

# A guide for parents and guardians



*their next step*

**CAO**  
[www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)

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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

**Help your child to research their courses**

**Encourage your child to apply early**

**Make sure your child lists their courses in genuine order of preference**

**Watch out for important deadlines**

**Remind your child to review all CAO correspondence carefully**

**Accept offer online by the reply date**

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.

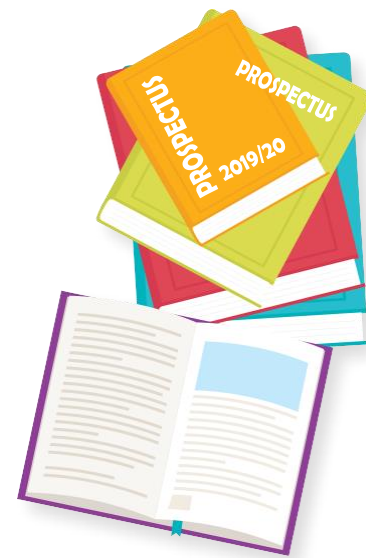
## Helping your child to choose their higher education courses

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 using the ‘Courses’ facility at [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie).

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 an application on Change of Mind may not be available options.

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.



### Helpful Tips

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





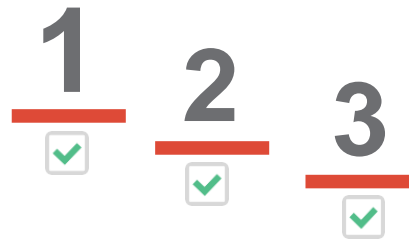
## THE APPLICATION DEADLINES

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

DATE	DEADLINE
<b>EARLY NOVEMBER</b>	Online application facility opens
<b>20 January 5:15 PM</b>	Discounted online application fee deadline – €30
<b>1 February 5:15 PM</b>	Change of Course Choices closes
<b>1 February 5:15 PM</b>	Normal closing date for online and paper applications - €45 fee
<b>EARLY FEBRUARY</b>	Online facility to amend course choices opens - €10 fee
<b>1 March 5:15 PM</b>	Closing date for amending course choices
<b>1 March 5:15 PM</b>	Closing date for final completion of DARE/HEAR forms
<b>15 March 5:15 PM</b>	Closing date for DARE/HEAR documentation to be received by CAO
<b>1 May 5:15 PM</b>	Closing date for late applications
<b>EARLY MAY</b>	Online Change of Mind facility becomes available
<b>END OF MAY</b>	Statement of Application Record sent to all applicants
<b>1 July 5:15 PM</b>	Change of Mind closes
<b>22 July 5:15 PM</b>	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.



**Applicants 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.**

### Personal details

Your child should take care when entering their personal details, for example their date of birth and email address. They must also inform CAO of the examinations that they will be taking or that they have completed in the past. If we do not have this information in advance your child cannot be credited for it at the offers stage. CAO must also be notified of any exemptions, for example exemption from Irish or a third language.

Ample time should be allowed for the completion of the application form. Occasionally, browsers will time-out and information may be lost; CAO has no control over this. Deadlines are strict, so applicants should avoid leaving an application to the last minute.

Where supporting documents are required please number, date and write the CAO application number on the front of each page, and refer to the CAO Handbook for more information. Applicants applying for the **DARE and/or HEAR schemes** should allow time for the completion of the online forms and gathering the necessary supporting documentation in advance of the deadline. For more information visit [www.accesscollege.ie](http://www.accesscollege.ie).



### CAO application number

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

### My Application facility

This is where your child will log in to their CAO account once they have registered on the CAO system. They will need their CAO application number, their date of birth, and the account password that they created at the registration stage.

### Choosing courses

There are two course choices lists – the Level 8 and Level 7/6 lists. Applicants can enter 10 course choices on both lists. The two lists are independent of each other - the only time the applicant must choose between them is at the offers stage if they receive an offer off both lists in the same round.

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



## Important correspondence from CAO

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. **Please ensure that your child checks their e-mail account regularly.**

### Application number email (immediately after applying online)

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, an e-mail verification code and the application details that they have provided.

### Email correspondence

CAO will communicate with applicants via email at various intervals throughout the application process. All CAO correspondence must be read carefully and any errors or omissions notified to CAO immediately via the Contact form on our website [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie).

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all relevant correspondence is received and dealt with appropriately. Please make sure to regularly check the email account provided at the application stage.

### Statement of Application Record (end of May)

Before the end of May, all applicants (online and paper) will receive a Statement of Application Record. This is an extremely important communication, instructing applicants to carefully review and verify their account information. Any errors or omissions (e.g. an incorrect or missing examination number) must be communicated to CAO immediately via the Correspondence Section of their CAO Account.

If your child has not received the Statement of Application Record by the end of May you must contact CAO via [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie) and we will issue a duplicate copy.

### Offer Notification/Statement of Application Record (mid-August or earlier for some applicants)

At the offers stage, your child will either receive notification of an offer, or a Statement of Application Record (by e-mail). If they receive a Statement of Application Record this is because they have not been deemed eligible for an offer in this round. 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 notification 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 in the Offer Notification is correct, and inform CAO of any incorrect or omitted information in your child's CAO Account. A further explanation of the offers stage is provided later in this document.



## Making changes to a CAO application

There are a number of deadlines which 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 obtain and keep a certificate of postage).

### Amendment deadline

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

It is important to note that there are restrictions on introducing courses using the Change of Mind facility - page 3 of the CAO Handbook outlines these restrictions.

### To make changes to course choices

(during the periods outlined above):



- Log in via the 'My Application' facility and go to add/change course choices

- Introduce all courses on the 'new list' in the preferred order of preference, remembering to click 'Continue with course changes' to save the information

- Check the acknowledgement e-mail sent to the e-mail address supplied when making the application. Make sure to check that the changes have been recorded completely and correctly.

For more information on the Change of Mind facility watch the video guide in the student Resources section.



## The offers 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 late Sept to fill any vacancies that may arise. For the full timetable of offer and acceptance dates check the 'Important Dates' section of [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie).



### The Offer Rounds

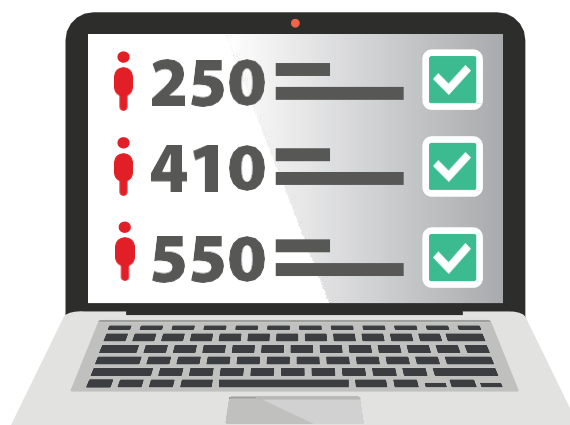
Round	Category of applicants
Round A (early July)	Deferred applicants; mature applicants; mature nursing/midwifery applicants; and applicants who have completed an access course.
Round Zero (early August)	Graduate entry medicine applicants; additional mature, deferred and access applicants; and applicants presenting QQI FET/FETAC for consideration for entry to courses with a <b>quota</b> for QQI FET/FETAC applicants.
Round One (Mid-August)	All applicants applying on the basis of school leaving examination results, regardless of year completed (including QQI FET applicants applying for non-quota courses)
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 (including QQI FET applicants applying for non-quota courses).

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.

### The Common Points Scale

In 2017, a new Leaving Certificate Grading Scale and Common Points Scale was introduced. From 2017, all applicants, regardless of the year that they sat their Leaving Certificate examination, will be competing using this new Common Points Scale. For more information on the scale go to [www.transition.ie](http://www.transition.ie).

A Points Calculator for current year and pre-2017 Leaving Certificate candidates is available at [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie). You will also find more information in the 'Student Resources' section of our website (click on the Applicant Scoring page).



## Accepting an offer

If your child decides to accept an offer they should accept the offer online before the reply date. If they receive an offer off both lists in the same round they must choose between them; they can only accept one offer from either their Level 8 or their Level 7/6 list in the one offer round.

**Accepting an offer in Round One will not prevent your child from receiving an offer of a higher preference course in subsequent offer rounds.**

If a place on a higher preference course becomes available in 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.**

If your child accepts an offer online they will receive an acknowledgment e-mail and they can check that their acceptance has been recorded online at [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie).



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## Deferring a place

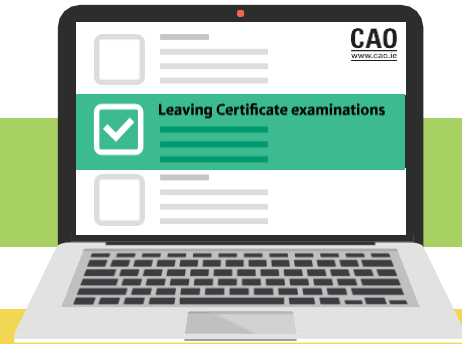
If your child decides to defer an offer of a place they must write or e-mail immediately to the Admissions Office of the appropriate HEI. They must give their name as it appears on their CAO application, quote their CAO application number and the course code of the offer they wish to defer, and set out 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 record the acceptance by the reply date.

## How offers are issued

### Example:

The applicant's leaving Certificate results are released to CAO.



CAO checks if the applicant meets the minimum entry requirements for each of their chosen courses.

CAO calculates a points score for all of the courses that the applicant is eligible for.



The applicant is placed on a list for each of their eligible courses. Their position on the list is determined by their points score relative to the other eligible applicants for that course. The list is commonly referred to as the 'Order of Merit' list.

The colleges instruct CAO to make X number of offers for each course.

The offers are issued to applicants based on their position on the list. The applicant with the highest points score will be offered the first place, the second highest will be offered the second place, and so on until all places have been offered.

The points score of the last person to receive an offer in that round is the cut-off point for that course, i.e. the points that are published for that course for that round.

The applicant will receive an offer of the course highest up on their preference list that they are deemed eligible for. If they are eligible for an offer on their 2nd preference course they will not receive an offer for any lower preference courses.

## How offers are issued *contd.*

### Later offer rounds

In a later round the applicant may be deemed eligible for an offer of a course higher up on their preference list. They can choose to accept this higher preference offer even if they have already accepted a lower preference offer in an earlier round.

### Random number selection

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

### No offer received

If your child does not receive an offer in the first round of offers they will receive a Statement of Application e-mail. Please check this document carefully to ensure that all of the information is correct, for example, their examination number and results.

In the absence of an offer in Round One, it is important to consider other options and consult with a guidance counsellor if possible. Your child may still receive an offer in Round Two or subsequent offer rounds. They may also choose to make an Available Places application (see below) via [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie).

Other options include further education, taking a year out and reapplying to CAO, repeating the Leaving Certificate, apprenticeships, and studying abroad. It is important to remind your child that there are many options available to them.

### Available places

If your child does not receive an offer in subsequent rounds, or if they are unhappy with the offer that they receive, they may apply through the Available Places facility on the CAO website. This facility opens in the days after Round One offers are made available online. 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. An application for an Available Places course does not guarantee an offer.

For more information watch the 'Available Places' video guide in the 'Student Resources' section of [www.cao.ie](http://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.



The decision to offer a place to a recheck applicant is made by the HEI in question and not the CAO.



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## 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 watch the CAO videos 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](http://www.cao.ie).

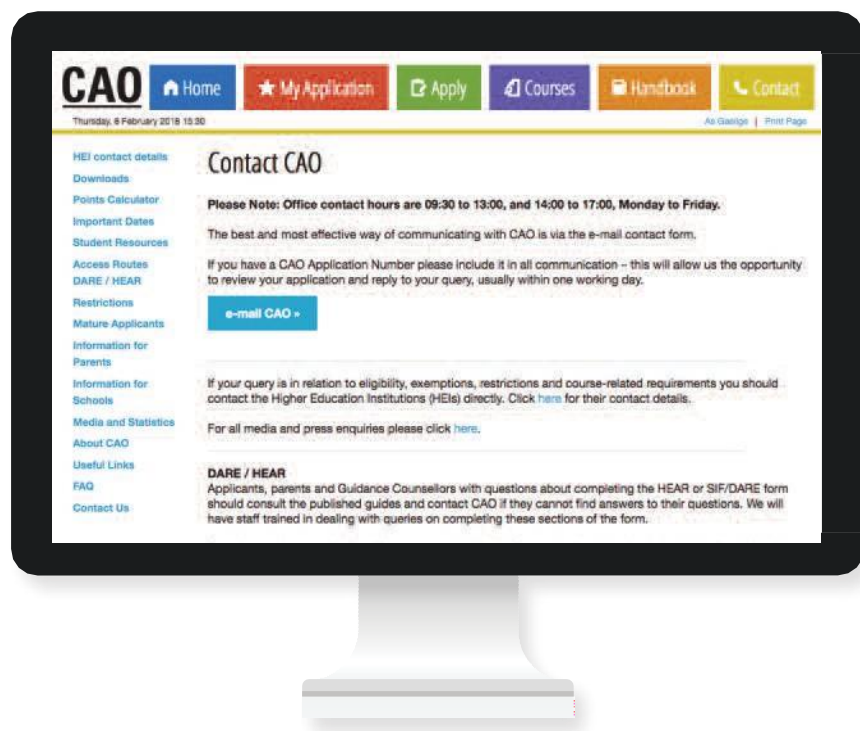
## Communicating with CAO

If you wish to make general enquiries with CAO on behalf of your child you must have their application number, full name and date of birth.

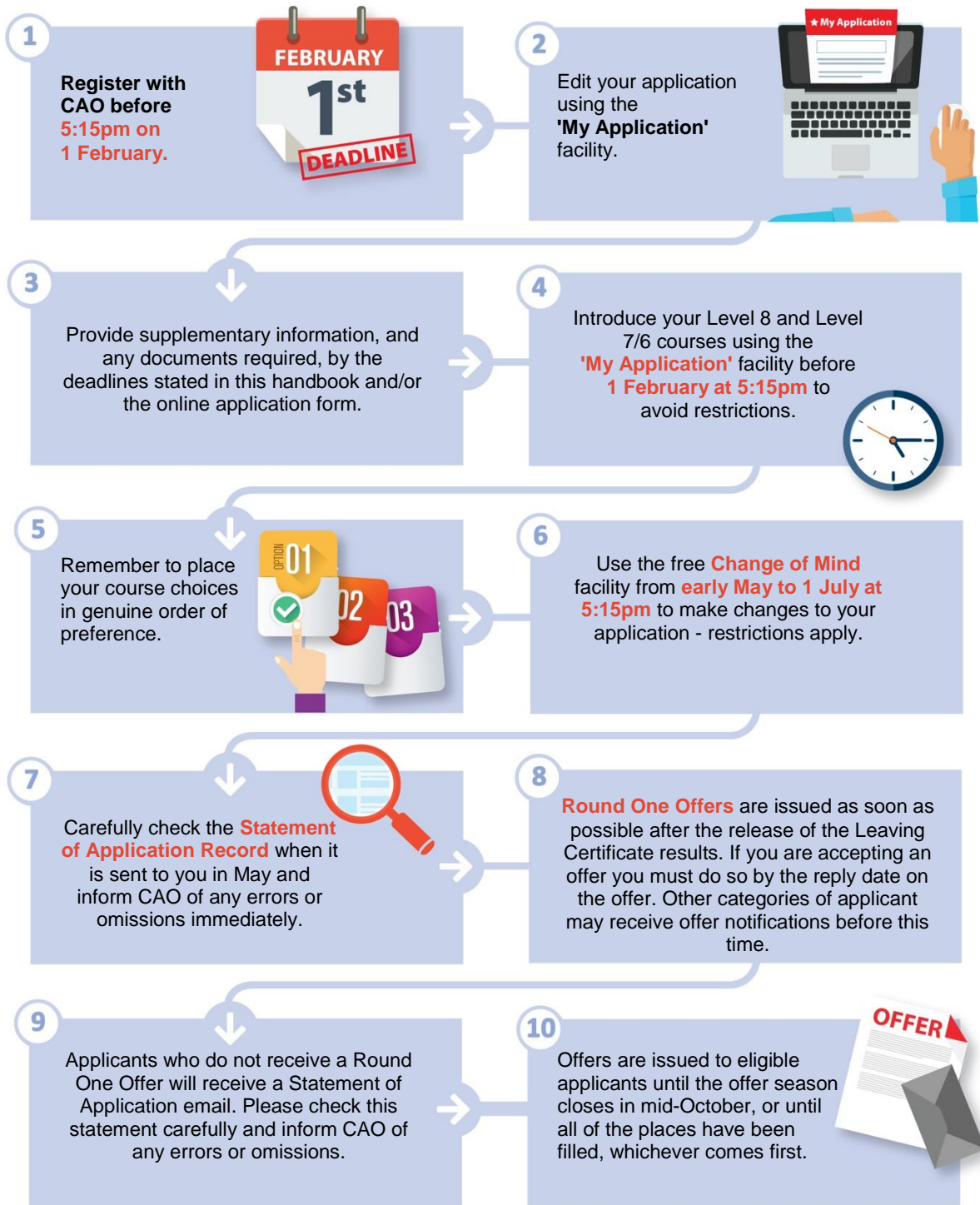
CAO staff members will only be able to discuss details of your child’s account once you can verify knowledge of that information, for example, if you wish to discuss course choices you will be asked to verify the courses that are listed on your child’s application. The same applies for examination details and results. If you do not have any of this information 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 ‘**Contact**’ 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 CAO on **091 509800**, but please note that due to the large number of applicants each year our phone lines are extremely busy.



# A summary of the major stages of the CAO Application Process







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