

# The CAO: A guide for parents and guardians



Central Applications Office

Published: October 2016

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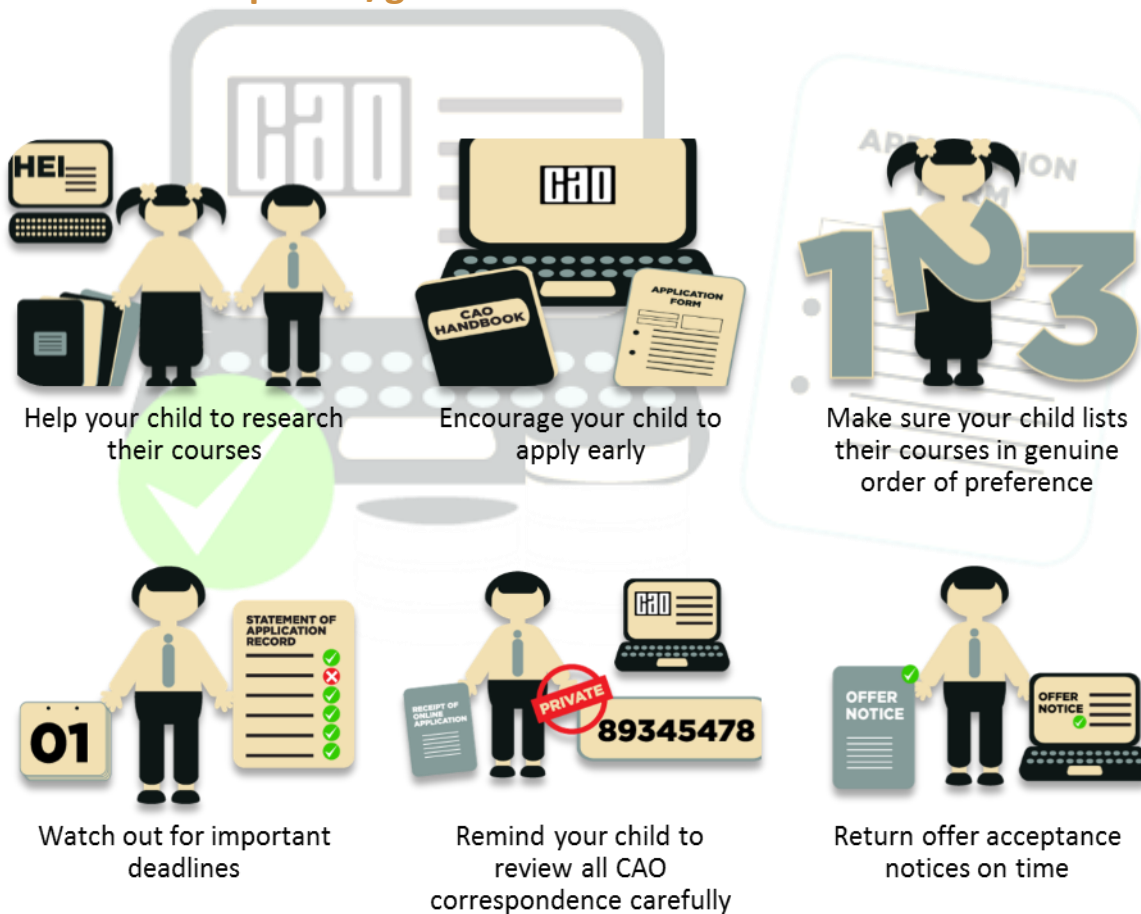
## Introduction

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 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.

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 for you and 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
Early November	Online application facility opens
20 <sup>th</sup> January 5:15 PM	Discounted online application fee deadline – €25
31 <sup>st</sup> January 5:15 PM	Change of Course Choices closes
1 <sup>st</sup> February 5:15 PM	Normal closing date for online and paper applications
5 <sup>th</sup> February 12:00 noon	Online facility to amend course choices opens
15 <sup>th</sup> February	Statement of Course Choices sent to paper applicants only
1 <sup>st</sup> March 5:15 PM	Closing date for amending course choices
1 <sup>st</sup> March 5:15 PM	Closing date for final completion of HEAR/DARE forms
1 <sup>st</sup> April 5:15 PM	Latest date for HEAR/DARE documentation to be received by CAO
1 <sup>st</sup> May 5:15 PM	Closing date for late applications
5 <sup>th</sup> May 12:00 noon	Online Change of Mind facility becomes available
15 <sup>th</sup> May	Late paper applicants are sent a Statement of Course Choices
End of May	Statement of Application Record sent to all applicants
1 <sup>st</sup> July 5:15 PM	Change of Mind closes
22 <sup>nd</sup> 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 applicant to correct the error straight away.



**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; 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 must also inform CAO 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 that applicants 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 log in to their account to check.

At certain stages in 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](http://www.cao.ie) from early November.**

## 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.



### 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 and the application details that they have provided.

### Statement of Course Choices (mid-February)

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 15<sup>th</sup> you must contact CAO via [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie) and we will issue a duplicate copy.

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

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](http://www.cao.ie) and we will issue a duplicate copy.

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

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 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 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.

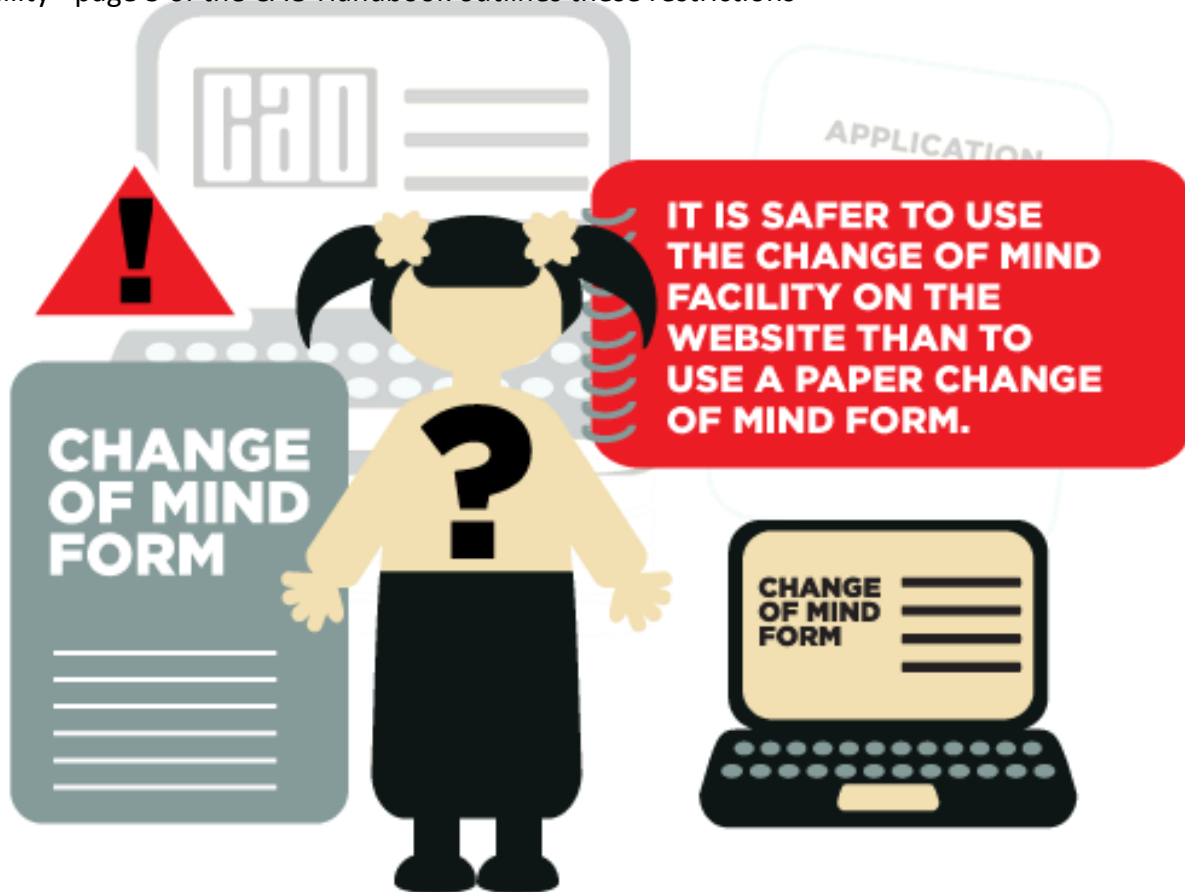
## Making amendments to a CAO application

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 obtain and keep a certificate of postage).

### Amendment Deadlines

Date	Deadline
5 <sup>th</sup> November - 31 <sup>st</sup> January	Change of Course Choices facility available online (FREE)
5 <sup>th</sup> Feb - 1 <sup>st</sup> March 5:15 PM	Online facility to amend course choices available (FEE: €10)
5 <sup>th</sup> May – 1 <sup>st</sup> July 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





## 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 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 QQI FET/FETAC for consideration for entry to courses with a quota for QQI FET/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 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).

### How offers are issued

After the release of the Leaving Certificate results, the examination results are input into the CAO computer and for each course that your child applied for the CAO will first check that they meet the minimum entry requirements e.g. 2x H5 or a third language if required (matriculation and course-specific entry requirements are available on the websites and prospectuses of the institutions).



If your child meets the eligibility criteria for the course(s) that they have applied for, the system then calculates a points score using the HEI Common Points Scale.

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 applicants to realise that they will be offered the single highest preference course on each list that 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 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.

If your child does not 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 does not 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 Places 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 record the acceptance by the reply date.

## Accepting an offer

If your child decides to accept an offer, they can accept the offer online up to the reply date.

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 of 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](http://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](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.

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.

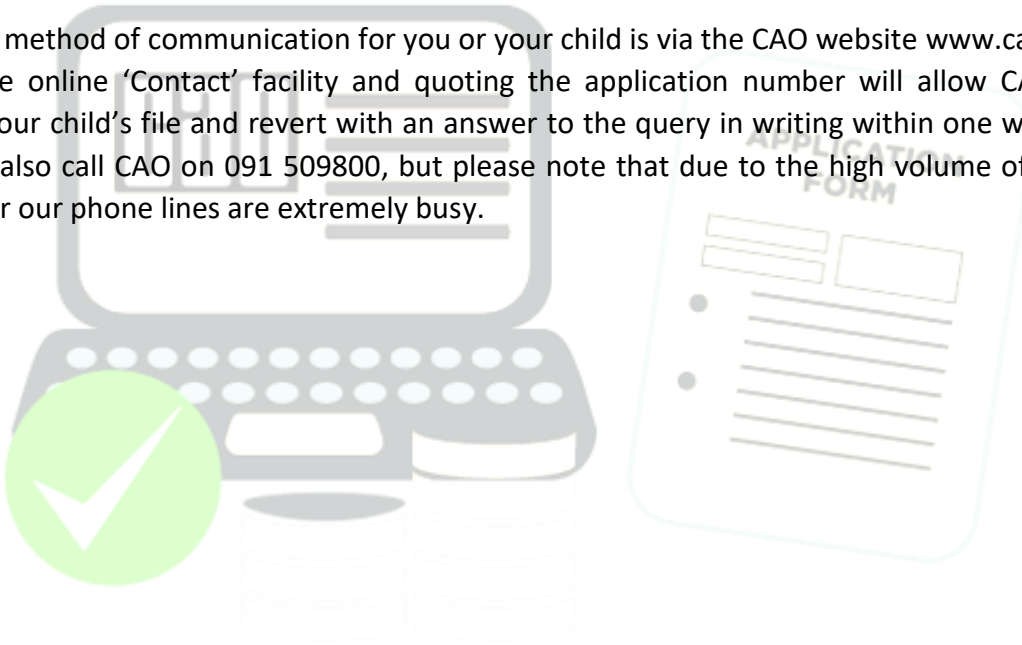
The decision to offer a place to a recheck applicant is made by the HEI in question and **not** the CAO. Missing out on a place on a preferred course due to an error in an examination script can be a difficult time for your child, and it is important to consider whether previous offers (if received) 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](http://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](http://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 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 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).

