

Parents' and supporters' guide to... Understanding university offers

Once your child has applied to university via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), (see Applying to University fact sheet), the university will update UCAS Track with their decision so they will be able to keep on top of offers received. There are three types of responses that might be given by the universities:

1. Conditional offer

This offer is based upon the student attaining the entry requirements set by the university for a specific course. It will give the student a goal to work towards and you can encourage them in that.

2. Unconditional offer

If the student has already achieved the necessary academic grades to meet the entry requirements for the course, they will receive an unconditional offer. This means that if the offer is accepted, this is the course and university where the student will study.

3. Unsuccessful

Unfortunately, this means that the student has not met or is not expected to meet the entry requirements for the specified course. The university may provide feedback at this stage, or it might be worth contacting the admissions office at the university to find out why they have made this decision. If you or your child is confused by receiving an unsuccessful decision, then please contact the university just in case there has been a mistake or there is something unclear in the UCAS application.

If each of the five chosen universities gives an unsuccessful response or the student declines the offers they have received, UCAS Extra is available. This is free to use and will allow the student to apply to one course at a time until they have received an offer they are happy with. This service closes on the 17 July.

UCAS Track

UCAS Track is accessed by logging in to UCAS and gives the student an overview of their status with each of their chosen universities.

Once all of the universities have given their responses, the student needs to decide on a firm and insurance choice, essentially narrowing down from five choices to two. The firm choice is the preferred university and, if the student achieves the grades specified in the offer, this is where they will go to study. The insurance choice is the back-up and the prerequisite grades are normally lower than the firm choice.

If the application was made before the 31 January deadline, the universities must respond by 16 May. The student then has until 6 June to decide on their firm and insurance choices.

Whilst it may appear complicated, the overall process is quite logical as long as your child focuses on what they want to do and assesses each offer based on its merits. If they need further advice it will be worth revisiting the reasons why they chose that course/university in the first place and also contacting the Admissions Tutor at the university to gain further insight.