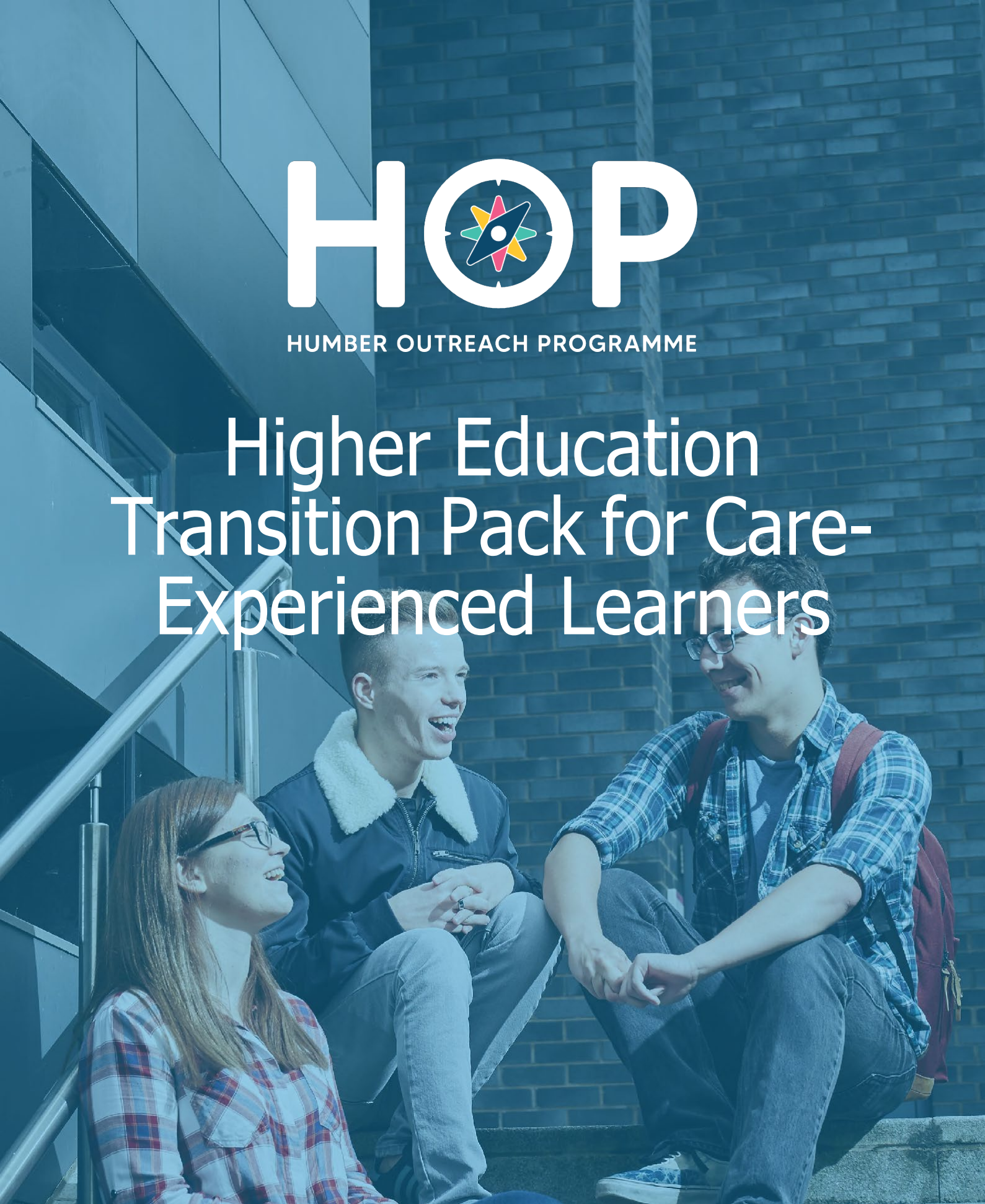




HUMBER OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Higher Education Transition Pack for Care- Experienced Learners



Developed by:

Go Higher West Yorkshire and Inspiring Choices

Kindly shared with the Humber Outreach Programme (HOP), a partnership of Higher Education Providers offering university degrees, college-based HE courses, and degree apprenticeships including the University of Hull; Hull College; Bishop Burton College; University Centre North Lincolnshire; Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education; and FE and Sixth Form colleges: Wyke College; Wilberforce College; East Riding College; Franklin College; Jogn Leggott College.

Disclaimer

Please note, the information in this pack is designed to provide generic guidance to support the application/ transition process into Higher Education. To find out specific information about how a university or Higher Education provider can support you and your individual needs, please contact the Higher Education provider directly. The information in this pack is correct at time of writing—April 2026.

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Introduction

Welcome to your Higher Education Care Leaver Transition Pack. If you're 16 or over and have experience in care, this pack is here to support you. We know thinking about university or college can feel exciting but also a bit overwhelming. Don't worry – we're here to walk you through it step by step in a friendly, approachable way.

Going into Higher Education – whether at a university, a college, a conservatoire, or through an apprenticeship – can be a rewarding experience. This guide will help you consider if Higher Education is right for you and how to get there, especially if you are care-experienced.

Care-Experienced? What That Means for You

Before we get into Higher Education, let's talk about **what being care-experienced means** – because understanding this can help you access the right **financial support, accommodation, and other help** at university.

✓ **UCAS Definition:** If you have ever spent time in foster care, residential care, kinship care, or under a supervision order (even for a short time), you are classed as care-experienced.

✓ **Student Finance England (SFE) Definition:** To qualify as an independent student for finance, you must have been in local authority care for at least 13 weeks spanning your 16th birthday.

✓ **University Support:** Some universities and colleges including our members define care experience even more broadly, meaning you may qualify for extra support even if you don't meet SFE's strict criteria.

Why This Matters:

- ☞ **You could get extra financial support**, including bursaries and grants (free money for university!).
- ☞ **You might qualify for 52-week accommodation**, so you don't have to move out during holidays.
- 📁 **Ticking the “care-experienced” box on UCAS** ensures universities know to offer you extra help – and it's confidential.

If you're unsure whether you qualify for certain support, don't worry – always ask! Universities and student finance teams can help clarify what you're entitled to.



What Is Higher Education?

Higher Education (HE) is typically the next stage of learning after you finish school or college, usually after completing qualifications like A levels, BTECs, T Levels or an Access to HE course. HE includes things like:

- **Bachelor's degrees** (usually 3 years courses at university in a subject you love).
- **Foundation degrees** or HNDs (shorter courses, often 2 years).
- **Higher apprenticeships or degree apprenticeships** (work and study combined – you earn a wage and get a qualification).
- **Other higher-level courses** – like diplomas, or programs at a **conservatoire** (specialist performance institution, e.g. Leeds Conservatoire for music/drama).

How is HE different from what you do at school/college?

In HE, you usually have **more independence**. For example, fewer classroom hours than school, more **research and study on your own**, and you get to focus on subjects **you choose**. You call your teachers **“lecturers”** or **“tutors”**, and you'll be treated as an adult (which is great, but means managing your own time and work). Don't worry – support is still there (we'll cover that)!

Why Consider HE? Is it worth it?

HE isn't “just more school” – it's a **chance to grow**, learn skills, and open doors. Let's look at some great reasons to think about going to uni or college:

- ☞ **Follow your passion:** Study something you are really interested in – anything from engineering to art to nursing to game design. HE lets you dive deep into what you love.
- ☞ **Better career options:** Many higher-level jobs ask for a degree or similar. On average, people who complete HE **earn more over their lifetime** (one study showed graduates earn about **35%** more than those who didn't).

More importantly, you might access careers you care about, whether that's teaching, social work, science – you name it.

- ☞ **Independence & life experience:** Going to uni often means a new adventure – possibly moving to a new city, meeting people from all over, and learning to live on your own. It's a safe way to step into adult life with lots of support around you.

Make new friends and connections:


You'll meet people in your course, join clubs or sports, and maybe connect with other care-experienced students. Many students say they make lifelong friends at university.


- ☞ **Support for your goals:** Universities and colleges have tons of resources – libraries, mentors, career advisors – to help you succeed in your studies and beyond.


Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE)

Not all Higher Education happens at a university. You can gain HE qualifications through other routes that might suit you better. Here are some ways to pursue HE outside the traditional university campus:

Studying at a College (HE in FE):


 Some Further Education colleges offer higher education courses – including full bachelor's degrees – often in partnership with universities. This means you could study for a degree in a smaller, more familiar environment close to home.

 For example, some colleges have a “University Centre” or undergraduate facilities where you can take a degree course validated by a university.

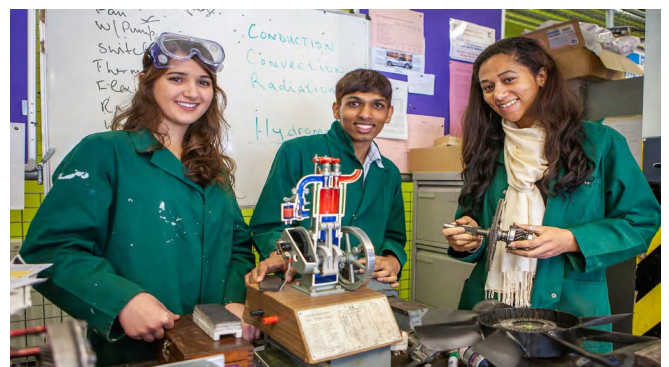
 Classes at colleges tend to be smaller, with a more personal feel, and entry requirements may be more flexible for vocational qualifications. You'll still graduate with a recognised degree, but you'll earn it at a college campus. The same process typically applies when applying and studying a degree at college, as it does university. Some colleges do offer direct applications so make sure to check their admissions section on their website if that interests you instead of applying via UCAS (we will discuss this later).

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs):

HNCs and HNDs are bite-sized HE qualifications usually offered at colleges. An **HNC** is a one-year Level 4 course, and an **HND** is a two-year Level 5 course. They are very practical and career-focused. Often, you can ‘top up’ an HND (or a two-year Foundation Degree) with an additional year at a university to earn a full bachelor's degree.

 For example, you might do an HND in Business or Engineering at a local college, then join the final year of a university degree course later. Or, you can use your HNC/HND to go straight into a related job and start your career earlier.

These qualifications are great if you want a more hands-on approach or aren't ready to commit to three years at a university right away.



Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships allow you to gain a qualification while working, but there are key differences between them:

✔ **Higher Apprenticeships (Level 4-5):**

These apprenticeships provide qualifications up to the equivalent of a foundation degree (such as a Higher National Certificate or Diploma). They're a great stepping stone into Degree Apprenticeships or skilled employment.

✔ **Degree Apprenticeships (Level 6-7):**

A Degree Apprenticeship lets you work and study at the same time to achieve a full bachelor's or even a master's degree. You'll be employed by a company and typically study one day a week (or in blocks) at a university or college. Your employer and the government cover the tuition costs – **so you earn a salary and don't pay tuition fees.**

Degree Apprenticeships usually take longer than a traditional degree (often 4 years instead of 3 for a bachelor's), and you might not get the full-time campus life experience, but you will graduate with both a degree and **real work experience.**

💡 For example, you could do a **Degree Apprenticeship in Digital Marketing:** during the week, you work at a marketing company, and maybe one day a week, you attend classes at a university to study marketing theory. By the end, you'll have a degree in Marketing, on-the-job experience, and **no student loans** to pay.

This route is ideal if you like the idea of being in the workforce and studying simultaneously. However, **places can be competitive**, especially for fields like engineering, medicine, law, and computer science.

Unlike full-time university degrees, there is **no fixed entry route** into higher-level and degree apprenticeships.

Employers set their own requirements, and applications are made directly to companies, not through UCAS. Some employers may look for A-Levels, T-Levels, BTECs, or relevant work experience.

Where to Find Degree and Higher Apprenticeships

To explore apprenticeship vacancies and entry requirements, check:

🔗 The [Office for Students website](#) (for general information)

🔗 The [Government's Apprenticeships website](#) (for current vacancies)

🔗 [UCAS Career Finder](#) (for employer-led apprenticeships)

(Plus, there are also options like online or part-time study if you need more flexibility – some people do their degrees through distance learning or evening/weekend classes. The key is: **there's no single "right" way to do HE!**)

As you can see, there are many pathways to get a higher-level qualification beyond the traditional full-time university route. Think about what environment and style of learning works best for you – whether it's a large university, a smaller college setting, or learning while working. **All of these routes lead to Higher Education success, just via different paths.**

"I realised learning wasn't just about passing exams – it was about discovering what I cared about, managing my own time, and growing as a person."



Busting Myths & Worries

Heard people say confusing things about university? Let's clear up a few myths that often worry students (especially those leaving care). We want you to have **the facts** so you feel more confident.

✘ **Myth 1:** "Higher Education is only for people who are good at academic subjects – not for people who did vocational courses."

✔ **Not true! Higher Education isn't just about writing essays or studying theory – there are loads of practical, hands-on, and creative courses too!**

Some courses focus more on learning by doing, while others mix practical work with classroom-based learning. For example, you could study film production, engineering, performing arts, health and social care, or business management – all of which involve practical elements.

💡 **What to do:** Research different courses, check the course content and learning style to see if it suits you. If you're unsure about how your background or qualifications fit, contact the university or college directly – they're happy to help!

✘ **Myth 2:** “You can only get a degree if you study at university.”

✔ **Nope! You can get a degree in lots of different ways.**

While many students go to university, you can also study for a degree at a local college, in a university centre, or even while working! Options include:

- **Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE):** Some colleges offer full degrees in a smaller, more familiar environment than a big university.
- **Degree Apprenticeships:** You can work and study at the same time, gaining experience while earning a degree (and a salary!).
- **Online and Part-Time Degrees:** Some courses allow you to study remotely or alongside a job.

💡 **What to do:** Think about what works best for you – whether that’s a traditional university setting, a local college, or an apprenticeship where you earn while you learn!



✘ **Myth 3:** “There’s no point in Higher Education – you can earn just as much by working.”

✔ **Actually, research shows that graduates earn more in the long run.**

Studies show that, on average, people who complete Higher Education earn about 35% more than those who don’t. That’s because many jobs that require a degree come with higher salaries and more career progression opportunities.

💡 **What to do:** Consider your long-term future. Higher Education can open doors to better-paying careers, more job stability, and roles that interest you – but if going straight into work is the best choice for you, that’s okay too! Just make sure you explore all options before deciding.

✘ **Myth 4:** “You can only apply to study in one place.”

✔ **Nope – you can apply for up to FIVE different courses!**

When applying through UCAS, you can choose up to five courses, either:

- ✎ At different universities or colleges (giving you multiple options in case one doesn’t accept you).
- ✎ At the same university but for different courses (for example, applying to both Business Management and Marketing at the same university).
- ✎ Note: You may also be able to make a direct application to a college’s university centre without going through UCAS.

💡 **What to do:** Apply to a range of places – that way, you have backup options if your first choice doesn’t work out.

✗ **Myth 5:** "Having a large student loan will stop me from getting a mortgage."

✓ **Nope! Having a student loan won't stop you from buying a house in the future.**

Student loans are not like normal loans – they don't show up on your credit score and don't work the same way as car loans or credit card debt. The Council of Mortgage Lenders confirms that student loans have little to no impact on getting a mortgage.

The only thing that might be considered is how much you repay monthly, but since repayments are based on how much you earn, this usually isn't a big deal.

💡 **What to do:** Focus on the course you are passionate about. If student loans are a deciding factor, consider Higher and Degree level Apprenticeships

✗ **Myth 6:** "If I say I'm care-experienced it will affect my chances of getting in."

✓ Nope – universities and colleges make offers based on your potential, not your background.

Your care-experienced status does NOT affect admissions decisions.

Universities and colleges only look at:

- ✓ **Your grades and qualifications** – Do you meet the entry requirements?
- ✓ **Your enthusiasm** – Does your personal statement show interest in the subject?
- ✓ **Your reference** – What do your teachers/tutors say about you?
- ✓ **Whether the course is a good fit for you** – Will you succeed in the subject?

In some cases, being care-experienced can actually help you! Some universities and HE in FE colleges offer contextual admissions, meaning they may lower the

entry requirements for care-experienced students to ensure fair access.

💡 **What to do:** Tick the box! Declaring your care experience on UCAS ensures you get the support and opportunities you're entitled to – but it won't negatively affect your application.

"I almost didn't mention I am care experienced, but I'm so glad I did—I was offered extra support I didn't even know about!"



✘ **Myth 7:** “If I tell my university or college I’m care-experienced, everyone will know.”

✓ **Nope! Your information is kept private and only shared with people who need to know.**

Declaring your care-experienced status does NOT mean all your lecturers, classmates, or tutors will know. Only relevant staff (like student support services, admissions teams, or accommodation staff) will be aware – and only if it helps them support you.

💡 **What happens when you declare your status?**

- A named care leaver contact may reach out to offer support.
- You might be invited to care-experienced student activities, but you’re never forced to join – it’s up to you! Other students and lecturers won’t know unless you choose to tell them.

💡 **What to do:** If you feel unsure, you can ask the university how they handle this information before applying. But in general, your privacy is always respected.



✘ **Myth 8:** “Higher Education will be a lonely place with no one to help.”

✓ **No way! There are tons of ways to make friends and get support.**

Universities and colleges want you to succeed – that’s why they have dedicated support services to help with:

- 😊 **Mental health and well-being** – Free counselling and emotional support.
- 👥 **Making friends** – Student unions, clubs, societies, and care-experienced networks.
- 📖 **Academic help** – Study skills support, tutors, and mentoring.

💡 **What to do:** When you start university, join student clubs, attend social events, and connect with student support services. You’ll find a community and support network to help you settle in.

“I thought I’d feel alone at first, but between my society, support services, and new friends, I’ve never felt more connected!”



Step-by-Step: Your Journey to University

So you're considering applying for a degree at university or an HE in FE college – fantastic! This section will break down the process into clear steps. We'll cover researching courses, applying, sorting your finances, finding accommodation, and getting support. You can think of it like a roadmap from now to your first day at uni.

1. Explore Your Options (Research Stage) 🔍


Timing: 1–2 years before you want to start university (for example, start researching in Year 12 if you plan to start uni after Year 13). Don't panic if you're later than that – just start as soon as you can.


What to do:

👉 **Think about subjects and careers** that interest you. What do you enjoy learning about? What kind of job would you like in the future? Make a list of fields or courses that spark your interest (for example, "sports science," "social work," "business," "nursing," "graphic design," etc.). It's okay if you have a few ideas or are unsure – this is normal!



- 🔍 **Research courses and universities/colleges.** Use websites like [UCAS.com](https://www.ucas.com) or [The Uni Guide](#) to search for courses in your interest areas. Each course listing will tell you what grades or qualifications you need (the entry requirements), what you'll study, and how it's taught.
- 📌 **Look at different universities and HE-in-FE colleges** – Check out a variety of universities (some nearby, some further away) and any **local colleges** that run **HE courses** in your field. Attend open days if you can: these are events (often in summer or autumn) where you can visit the campus, tour accommodation, and ask questions. Try to attend a couple of open days for places you're interested in – you can go with a friend, foster carer, or even on your own. (Many universities – and some colleges – will even reimburse travel costs for care-experienced students visiting open days. Be sure to ask about this!)
- 📄 **Note the support on offer:** As you research, also peek at what support each university provides for care-experienced students. Most unis have a webpage about support for care leavers (or "care-experienced" students). Look for things like bursaries (extra money), guaranteed accommodation, or a named contact person. This can be a factor in deciding where you might apply.

 **Ask for advice:** Talk to your school or college **career advisor** or teachers about your ideas. They can help suggest courses or give insight into different unis. Also, talk to your **foster carers, social worker, or personal advisor** (if you have one) – they might not have all the answers on HE, but they can support you in finding info or just encourage you. There are also outreach programs (like those by charities or local universities) specifically for care leavers – take advantage of those if available (they might offer campus visits or mentoring).

 **Key takeaway:** Take your time to explore. There's no rush to have all the answers immediately, but the more you look into things, the clearer it will become which path feels right. Jot down courses you like and their application deadlines.

"I had no idea where to start, but looking at different courses and going to open days really helped me figure out what felt right for me!"




2. Decide on Your Course & Where to Apply (Application Stage)

Timing: Typically **autumn of the year before** you start (around September –


January of Year 13 if aiming for entry after school). Some courses have earlier deadlines (like Oxford, Cambridge or medicine/vet courses have an October deadline in Year 13).


What to do:

 **Narrow down your choices.** From your research, pick up to **5 courses** you want to apply for. They can be at different universities or HE in FE colleges, or you might apply to a couple of courses at one – any combo, up to five choices. It's good to have a range – for example, some “aspirational” choices (higher entry requirements) and some “safe” choices (lower requirements you're confident to meet).

Get your application ready on UCAS.

UCAS is the online system for UK university applications. You'll need to create an account and fill in your details, education, and course choices. The important parts are:

 **Personal Statement:** This is a big part of your application. It's a 500-1000 word essay about why you want to study your chosen subject and why you'd be a great student. You talk about your interests, achievements, maybe career goals. Don't stress – it's okay to mention challenges you've overcome (like being in care) if you want to, but you don't have to. Focus on showing enthusiasm for the course. Get a teacher or advisor to help proofread it.

 **Reference:** A teacher or tutor will write a recommendation for you. Make sure whoever is writing it knows about any challenges you've had that

might have affected grades, so they can put that in context (for example, changing schools, personal issues). They should definitely mention if you have shown resilience or growth – this helps admissions tutors see your potential.

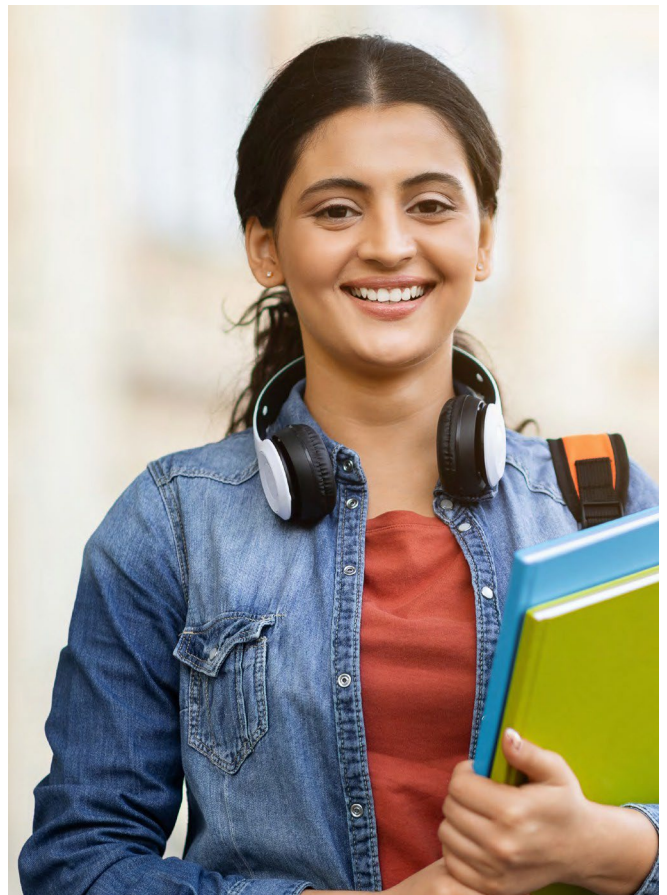
☑ **Check the care experience box:** Very important – UCAS will ask if you have ever been in care. **Tick “yes”** (if you feel comfortable – but remember the reality: it will only be used to support you, not to disadvantage you). This flag lets universities know to reach out with support and consider you for any contextual offers or programs for care leavers. If you skip it, you might miss out on help. The info stays confidential and doesn't go to everyone, so don't worry about privacy.

🔍 **Consider “access schemes”:** Some universities or organisations have special access schemes or programs for students from certain backgrounds (like care leavers). These might give extra mentoring, or an interview guarantee, or a lower grade offer. Look up if the universities on your list have something like a “care leaver progression scheme” and apply for it if so – these can only help you.

📅 **Submit before the deadline:** For most courses, the UCAS deadline is in January (mid-January of the year you'll start in autumn). Mark it on your calendar and try to submit before that. (If you're applying to Oxbridge or medicine/dentistry, your deadline is earlier – October in the year before.) After you submit, UCAS sends your application to your chosen universities. Then you wait for offers, which usually come through late winter to spring.

💡 **Pro tip:** If at any point you feel stuck or unsure in the application process, reach out for help. Your school likely has someone to help with UCAS. Also, many universities have a **designated contact for care leavers** – you can find their email on the uni's website or via the Propel website (Propel is a site listing support contacts for care leavers at each uni). You can email them saying, *“Hi, I'm a care-experienced student interested in applying, can I ask about your support?”* They'll be happy to assist, and it shows you're proactive.

! **Important:** Not all universities or colleges require a UCAS application. Some allow **direct applications** through their websites admissions section, however, do check their terms as these can differ between institutions.



3. Student Finance

Timing: Around spring (February – April) before you start the course. You usually apply for finance in the spring after you've applied to uni (you don't need a confirmed place to apply for student finance – you can use your first choice and adjust later if needed).

What to do:

Apply for the following: Student Finance:

In England, that means applying to **Student Finance England (SFE)**. This is the official way to get your **Tuition Fee Loan** and **Maintenance Loan**. You can apply online, and there's a section where you declare your care leaver status.

! Important: If you've been in care at least 13 weeks and were in care on your 16th birthday, you're considered an **independent student** for finance. This is good because it means you'll likely get the **maximum Maintenance Loan** (since it's not based on your guardian's income). SFE might ask for proof that you were in care – usually a letter from your local authority or social worker confirming your dates in care. Get this ready (ask your leaving care personal advisor or social worker).



💰 Tuition Fee Loan: This pays your course fees (around £9,535 per year in England currently). It doesn't go to you; it's paid directly to the university. You will have to pay it back, but **not until after you finish and only if you earn enough** – we'll explain repayment in a second.

💰 Maintenance Loan: This comes to you for living costs (rent, food, books, etc.). The amount depends on your circumstances. As a care-experienced student with independent status, you'll get a higher amount (because they assume £0 household income). This loan is paid into your bank account in instalments (typically at the start of each term). Use it wisely for your expenses – budgeting is key.

Grants and Bursaries: Unlike loans, these are free money you don't pay back. Look out for:

✓ **Local authority leaving care grant:** Most councils give around £2,000 to young people leaving care to help set up their new home (sometimes called a Setting Up Home Allowance). If you're moving out to attend uni, this can help buy essentials (kettle, bedding, laptop, etc.). Check with your personal advisor that this is arranged for you.

✓ **University bursaries/scholarships:** Many universities offer a care leaver bursary – e.g. £1,000 or £1,500 per year for students who ticked that box or can show they were in care. It's usually not automatic; you might need to fill out a short form or let the student support office know you're eligible. Definitely ask each of your chosen universities what they offer. This is on top of loans – you don't have to pay bursaries back! Some unis have other scholarships you could apply for (based on academic talent, or specific career goals, etc.). Take some

time to search the uni's "Fees and Funding" pages or ask the finance office. Free money is good – don't miss out.

- ✓ **Estranged student/care-experienced grants:** There are charities and organisations that provide grants for students without family support. For instance, Buttle UK or Stand Alone or others sometimes have funds – a quick search online or chat with a advisor can reveal extra funding sources.

"I was worried about money, but applying for student finance was easier than I thought—and I even got extra bursaries I didn't know existed!"



- ✓ **The Care Leaver Covenant:** This is a promise many organisations make to support young people from care. Under this, some organisations or charities might have special offers – for example, the [Unite Foundation Scholarship](#) which can give free accommodation for 3 years to care leavers (that's a big one – check if you can apply!).

We've put together a Care Leaver Covenant that highlights the support available from universities and colleges for care-experienced learners like you. You can check it out on our [website](#) to see what's on offer. It's always worth exploring your options—you might be surprised by the support available!

Repayments

So let's understand repayment (but don't panic about it now): Student loans feel huge, but the system is designed so that **if you don't earn enough, you don't pay.**

Currently, once you finish, you start repaying **only when you earn over about £25,000** a year (under Plan 5 terms). And then it's just a percentage of what you earn above that. For example, if you earned £30,000, you're £5,000 over the threshold, and you'd pay 9% of £5,000 over a year – which is about £37 a month. If you lose your job or earn under the threshold, **payments stop.**

After 40 years (for the newest plans), any remaining balance is wiped. **Also, student loan debt doesn't go on your credit record** like normal debt, and it **won't stop you from getting a mortgage** later in life (mortgage lenders mostly care about your monthly income, and since loan payments adjust with income, it's not seen the same as, say, credit card debt). So while it's important to be aware, try not to let the idea of "debt" scare you – it's more like a **graduate tax** that successful earners pay forward.

Don't let finances hold you back. Student loans, grants, and bursaries are there to support you through university so you can focus on your studies.

💡 Key takeaway: Apply for funding early (don't wait till last minute in summer). And always ask about **extra support** for care-experienced students – there might be more out there for you than you think (like bursaries or local funds). With loans and bursaries combined, you should have the means to cover tuition and basic living costs. If at any point money gets tight while studying your degree, remember universities and colleges often have **hardship funds** you can apply to for emergency help. You're not expected to do it alone.



4. Find the Right Place to Live (Accommodation Stage) 🏠

Timing: Spring/early summer before you start (once you've got offers or decided on a firm choice). After you accept a university offer (normally you firm up your choice by May), you can start sorting accommodation.

What to do:

University Halls: Most first-year students live in "halls of residence" – basically dorms or student flats run by the university. These can be on campus or nearby. For care-experienced students, many unis **guarantee a place** in halls (as long as you apply by their deadline). Halls are convenient – you'll have your own room (sometimes en-suite, sometimes shared bathroom) and share a kitchen/lounge with other students, which is great for making friends. **Apply early** for uni accommodation through the university's housing portal. On your form or application, look out for a place to mention you are a care leaver – some unis will then automatically consider you for any special accommodation support.

Accommodation support for care leavers: As a care-experienced student, you might get perks like:

📅 **Year-round housing:** Many unis offer **365-day accommodation** so you don't have to move out for Christmas or summer holidays. This is super helpful if you don't have a stable home to go back to during breaks. Always ask if this is available (and whether it's free or has an extra cost).

- **No guarantor needed:** A guarantor is someone (usually a guardian) who signs to cover rent if you can't. If you don't have one, some unis will act as a guarantor for you so you can rent uni or private housing without worry.

👁️ **Discounts or bursaries for housing:**


A few unis give rent discounts for care leavers, or even free accommodation for the first year. And external programs like the **Unite Foundation** (if your uni is partnered) can provide free student housing for up to 3 years for care leavers – definitely worth checking!


🧰 **Starter packs:** Some places might provide a pack of essentials (bedding, kitchen utensils) when you move in. If not, you can use part of your setting up allowance for these.



Choosing halls

When you apply, you might get to list preferences (e.g., catered vs self-catered, en-suite vs shared bathroom, single-gender or mixed flats, quiet or sociable dorm, etc.). Think about what suits you. Catered (meals provided) can simplify food, but self-catered gives more freedom (and is usually cheaper). If you value quiet, you can request quieter halls. Some unis even have **alcohol-free** flats or specific mature student flats – if those things matter to you, ask what options exist.


 **Alternatives:** Not all universities or colleges offer halls of residence – especially some colleges that provide higher education courses. It's important to think early about where you'll live while studying.

 **Staying Put:** If you have a “staying put” arrangement with your foster family, you might choose to live at home and commute. This can save money and keep you close to your support network. Just make sure you'll have the space and quiet time you need to study.

Private Housing:

Some students rent a shared house or private flat – especially if their college or uni doesn't have halls. First-year students often choose halls because they're set up for new students and can help you settle in. But if you go private, ask your uni if they offer a guarantor scheme – this can help you rent without needing a family member to act as your guarantor.

You can also check whether your local authority, a charity, or student support team offers help with housing costs or deposits for care-experienced students.

 **Visit if you can:** If possible, take a tour of the accommodation during an open day. Seeing the room and facilities can make you feel more comfortable and help you plan what to bring.

 **Key takeaway: Secure your accommodation early.** And **communicate with the university's accommodation team** about your situation – they can often adjust to meet your needs (like letting you move in a bit early, or stay over holidays, etc., often they just need to know what you need). Moving out on your own is a big step, but you'll have a room of your own where you can make your little comfy space. Don't be afraid to ask questions like “Is there 24/7 security or wardens? What do I do if I have an issue with my room?” The more you know, the more at ease you'll feel.

"I was nervous about moving but choosing the right accommodation made all the difference—now I have my own space and a great support system around me!"

5. Prepare for University Life (Transition Stage)


Timing: Summer before you start and the first weeks at uni.

You've got your place (yay!), sorted your funding and where you'll live. Now it's all about getting ready to actually go. This stage is about making the transition as smooth as possible and knowing what support is there once you arrive.



What to do in summer:

Stay in touch with your uni's support contact: Many universities will reach out to students who indicated they are care-experienced, sometime after results or over summer. If you hear from a **Care Leaver Coordinator** or someone in student services, respond and keep their contact info. They can help answer any last-minute questions and might even arrange a visit or special orientation for you. If you don't hear from them by late summer, it's a good idea to email them yourself just to introduce yourself and confirm any support (for example, "Hi, I'm starting in Sept and I'm a care-experienced student. Just checking in about my accommodation contract length and any welcome events – thanks!"). Taking initiative is always good.

 **Packing and logistics:** Make a list of what to bring. Important stuff: documents (ID, letter confirming you were in care for proof if needed, university acceptance letters, student finance letters), kitchen items (if self-catered), bedding (check bed size), clothes (don't overpack – you can always get things later, but do bring some comfy items that make you feel at home), any academic stuff (laptop, notebooks). Don't forget things like chargers, maybe a special memento or two that gives you comfort. If you need help transporting things, talk to your personal advisor – some local authorities help with moving costs or might drop you off. Or maybe your foster carer can drive you. Universities often have big **arrival days** with student volunteers to help you move in – it's okay if you come on your own, you'll get help unloading.

 **Get familiar with life skills:** Over summer, practice some basics if you haven't already: cooking a few simple meals (pasta, eggs, whatever you like), doing laundry, budgeting your weekly expenses. You don't have to be an expert – you'll learn a lot as you go – but a little practice boosts your confidence. Also, set up a **student bank account** (banks offer accounts with perks for students – you might get a free railcard or something). Having your finances organised before you arrive helps.



Once you arrive at uni:

Induction and Freshers' Week:

Universities have welcome weeks at the start. Go to the orientation events, tours, and the Freshers' Fair (where you see all the clubs and societies you can join). Even if it's a bit overwhelming, these events are where everyone is new and looking to make friends. Consider joining a club or society that interests you – it's a built-in way to meet people. From sports teams to Harry Potter fan clubs to volunteering groups, there's usually something for everyone.

✓ **Meet your support staff:** Early on, try to meet the people who are there to support you. For example, find out when you can meet your **personal tutor** (an academic staff member assigned to check in on your progress) – introduce yourself and let them know you're eager to do well. Also, connect with the **care leaver contact** or student support officer. Sometimes they'll invite you to a meet-up or one-to-one chat. They can help with any questions about settling in, and later on they can assist if any issues come up (personal or academic). Remember, they're on your side and want you to succeed.

✓ **Settle into a routine but also reach out:** The first term will be full of new experiences. It's normal to have ups and downs. Maybe one day you're loving the freedom, next day you feel a bit homesick or stressed – totally normal. In those moments, don't hesitate to use the support services: university counseling, student advice center, or even drop a text to your old support network (former foster carer, mentor, etc.) for a chat. Many unis also have peer mentor programs – if you have one, you can talk to an older student who knows the ropes.

✓ **Academic support:** University work can be a step up. If you ever struggle with an assignment or understanding lectures, use the help available: go to tutor office hours (time professors set aside to help students), ask if the uni has a writing center or study skills workshops. Also, being care-experienced doesn't mean you will struggle academically, but if you ever feel your personal situation is affecting your work (say a tough anniversary date, or mental health dip), **tell someone**. Unis have a process for "mitigating circumstances" – basically, if life events affect your studies, they can give extensions or other support. Knowing this exists can relieve pressure – you have safety nets.

💡 **Important:** You are entitled to support and you deserve to enjoy your time in HE. It might take a little while to find your groove, but you will. Many care-experienced students thrive at university – and even if there are bumps, you have a team behind you (both at uni and possibly your leaving care worker checking in). Never be afraid to ask for help or advice; there's no silly question in that first year – everyone is figuring things out.



You're not alone: Support is there for you

"At first, I didn't know what support was out there, but once I reached out, I realised there were so many people ready to help—now I know I'm not alone in this!"



We've mentioned support a lot – here's a summary of the help available specifically for care-experienced learners in HE:

- ✓ **Dedicated Staff and Contacts:** Almost every uni/college has a **named contact for care leavers or care-experienced students**. Their job is to be a go-to person for you – from application stage through graduation. They can liaise with accommodation, finance, or academic departments on your behalf if any issues arise. If you haven't been introduced to yours, check the uni's website or the Propel website to find their email. Write it down!
- ✓ **Care Leaver Covenant:** Many institutions including our member higher education providers have signed up to the [Care Leaver Covenant](#), meaning they've committed to certain support standards. This can include things like guaranteed accommodation, additional mentoring, internships or work opportunities for care leavers, etc. Check if your uni is part of this and what that entails – info might be on their care leavers page or ask the support contact.

💰 **Financial Support:** To reiterate, you have access to **maximised student loans** (as an independent student) and often **extra bursaries**. During uni, if you face financial hardship, the uni might have **hardship funds** you can apply to. And your local authority should continue some support: you likely have a **Personal Advisor (PA)** assigned until you're 25 – keep in touch with them, as they can help you navigate leaving care benefits, vacation accommodation, or just provide a friendly ear and advice.

😊 **Health and Wellbeing:** Universities provide **free counselling services, mental health advisors, and disability support**. If you ever feel anxious, depressed, or are struggling, you can contact them. There's no shame in using these – lots of students do, for all sorts of reasons. Also register with a local **doctor (GP)** when you move, so you have medical support nearby. Some unis have on-campus health centers.

👤 **Mentoring and Networks:** Some universities have **peer mentoring** specifically for care-experienced students – pairing new students with those in later years who also were in care. This can be great to talk to someone who “gets it.” There may also be student-led groups or socials for care leavers. If not, maybe you could even start one with help from the Student Union – chances are there are others like you who'd love to connect.

📖 **Academic Support:** This includes personal tutors, study skills workshops, library help, and sometimes **contextual support** like extra tutoring if you need to catch up on a certain subject. If you had any learning support at

school (for example, for dyslexia or similar), make sure the uni's disability service knows so they can continue support (this is separate from being in care, but don't forget it if relevant).

♥ **Your Foster Carers/Supporters:** Just because you're becoming independent doesn't mean your supporters disappear. Foster carers, guardians, or family friends who've been there for you can still be involved. While the uni can't share your information with them without your permission (due to data privacy), you can absolutely share what you want with them and even invite them to open days or moving-in day. They might worry about you (that's normal), but you can reassure them by sharing how the uni is supporting you. If it helps, you could introduce them to the uni support staff on day one, so they also feel assured that you have a safety net.

👉 Remember, **asking for help is a strength, not a weakness**. Whether it's advice on an assignment, talking through feelings of stress, or needing a bit of financial help, the support is there – you just need to reach out. Universities want their students to succeed and be happy, and that includes you!



Your Next Steps Checklist ✓

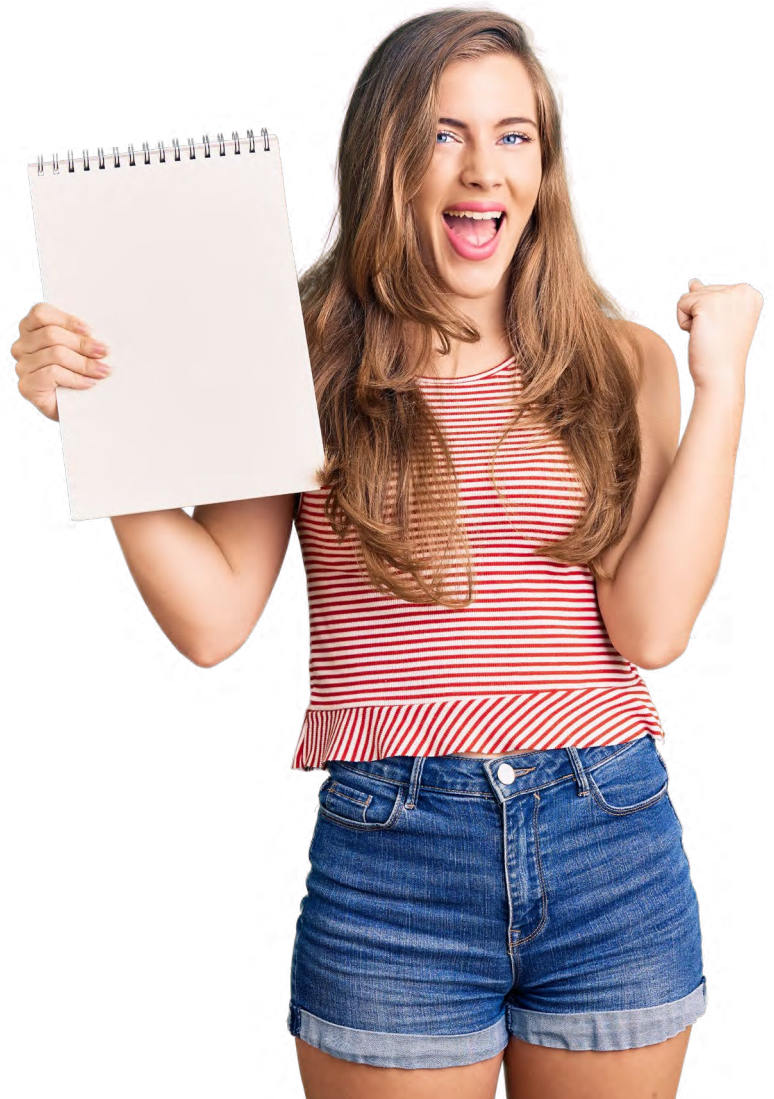
That was a lot of info – but don't worry, you don't have to memorise it. Here's a handy **checklist** of next steps to keep things simple. You can refer back to this as you move forward:

- ✓ **Research courses and careers** that interest you. Jot down 2-5 potential courses or subjects.
- ✓ **Look up universities/colleges** offering those courses. Check entry requirements and support for care leavers at each.
- ✓ **Attend an open day** (in person or virtual) or contact admissions to get a feel for the places you like.
- ✓ **Talk to your carers, teachers, or advisors** about your plans and ask for any help you need in the process.
- ✓ **Create a UCAS application** (if applying to universities). Write your personal statement and get a reference from a teacher. **Tick the box** saying you have been in care.
- ✓ **Apply to up to 5 courses** on UCAS by the deadline (mid-Jan, or earlier if needed). Double-check all details, then hit submit!
- ✓ **Apply for Student Finance** (around Feb-March). Mark yourself as independent (care leaver) and send in any proof they ask for (e.g., a letter from your local authority).
- ✓ **Apply for bursaries/grants:** Ask each chosen uni (or check their website) about care leaver bursaries or scholarships and how to get them. Also ensure your local authority knows you're heading to HE to arrange any leaving care grant.



- ✓ **Firm up your university choice** (when offers come in). Once you decide which offer to accept, complete the steps with UCAS to accept your firm (and insurance) offer.
- ✓ **Secure accommodation:** As soon as housing applications open at your chosen uni, apply for accommodation. Mention that you're a care-experienced student and request any specific support you need (like 52-week accommodation).
- ✓ **Contact the care leaver support officer** at the uni (if you haven't already) to introduce yourself and ask any questions. They can help ensure everything is in place for you.
- ✓ **Prepare for moving:** Sort out what you need to bring, sort transportation for move-in day, and take any life-skills prep you feel you need (cooking, budgeting practice, etc.). Your personal advisor or social worker can help you plan for this transition.
- ✓ **Register with a GP** near the university and any support services you might need (counselling, etc.) once you arrive.
- ✓ **Enjoy Freshers' Week** – go to events, meet people, and sign up for any clubs that sound fun!
- ✓ **Settle into your studies:** Attend your classes, meet your tutors, and establish a routine. Don't hesitate to use academic support like tutoring centers or study groups.
- ✓ **Stay connected:** Keep in touch with your support network back home and build a new one at uni. You have double support now! If anything gets tough, remember all the people and services ready to help you.

Finally: believe in yourself. You've made it this far and you have overcome challenges already. Higher Education can be a fresh start and a place to discover your potential. Being care-experienced has given you strength and resilience that will serve you well at university. With the right support and preparation, you can absolutely thrive in HE – academically, socially, and personally. 🎓



Useful Links

Higher Education

[Go Higher West Yorkshire](#): A partnership of 13 Higher Education (HE) providers working collaboratively to reduce inequalities in HE access and success, particularly supporting underrepresented groups.

[UCAS](#): The UK's centralised service for university applications, providing guidance on applications, finance, and career options.

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

The [Office for Students website](#) (for general information)

The [Government's Apprenticeships website](#) (for current vacancies)

[UCAS Career Finder](#) (for employer-led apprenticeships)

Finance

[Student Finance England](#): Provides tuition fee and maintenance loans for students in England.

[Disabled Students' Allowance \(DSA\)](#): Offers financial support for students with disabilities, mental health conditions, or learning difficulties.

[Turn2Us Grant Search](#): A tool to help find grants and financial support from charities and organizations.

Wellbeing

[Office for Students - Student Mental Health](#): Information on how universities can support student mental health and wellbeing.

[NHS - Student Mental Health Counselling](#): Provides guidance and services available to students dealing with mental health issues.

[Mind - Student Mental Health](#): A mental health charity offering resources tailored to students.

HOP

HUMBER OUTREACH PROGRAMME

