

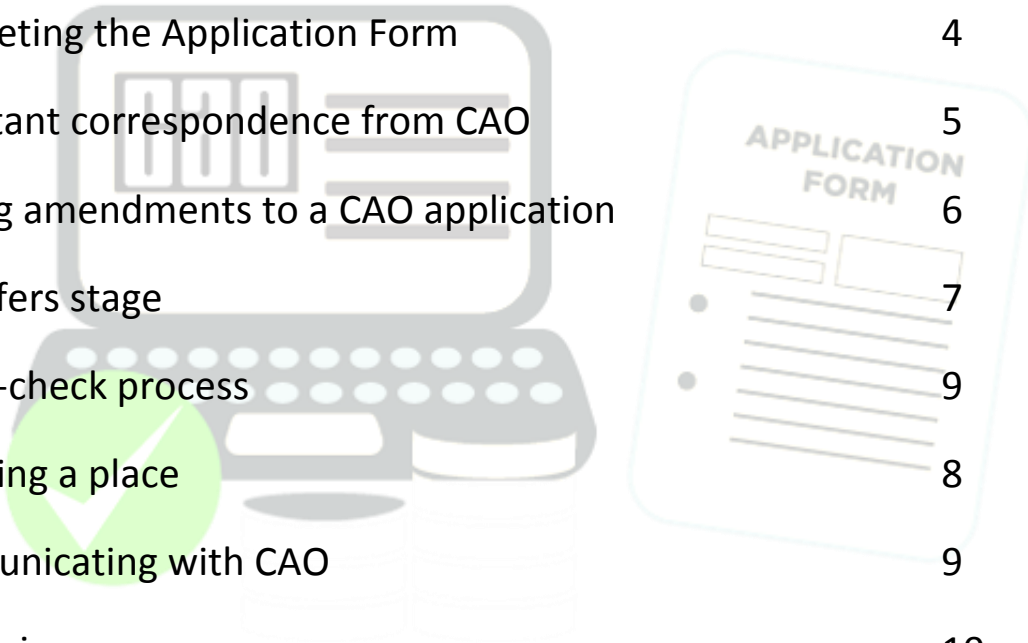
The CAO: A guide for parents and guardians



Central Applications Office

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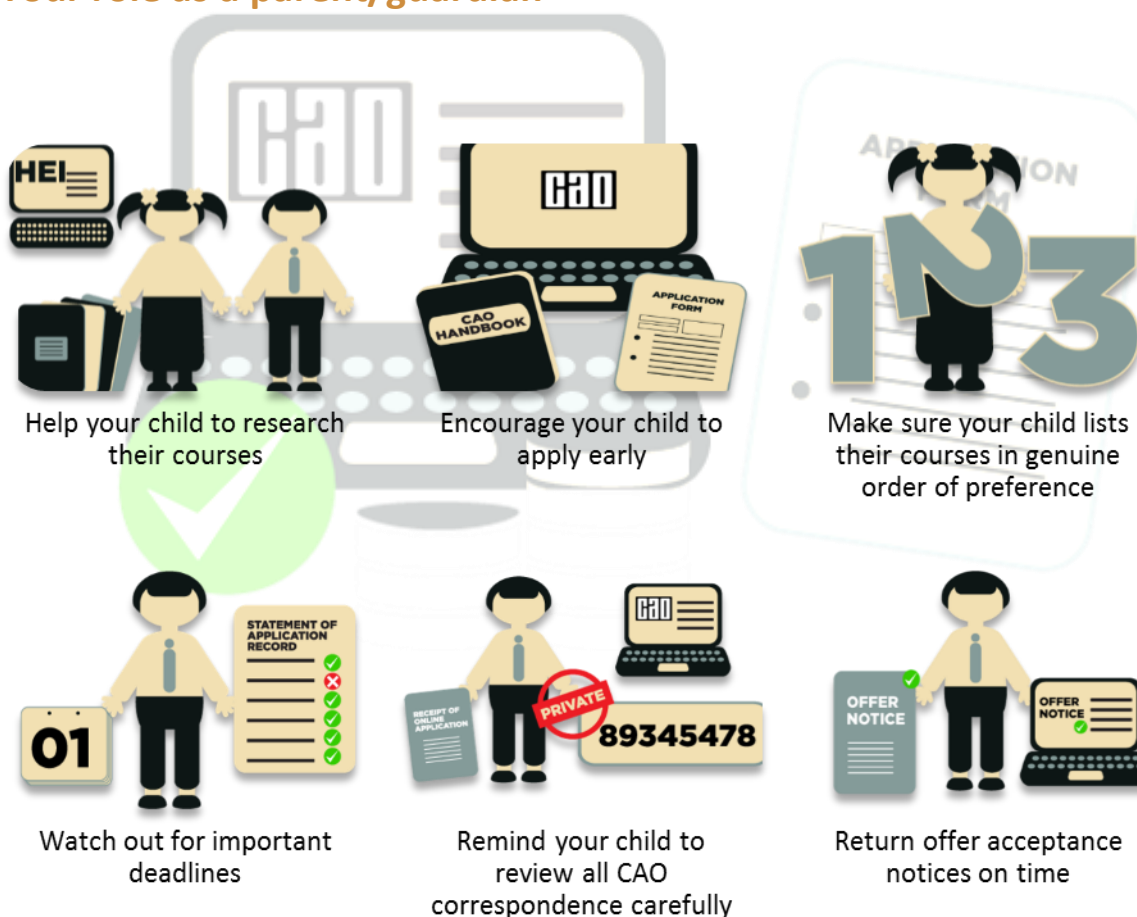
Introduction

Welcome to *The CAO: A guide for parents and guardians*. This document has been prepared by the Central Applications Office (CAO) to assist parents and guardians supporting a student in their undergraduate application to Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The CAO is responsible for processing applications and recording acceptances for HEIs, but all decisions on admissions are made by the individual Institutions and not by CAO.

The information provided in this guide is tailored for parents and should not be used by students. Students must carefully read the CAO Handbook, distributed to their school in September, which contains information on all of the courses, restrictions, deadlines, fees and application guidelines. All students should also seek the advice of their school Guidance Counsellor before completing their CAO application.

Your role as a parent/guardian



Throughout this guide we use the terms 'parent', 'guardian', and 'child', but please note that this document has been prepared for a parent, step-parent, guardian, carer or supporter of someone applying to CAO.

Helping your child to choose their higher education courses

It is extremely important that your child takes the time to review all of the courses and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) available to them. Courses are listed in the CAO Handbook and can also be searched on the CAO website www.cao.ie.

The courses listed in the Handbook are classified with reference to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Courses are listed by their NFQ Level of learning achievement, e.g. NFQ Level 6, 7 or 8 and by the NFQ Award-Type to which each course leads e.g. Honours Bachelor Degree.

This table outlines the range of NFQ Levels and Award-Types that are used to classify the courses in the Handbook:

NFQ Levels	Major Award-Types
Level 8	Honours Bachelor Degree (HD)
Level 7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree (DG)
Level 6	Higher Certificate (HC)

A small number of courses listed in this Handbook lead to what are known as non-major awards. Where applicable these will be listed as Certificates (CT) or Foundation Certificates (FC) at NFQ level 6 and as Diplomas (DP) at NFQ Level 7.

Students should request a prospectus or visit the website of the Institution that they are interested in attending. **When deciding on courses, your child must make sure to check the minimum entry requirements for each of the courses and take note of any restrictions, such as early application dates, supplementary information that may need to be submitted, or if an interview forms part of the qualification process;** such courses are referred to in the handbook as restricted courses and late application or change of mind deadlines may not apply for these courses.

If you know of any family members or friends who are attending the Institution that your child is interested in attending, or who have completed the courses that they are interested in studying, then you should arrange for your child to meet with them to discuss the course and Institution in greater detail. Attendance at Open Days and Education Fairs can also be helpful.

When helping your child to decide what courses they want to apply for you should also take some time to consider the financial implications of their decision; consider the cost of accommodation, food, and travel expenses for every year of study.

The application deadlines

There are a number of important deadlines throughout the year that you should take note of:

Date	Deadline
5 November 12:00 noon	Online application facility opens
20 January 5:15 PM	Discounted online application fee deadline – €25
31 January 5:15 PM	Change of Course Choices closes
01 February 5:15 PM	Normal closing date for online and paper applications
05 February 12:00 noon	Online facility to amend course choices opens
15 February	Statement of Course Choices sent to paper applicants only
1 March 5:15 PM	Closing date for amending course choices
1 March 5:15 PM	Closing date for final completion of HEAR/DARE forms
1 April 5:15 PM	Latest date for HEAR/DARE documentation to be received by CAO
1 May 5:15 PM	Closing date for late applications
5 May 12:00 noon	Online Change of Mind facility becomes available
15 May	Late paper applicants are sent a Statement of Course Choices
End of May	Statement of Application Record sent to all applicants
1 July 5:15 PM	Change of Mind closes
22 July 5:15 PM	Exceptional closing date for those attending a participating HEI

Completing the Application Form

The majority of students now complete the application form online. Students who submit a form online may avoid some of the many common pitfalls experienced by those who submit a paper application form, for example entering an invalid course code. The CAO system will detect invalid course codes and notify the applicant immediately, allowing the student to correct the error straight away.



Students should place their courses choices in genuine order of preference, and not based on predictions about what the points score will be or how they will perform in their examinations, so please remind your child of this fact when they are completing their application form.

When your child submits an online application they will receive an e-mail containing details of their registration and their CAO application number. This number is extremely important as it will be used by your child for all communication with the CAO throughout the year.

If your child is absent from the postal address provided, and/or unable to receive e-mails at any stage throughout the application process, they may give this number to a parent/guardian or someone that they are happy to have acting on their behalf.

The application form itself is fairly self-explanatory, but please remind your child to take care when entering all identifying information such as name, date of birth, postal address, and their examination number. They also must inform us of the examinations that they will be taking, or that they have completed in the past, as if we do not have this information in advance your child cannot be credited for it at the offers stage.

It is extremely important for applicants to save their information at different stages throughout the online application process. When your child first registers on the CAO system they will receive an e-mail in acknowledgment of their application; if they do not receive an e-mail this may indicate that their application was incomplete or the e-mail may have automatically redirected to a spam folder.

Occasionally browsers will time-out and information may be lost; CAO has no control over this. If your child has received their application number and has concerns over whether information that they input into the system was recorded correctly, they can login to their account to check. At certain stages throughout the application process your child may be permitted to change course choices or their order of preference, however, make sure to check the relevant deadlines and be aware of any restrictions that may apply.

An online application demo is available via www.cao.ie from November 5.

Important correspondence from CAO

The CAO communicates with applicants via e-mail, text and post at different stages throughout the year. All correspondence from CAO should be treated as extremely important and checked carefully to make sure that the information held on file by CAO is correct.



When your child applies online their first correspondence with CAO will be in the form of an automated e-mail which will contain your child's application number and the application details that they have provided. If your child sends in a paper application form they will receive a **Statement of Course Choices** by mid-February which will contain their CAO application number, the personal information provided by your child to CAO, and the details of their course choices and course preferences. This document must be checked carefully and any errors or omissions must be notified to CAO in writing IMMEDIATELY. If your child does not receive this document by

February 15th you must contact CAO immediately via www.cao.ie and we will issue a duplicate copy.

Before the end of May all applicants (online and paper) will receive a **Statement of Application Record** in the post. This is an extremely important document and must be carefully reviewed and any errors or omissions must be noted on this form and returned to CAO immediately. If your child has not received this document by the end of May you must contact CAO via www.cao.ie immediately and we will issue a duplicate copy.

Accompanying the **Statement of Application Record** will be a **Change of Mind Form**.

The Change of Mind (restrictions apply) facility is available online and most students will make their changes online. The paper form may also be used by your child if they wish to amend the order of course choices, or if they wish to introduce new courses.

At the offers stage, your child will either receive an **Offer Notice** or another **Statement of Application Record**. If they receive a **Statement of Application Record** this is because they have not been entitled to an offer of a place by the Institution. You must ensure that your child checks that all of the information that CAO currently holds on file is correct, including their examination details. If your child receives an **Offer Notice** this means that they have been deemed entitled to a place on one of their Level 8 or Level 7/6 courses, or both.

Please check that the information contained on the **Offer Notice** is correct and inform CAO of any incorrect or omitted information. A further explanation of the offers stage will be provided later in this document.

Making amendments to a CAO application

There are a number of deadlines that must be noted when your child is making amendments to their CAO application. Changes to some personal information cannot be carried out online and your child will have to post the amendment with their CAO application number to CAO, Tower House, Eglinton Street, Galway (please keep proof of postage).

Amendment Deadlines

Date	Deadline
November 5 – January 31	Change of Course Choices facility available online (FREE)
February 5 – March 1 5:15 PM	Online facility to amend course choices available (FEE: €10)
May 5 – July 1 5:15 PM	Change of Mind facility is available (FREE)

It is important to note that there are restrictions on introducing courses on the Change of Mind Form. Applicants can complete a Change of Mind Form online or in the paper form; the majority of applicants use the online Change of Mind facility which helps to reduce the number of errors and omissions which are recorded by applicants using the paper form.

Page 4 of the CAO Handbook outlines these restrictions

The offer stage

There are three main rounds of offers: Round A, Round Zero, and Round One. After Round One offers have been accepted CAO then issues Round Two offers for remaining places; subsequent offers are issued by CAO as necessary until October to fill any vacancies that may arise.

The Offer Rounds

Round	Category of Applicants
Round A (early July)	Deferred applicants; mature applicants; mature nursing/midwifery code applicants; and applicants who have completed an Access course.
Round Zero (early August)	Graduate entry medicine applicants; additional mature, deferred and Access applicants; and applicants presenting FETAC for consideration for entry to courses with a quota for FETAC applicants.
Round One (mid-August)	All applicants applying on the basis of school leaving examination results, regardless of year completed.
Round Two and subsequent offers (late-August to mid-October)	All applicants applying on the basis of school leaving examination results, regardless of year completed.

If your child is applying on the basis of school leaving examination results, regardless of the year completed, they may receive an offer in Round One. Round One offers will be issued as soon as possible after the current year Irish Leaving Certificate Examination results become available, normally within a week of the issue of results to candidates, in mid-August.

The results are input into the CAO computer, and for each course that your child applied for the CAO system will first check that your child meets the minimum entry requirements (e.g. 2x HC3 or a third language if required).

If your child meets the eligibility criteria for the course(s) that they have applied for, the system then calculates a points score for your child based on their examination results.

Your child will then be placed on a list in order of merit for each course that they are eligible for – e.g. if your child has the highest points score he/she goes to the top of the list and the child with the second-highest points score goes second on the list, and so on.

The HEI then instructs CAO on how many offers to make for each course. If your child was in 20th position for a chosen course, and the Institution instructs CAO to offer 25 places, then your child will receive an offer of a place on that course, unless they have received an offer of a course higher up on their preference list. **It is really important for students to realise that they will be offered the single highest preference course on each list which they are deemed eligible for and have the required points.** Your child cannot be offered a lower preference course if they receive an offer of a course higher up on their preference list.

For some courses random number selection may also be a factor. Before students are placed on the Order of Merit list for a course that they are deemed eligible for they are assigned a random number; this random number is different for each course. If there are five applicants with an identical points score competing for one remaining place, the random number selection applies and the place will be offered to the candidate with the highest random number.

If your child doesn't receive an offer in the first round of offers they may receive an offer in subsequent rounds. Your child will have received their Statement of Application Record which you should make sure is checked carefully to ensure that all of the information is correct.

If your child doesn't receive an offer in subsequent rounds they may also apply through the Available Places facility on the CAO website. The Available Places facility lists all of the courses which institutions have not yet filled. Applicants who meet the minimum eligibility criteria may apply for such courses and they must do so through the Available Places facility on the CAO website. An application for an Available Place course does not guarantee an offer.

Deferring a place

If your child decides to defer an offer of a place they must write or e-mail IMMEDIATELY to the Admissions Office of the appropriate HEI. They must give their name as it appears on their CAO application, quote their CAO application number and the course code of the offer they wish to defer, and set out the reason(s) for the request. They must mark "DEFERRED ENTRY" clearly on the envelope or in the Subject Line of their e-mail.

The letter or e-mail must arrive in the Admissions Office at least two days before the "Reply Date" shown on the Offer Notice. The HEI will communicate their decision to your child. If the deferral is not granted, your child may then accept the offer for the current year providing they return their acceptance notice within the agreed deadline.

Accepting an offer

If your child decides to accept an offer, they can also accept the offer online. Alternatively, applicants can return the offer notice by post to CAO before the reply date indicated on the Offer Notice. Do not do both. If they receive an offer from both lists they must choose between them, they can only accept one offer from either their Level 8 or their Level 7/6 list.

Accepting an offer in Round One does not mean that your child may not receive an offer of a place on a higher preference course in subsequent offer rounds. Should a place become available at a later round, and if your child is entitled to this place, they may receive an offer which they can choose to accept or ignore. Accepting the new offer will automatically cancel the previous acceptance.

When your child accepts an offer they will receive formal notification by post within three working days after the Reply Date. If they do not receive this correspondence you must instruct your child to contact CAO immediately through www.cao.ie. If your child accepts an offer online they will also receive an acknowledgment e-mail and can check that their acceptance has been recorded online at www.cao.ie

The recheck process

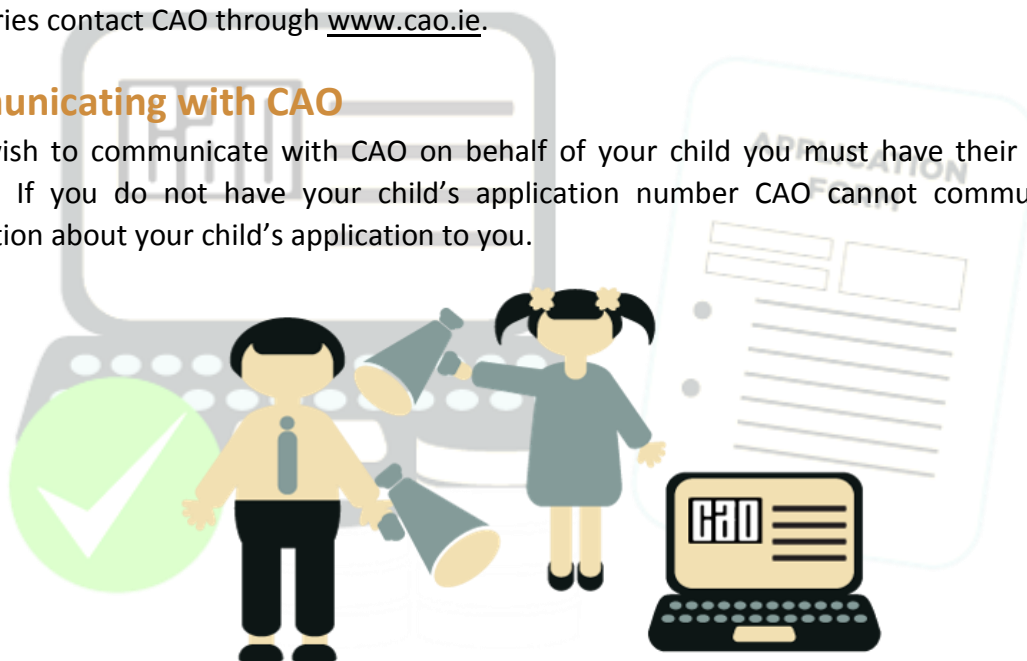
If your child has requested to have some of their Leaving Certificate examinations rechecked, and if the recheck discovers that your child deserved a higher mark and thus obtains a higher points score, their position on the Order of Merit list will be altered to reflect their new points score.

Unfortunately, even if your child is entitled to a place on a course based on their improved Leaving Certificate results, if all of the places for that course have been allocated then your child may not receive an offer of a place this year; they will, however, receive a deferral of the offer for the following academic year.

The decision to offer a place to a recheck applicant is made by the HEI in question and **not** the CAO. Missing out on a place on a preferred course due to an error in an examination script can be an extremely upsetting time for your child, and it is important to consider whether previous offers (if received) out-weigh the benefit of waiting for a year to take up a place on your child's higher preference course. It is important to discuss all options carefully with your child and if you have any queries contact CAO through www.cao.ie.

Communicating with CAO

If you wish to communicate with CAO on behalf of your child you must have their application number. If you do not have your child's application number CAO cannot communicate any information about your child's application to you.



The best method of communication for you or your child is via the CAO website www.cao.ie.

Using the online facility and quoting the application number will allow CAO time to review your child's file and revert with an answer to the query in writing within one working day. You can also call us on 091 509800 but please note that due to the high volume of applicants each year our phone lines are extremely busy.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to review the information provided in this guide. We hope that we have helped you to develop a better understanding of how the CAO works and answered some of the questions you may have about your role in the application process.

As a parent or guardian it is extremely important that you encourage your child to take time to review all of the courses and Institutions available to them, and remind them to place their course choices in genuine order of preference on their application form.

It is also important that you encourage your child to submit their application form well in advance of the deadline, and to keep track of all relevant deadlines and important CAO correspondence.

If you have any additional questions throughout the year you should consult the CAO Handbook or visit the CAO website. If you are interested in learning more about the CAO download the CAO App for Android and iPhone devices or watch the CAO video which is available on our website.

If your query is not answered online or in the Handbook please do not hesitate to contact us via www.cao.ie.

