

Clearing for the Confused: parents start here

August. Sun, sea and simmering tension. At least if you are a pre-university student expecting exam results. Perhaps more so if you are that student's parents. What if it all goes pear shaped? Grades not made? Or – and yes, it does happen – results exceed those predicted? Welcome to the wonderful world of Clearing. A part of the summer when students pursuing places, and universities seeking students, come together in an often frenetic courtship ritual.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is the matchmaker here. They publish the vacancies, you phone the universities, and a marriage made in heaven ensues. Easy-peasy, right? Not quite.

Clearing is orchestrated by UCAS, but you and yours are the prime players. So preparation – and some perspiration – is required. Read on for enlightenment...

Practical points for a pain-free process: Part 1

- **Utilise UCAS!** Data, deadlines, do's and don'ts, they're all there. Ignore them at your peril
- **Don't look back.** Now is not the time to apportion blame for imperfect application, lack of revision, too many teenage nights on the town or the tiles
- **Speed is of the essence.** But pause to plot your pathway before hitting the accelerator. Three years on the wrong degree is a long time to rue a decision made in haste
- **Research.** All universities have online prospectuses. Read them. BEFORE you reach for the phone. And be sure to *peruse the small print*
 - **Example 1:** Where is your degree located? On the main campus or in a galaxy far far away?
 - **Example 2:** Course title is often a poor indicator, or indeed, no indicator, of course content. What *exactly* is on offer?
 - **Example 3:** some vocational degrees are approved by professional bodies, others are not. Which would you prefer?

I could go on, but you get the gist.

And there's more. That's just the groundwork, now for the action.

Practical points for a pain-free process: Part 2

- **Be there.** Ensure your child is in situ, not on holiday. Technology is all very well but what happens if the line from Ibiza is iffy or the connection from Corfu collapses?
- **Be persistent.** Hang on in there. University phone lines are often so hot they're sizzling. Don't let go. Multiple mobiles, lots of landlines, patience, perseverance – let these be your watchwords
- **Be prepared.** Admissions tutors can be trickier than even the toughest TV talent-spotter. So once your child gets through, opportunity is well and truly knocking. Can they sell their strengths, rationalise rotten results, reel off reasons for current choice of course? No? Then after all that angst, it could be thanks, but no thanks. Practise, plan, perfect the patter. Then get your son or daughter to call. Admissions tutors prefer to interview the applicant, not the parent
- **Be responsive.** Follow it up. Places are lost because deadlines are discounted, letters are left, emails ignored. Don't falter at the final fence. Either you or your offspring needs to keep tabs on all correspondence whether it's snail mail or e-type

So – eight essentials for surviving and thriving in Clearing. Keep them close, and while others may flounder, you – and your offspring – will flourish.

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