate's income then falls back below the threshold, payments will be automatically halted. If they later start to earn over that figure again, payments will restart.

WHAT IF THE LOAN IS NOT PAID BACK?

If a student loan has not been repaid after 30 years, any outstanding payments will be written off.

IS IT ADVISABLE TO GET INTO DEBT?

We believe that the lifelong value of higher education far outweighs any short-term costs. Taking on debt is never an easy decision, but student loans have been designed to be manageable – graduates have to earn above a minimum amount before they have to start repaying and then they

only pay a percentage of their income above that threshold. If at any point the graduate is unemployed or takes a career break, the payments are halted.

WILL MY SON OR DAUGHTER BE ABLE TO TAKE OUT A LOAN OR MORTGAGE?

The Council of Mortgage Lenders has advised that a student loan is 'very unlikely' to have a material impact on an individual's ability to get a mortgage. Decisions on loans would be a decision for the provider, but Student Finance England will not be sharing student loan information with credit reference agencies.

ARE THERE OPTIONS TO STUDY PART-TIME?

Yes, nearly all our courses can be studied part-time. We've provided flexible options that allow students to work as they study.

Since 2012, part-time students have been able to access government loans if they are studying a course equivalent to at least 25 per cent of a full-time course.

DOES BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY HELP STUDENTS TO WORK PART-TIME?

Yes! As well as helping students find part-time work through our Employment Zone, we hire our own students for a range of temporary and casual jobs around the University using our dedicated employment agency, OpportUNity - Student Jobs on Campus. This gives students valuable experience of

the recruitment and selection process, as well as the opportunity to develop their skills in key areas identified by the University in consultation with employers.

Students can be paid to become Student Ambassadors who assist on open days and school visits. We also employ Student Mentors to help new arrivals settle in.

MY SON OR DAUGHTER HAS NEVER MANAGED A BUDGET BEFORE...

Student Services run workshops on budgeting and applying for funding throughout the year – as well as providing drop-in advice and a range of brochures on money matters. There are also example student budget tables at www.bcu.ac.uk/about-us/parents-and-carers to give you more of an idea about what university costs. For the latest information on fees and finance, please see www.bcu.ac.uk/tuitionfees.

Graduates earn, on average, around **£12,000 more per year** than non-graduates. (Office for National Statistics)

Graduates **do not have to pay anything back** until they are in work and earning over a set amount.



"I see a lot of people who've done law degrees at other universities who have great academic knowledge but don't necessarily have the practical skills that they need, which is where Birmingham City University really made the difference for me."

Katie Ferrier, LLB (Hons) Law
Head of Supplier Engagement at Network Rail

LIVING AWAY FROM HOME

SHOULD MY SON OR DAUGHTER LIVE AT HOME OR IN HALLS OF RESIDENCE?

Deciding whether or not to move away from home for university is a very personal decision. Living in halls may make it easier for your son or daughter to make new friends and increase their sense of independence, but they will have to factor in the increased cost and responsibilities.

WHAT ACCOMMODATION IS AVAILABLE?

Birmingham City University maintains friendly and affordable self-catering halls of residence with CCTV and 24-hour security. A limited amount of single sex accommodation is available.

Most of the students living in our halls are first-year students – many second and third-years choose to privately rent shared houses together.

Due to demand, we can't always offer students the halls closest to the campus they study at, but it's worth encouraging your son or daughter to consider this when they apply.

For full details, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/accommodation.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

We offer a range of accommodation to suit all needs and pockets. Our prices are determined by the policy that halls of residence should break even.

Accommodation fees are subject to annual increases and can be paid upfront, or in three or nine instalments.

Students living in halls are usually exempt from Council Tax.

WHAT ACCOMMODATION DO YOU OFFER FOR DISABLED STUDENTS?

We have several accessible/adapted rooms available and we have not had any problems meeting disabled students' accommodation needs to date.

For more advice please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/disability-support.

HOW DO STUDENTS APPLY FOR ACCOMMODATION?

When your son or daughter has firmly accepted an offer to study at Birmingham City University, they can apply online for accommodation. Rooms are allocated at the beginning of July, and they will receive a room offer via email or letter.

DO STUDENTS NEED INSURANCE?

Your son or daughter should check whether their possessions are covered by your home insurance – if not they may wish to consider taking out their own contents cover. Many insurance firms offer special deals for students.

DO STUDENTS NEED A TV LICENCE?

Students will need a TV licence if they watch programmes as they are broadcast live, whether this is through a television set or any other device, such as a laptop, smartphone or tablet.

They do not need a licence if they only stream TV programmes online after they are broadcast. Visit www.tvlicensing.co.uk for more information.

THE ELECTORAL REGISTER

Your son or daughter can choose to vote either at their home or term-time address for UK and European elections, and may vote at both for local elections (as long as the two addresses are in different local government areas). Visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk for more information.

EATING AND COOKING

Depending on their existing experience, your son or daughter may need to develop a few cooking skills before they leave home as surviving on takeaways isn't good for the bank balance or waistline! If they will be cooking for themselves, they will also need to check what equipment is provided, and what they will need to bring with them.

REGISTERING WITH A DOCTOR

We encourage students to sign up with a local GP as soon as they arrive, and also provide information about finding dentists and other healthcare providers in Birmingham. The Handsworth Wood Medical Centre operates surgeries on campus and encourages students to register in Freshers' Week.

APPLYING FOR STUDENT FINANCE

Students should apply for their student funding early, to ensure it arrives in time for the start of term. They should also consider setting up a student bank account with a low rate of interest on overdrafts.



Our primary and secondary teacher training courses are rated by Ofsted as **'outstanding'**.

100 per cent of our Adult Nursing graduates were in employment or further study within six months of graduating. (DLHE 2012)

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

WHAT IF MY SON OR DAUGHTER FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO ADAPT TO UNIVERSITY LIFE?

We understand that the transition from school to university can be overwhelming. That's why we operate a mentoring scheme, assigning your son or daughter a second or third-year student who they can talk to about settling in, balancing life and study, and making friends.

All students are assigned a 'Personal Tutor' – an academic member of staff who supports them with their academic and personal development. We also provide free study skills workshops to all our students throughout the year – to help them adapt to independent learning.

Phone calls and emails from home always help with home sickness, so be sure to stay in touch.

WHERE CAN MY SON OR DAUGHTER GET ADVICE OR INFORMATION?

Our Student Services team runs 'help zones' on a number of our campuses where students can drop in and get advice about money, health and wellbeing and finding a part-time job. We can also put students in touch with our student counselling service and our careers service. For more information, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/studentsservices.

WILL MY SON OR DAUGHTER BE SAFE?

The Security Services team provides 24 hour security and operates CCTV on all University campuses and halls of residence.

Encourage your son or daughter to look at the West Midlands Police website 'Safer Students' for tips on staying safe at www.west-midlands.police.uk/saferstudents.

WHAT CAREERS ADVICE IS AVAILABLE TO MY SON OR DAUGHTER?

Our Careers Zone, operated by Student Services, gives students access to qualified careers consultants throughout their studies and up to five years after they graduate. Our consultants help students draft CVs, give advice on interviews and share self-employment advice.

If your son or daughter plans to start their own business when they graduate, our Concept Factory provides dedicated meeting space for entrepreneurial students and graduates to network, share ideas and form collaborations.

The Careers Zone also advertises work placement opportunities and helps local companies recruit graduates. For more information, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/careers.

MY SON OR DAUGHTER HAS A DISABILITY – HOW WILL YOU HELP?

Advice and support is available right from the point of enquiry and throughout a student's time at the University. Student Services can help with all aspects of support for disabled students from recommendations on academic-related issues, to funding for disability support and any other needs disabled students may have.

For more information, see www.bcu.ac.uk/disability-support.

WILL MY SON OR DAUGHTER HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP?

We understand how important religious faith is to students undergoing the huge change of a new life in a new city. Our multi-faith chaplaincy organises religious services, social events and prayer meetings on campus, as well as maintaining Muslim prayer rooms and offering students from all faith backgrounds advice and support.

For more information, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/chaplaincy.

"The lecturers were just brilliant – they were real mentors and friends and they pushed us hard, but for the right reasons. Because of the success they had achieved in their own careers – including some who had worked for the BBC – they gave us all something to aspire to."

Sue Paz, BA (Hons) Media and Communication
Online producer for BBC Radio Dorset





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