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# **Students' Guide to University 2026**

The key higher education facts for students thinking  
about university

Produced in collaboration with 

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# Welcome to the UniTasterDays Students' Guide to University 2026

The year was 2007. Tony Blair was in Downing Street, George Bush was in the White House, and David Tennant was in the TARDIS. And I was in the Great Hall at the University of Birmingham for my graduation ceremony.

I left campus with a degree certificate. More than that, I left with three years of knowledge and networks, of expertise and experience, of motivation and memories. I ventured into the graduate market with the confidence, learning, and empathy that I gained from university. As a result, I found lots of opportunities waiting for me.

Graduates from all corners of the UK have gained a similar employability glow-up because of their university years. They underwent an uplifting, upskilling transformation which helped them achieve the careers (and life) they desired. For this reason, university was the obvious option for a long time. But then...

The year was 2012. David Cameron was in Downing Street, Barack Obama was in the White House, and Matt Smith was in the TARDIS. And UK students were in London, passionately protesting with megaphones and placards. Tuition fees were rising to £9,000 a year. Suddenly, university no longer seemed a no-brainer.

In reality, it was a mental block, rather than a financial block. The student loan system ensures higher education is affordable to all (page 67). Even so, the rise in tuition fees gave students pause for thought. University now needed careful consideration.

After all, if you're paying (or repaying) that kind of money, you want maximum value for your

investment. You desire the university that makes you the smartest, happiest, most employable. Research and university events became even more critical. That remains true, which is why this guide dedicates an entire section to each.

At least there are no more surprises. Or are there?

The year is 2026. Keir Starmer is in Downing Street, Donald Trump is in the White House, and Billie Piper is in the TARDIS. And you have likely found a new complication. No longer cost, but another potential barrier: choice.

Higher education has never been more varied. The traditional three years on a campus is just one path amidst many. You now have endless choice on how, where, when, and what you study. This freedom can be overwhelming and off-putting. But try to reframe your thinking. Choice isn't a burden. It's a gift.

The sector has listened and responded and rewarded you with new routes to gain your degree. This guide is here to navigate you through these options: degree apprenticeships, part-time study, online learning, studying overseas, and so much more. Let us be your compass.

Here at UniTasterDays, we can't predict the next Prime Minister, President, or Doctor. But we can predict one thing. You're going to have a life-changing university experience, no matter how you choose to study. In doing so, you'll gain the skillset, mindset, and heartset to achieve success in the many years ahead.



Simon Fairbanks,  
Associate Director  
Community Engagement,  
UniTasterDays

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# You don't need all the answers yet - My advice for students thinking about university



**By Baasit Siddiqui,  
Director of Siddiqui Education**

If you're thinking about university, chances are someone has already asked you a big question.

"What do you want to be?"

It's a well-meaning question, but it can feel overwhelming, especially if you're not sure yet. Here is something I wish more students heard earlier on. You don't need all the answers right now. Most adults you admire didn't have a perfectly mapped out plan at your age either.

I know this because I certainly didn't.

After leaving university with a degree in Business Information Systems, I began working as a data analyst. On paper, everything looked fine. It was a good job, it paid the bills, and it made sense. But something was missing. I felt unfulfilled and couldn't quite explain why.

Then, by pure chance, two 15-year-olds came to my workplace for a short placement. I was asked to show them the ropes and explain what we did. Those two weeks changed everything. For the first time, I realised how much I enjoyed explaining ideas, answering questions, and seeing someone grow in confidence. That unexpected experience became my first taste of teaching. I often wonder what might have happened if not for that chance encounter.

Since then, I have worked with thousands of young people across schools, colleges, and universities. One thing stands out every time. The students who thrive aren't always the loudest or most certain. They are the ones who stay curious. They ask questions. They try things that feel uncomfortable. They give themselves permission to change their mind.

University isn't a final decision about who you will be forever. It's a chapter. It's a place to explore, learn, make mistakes, and grow.

One of the biggest myths about confidence is that confident people feel ready before they try. In reality, confidence usually comes after action. You apply for the course, move somewhere new, speak up, meet new people, and then confidence slowly follows. Courage comes first. Confidence catches up later.

When choosing a course or university, it can be tempting to focus on outcomes like job titles, grades, or rankings. Those things matter, but so does the experience. Do you enjoy learning the subject? Does it stretch you? Does it help you build skills like communication, collaboration, curiosity, and resilience? Those skills will stay with you, even if your plans change.

And plans do change. That isn't failure. That's growth.

You don't need a single lifelong passion figured out at 17 or 18. Many people discover what they enjoy by doing, not by deciding in advance. University can help you learn what energises you, what challenges you, and what kind of environments help you thrive.

Most importantly, remember this: your value isn't defined by one application, one course, or one outcome. University is one of many ways to continue developing who you are becoming.

So, my advice is simple. Be curious. Be brave enough to try. Be kind to yourself when things feel uncertain. You don't need to know exactly where you're going. You just need to be willing to take the next step.

**“Plans do change.  
That isn't failure.  
That's growth,”**

# Reasons to consider university

**By Meg Griessel,  
Head of UK Recruitment at  
St Mary's University, London**

Is university worth it? Is it right for me?

It's normal to ask these questions as you near the end of school or college.

Whilst exploring your options, it's important to remember that people will be driven to degree-level study for different reasons. Popular reasons include the academic experience, the career enhancing prospects, the social opportunities, and the chance to develop independence.

You may decide that university is right for you because of one (or three) of these reasons. Or you may decide that university isn't right for you at all, and that's okay too!

Hopefully this short article will provide you with some clarity to help you consider whether university is your best next step.

## Academic opportunities

University is a great opportunity to focus on the subject that you love. There are 50,000 unique degree options in the UK. You can study something you've studied before, or you could try something new and more specialised.

You'll be taught by experts in the field. You'll study topics that you enjoy, along with peers who are invested in the subject too. And you'll study within world-class facilities which take your learning experience beyond school or college level.

With nearly 400 higher education providers in the country, you can study in a location that aligns with your chosen degree. Or you can choose a location where you'd like to live, such as by the sea, in a city, or more remotely.

## Career prospects

One of the main reasons that students consider university is to further their career prospects. On average, a university graduate will earn £10,000

more per annum than those who don't attend university. This is according to the graduate labour market statistics produced by the government in 2023.

Of course, you don't need to go to university to earn a decent salary. But university is often the quickest route into some professions, such as becoming a doctor, dentist, teacher, or lawyer.

University degrees provide you with transferable skills that are well regarded within the workplace, and they will further your cultural understanding of the world that we live in. The networking and work placement opportunities offered by a degree are the perfect stepping stones into many industries, and university will broaden your awareness of the professions available to you.

Remember, you don't need to know your future career before you go to university. You'll discover this along the way.

## Finding your independence and your people

One of the most exciting reasons to consider university is the opportunity to grow your independence. You'll gain the confidence to study and live beyond a school or college environment. You'll also learn to manage your own day-to-day finances (page 74). And you don't have to move away from home to become independent either!

University also offers an incredible opportunity to grow your network. You'll find the courage to reach out to new people and make friends for life. One of the most social aspects of a university is their students' union. There is something for everyone, no matter your hobbies or interests. You'll find your people at university!

**“ You don't need to know your future career before you go to university. ”**



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These events are designed for students in their first and second year of sixth form or college.

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**Any questions?**

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[schools.colleges@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:schools.colleges@stmarys.ac.uk)

# Understanding fair access and widening participation

**By Rob Thatcher, Head of Widening Participation & Success at the University of Surrey**

Education has the power to transform lives, and educational opportunities are in rich supply. Yet, for some learners, accessing these opportunities may not always appear obtainable. The prospect and feasibility of completing further study may not seem viable to learners who experience significant barriers to access. These barriers could be economic, cultural, social, medical, or environmental.

Widening participation initiatives attempt to either remove or navigate such barriers to ensure that access to further and higher education remains fair and inclusive. Widely recognised by colleges and universities across the UK, institutions provide their own opportunities based on local need, provision, and resource.

**Outreach** - these events and activities are designed to increase awareness of educational and career pathways. Many outreach initiatives are impartial and begin in either primary or secondary school. They may be subject to eligibility criteria and delivered in school, at your local institution, or through your local Uni Connect Partnership.

**Summer schools** - several institutions advertise residential summer schools for learners considering applying for higher education. You can stay overnight in student accommodation and experience university teaching and learning. Widening participation summer schools are often subsidised for a specific eligibility criteria.

**Open days** - visiting your next educational institution can become challenging, especially when arranging visits to multiple venues across the region and country. Widening participation will recognise this challenge by scheduling virtual visits, alternative dates, bespoke campus tours, and financial reimbursement for travel and accommodation.

**Mentoring** - having a mentor is incredibly valuable, especially if they have experienced the same application process and share similar lived experiences to you. Many universities and Uni Connect partnerships deliver mentoring programmes so you can receive impartial, tailored advice that equips you towards making your decision.

**Contextual offers** - institutions recognise the context in which grades have been achieved, particularly where significant barriers or disruption to education are evident. As such, the advertised entry requirements might be reduced for you. Whilst commonly available, this process isn't standardised. Each institution will outline their own eligibility criteria and conditions.

**Finance** - eligible learners may be entitled to financial assistance, either as a bursary or scholarship. Each will carry its own eligibility requirements along with instructions in terms of application, amount, and selection process.

**Ongoing support** - once registered and enrolled at your chosen institution, you can expect continued support and information as relevant to your student experience. For eligible learners, additional widening participation support may be available through academic, financial, social, and professional development opportunities.

This list is not exhaustive, so remember to speak directly with individual institutions about the support and provision available to you.



# Support for first-in-family students

**By Madeeha Aminuddin, Taster Course and Outreach Engagement Officer at the University of London**

You may have heard the expression 'first-in-family' when people discuss university. In this context, you are a first-in-family student (sometimes called a first-generation student) if neither of your parents or carers have attended university or completed a degree. This still applies even if you have a sibling, or a relative from your extended family, who has attended university.

Many students who attend university have parents or carers without experience of higher education. According to a study by HEPI, two-thirds of young graduates in the UK are first-in-family students. If you are a first-in-family student looking at options for higher education, you may be wondering what support is available to you.

## Taster days

Taster days can give you an insight into different universities and the range of subject options available. Some taster days are specifically designed for first-in-family students. You can

register for taster days which take place both online and in-person.

## Outreach programmes

Many universities offer bespoke outreach programmes for underrepresented students considering higher education. Events take place throughout the year, in addition to summer schools. Places can fill quickly so do apply early if you are interested. Some programmes include support from the time you apply right through to when you graduate. This can really help with your transition to university.

## Careers advisers

You can meet with the careers advisers at your school or college to talk through your CV and application forms. Your careers advisers can also provide other careers resources, information, networking opportunities for work experience, and guide you in the right direction for financial advice.

## Networking

Reach out to people in your network at school, college, and extended family to build social connections. You may find that someone in your wider network has already studied the subject you are interested in. Equally, you may find a graduate from a university you are considering who can provide you with some valuable insight.

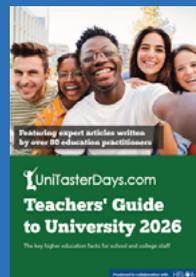
**“Many universities offer bespoke outreach programmes for underrepresented students.”**

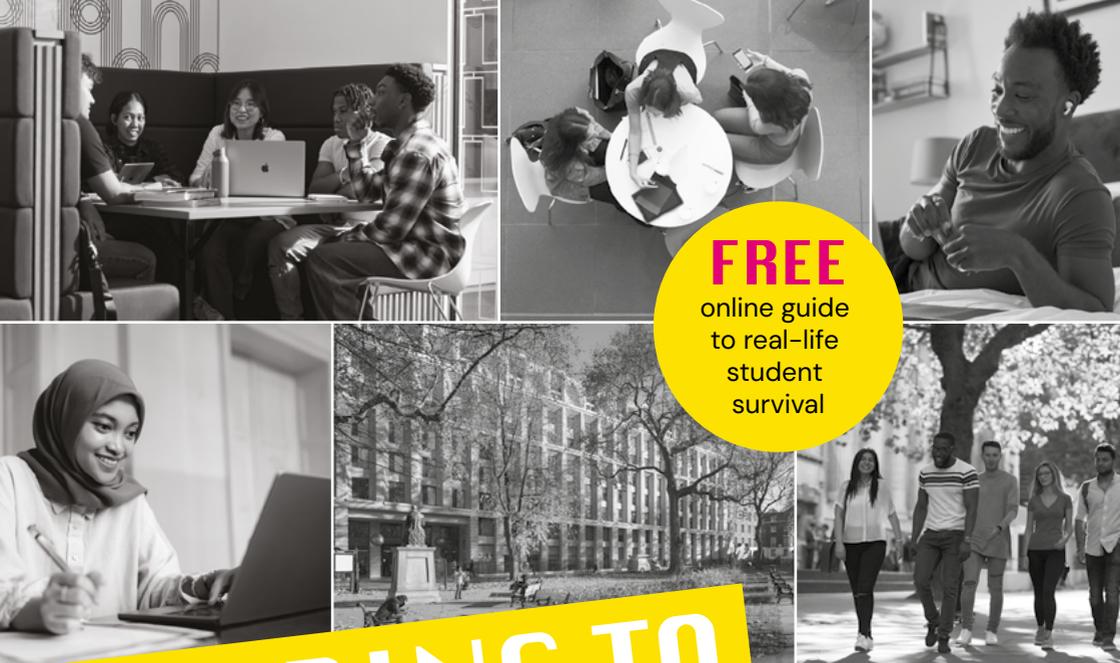


**Did you know we have two other university guides?**

You can download our Parents' Guide and Teachers' Guide for free. Please share with your parents, supporters, carers, teachers, and careers advisers to help their understanding of university.

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# Support for males on Free School Meals

**By Steph Cosey, Outreach Manager at the University of East Anglia**

If you are a boy eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), the journey through school can feel like you're navigating challenges that other people don't always see. How you imagine your future can be shaped by expectations, confidence, opportunities, and what you think is "for people like you."

But your potential is real, valuable, and absolutely worth investing in. And there are universities, programmes, and people committed to helping you achieve your ambitions, starting now.

At the University of East Anglia (UEA), we work with students from all kinds of backgrounds. We know that your story, your experiences, and your goals matter. Our widening participation programmes are designed to give you the tools, knowledge, and confidence to see higher education as something that belongs to you. It isn't something distant or intimidating, but something exciting and achievable.

A standout programme designed especially for boys like you is UniBoys, a project originally developed for Year 7 students from FSM-eligible backgrounds. It starts early in the school journey, but its impact is long-lasting. UniBoys will help you build confidence, set goals, and understand your strengths. You work with real university students who grew up in your region, faced some of the same barriers, and now thrive in higher education. They don't just explain university life – they show you what is possible.

Another powerful part of our work is our collaboration with Boys' Impact: a national

movement focused on improving outcomes for FSM-eligible boys. Boys' Impact champions a strengths-based approach that recognises your talent, your resilience, and your potential. UEA is an active member of the East Anglia Boys' Impact Hub. We connect with teachers, researchers, and youth practitioners to ensure the support you receive is meaningful, relatable, and grounded in real evidence.

As you start thinking seriously about university, you must look beyond courses and campuses to research the practical support available to you. Many universities offer additional pathways, resources, and flexibility for students from certain backgrounds, including those eligible for FSM.

For example, at UEA you might receive a contextual offer, which takes your personal circumstances into account and recognises your achievements in context. You can also access our 'Preparing for University' MOOC. This is a free online course designed to help you understand how university works, build confidence, and learn what to expect before you set foot on campus. Exploring these kinds of opportunities can make the application process more transparent and far less stressful.

If you're beginning to plan your next steps, here are a few tips drawn from our work:

- Talk to teachers, tutors, and mentors to understand the routes available.
- Explore subjects and activities that genuinely interest you - curiosity is a powerful driver of success.
- Research contextual support, bursaries, and university preparation programmes.
- Visit campuses, ask questions, and look for places where you feel you can belong.

Remember, university isn't just about grades. It's about development, confidence, and opportunity.



# Support for mature students, parents, and carers

**Gemma Standen, Widening Participation Officer for Mature Students at the University of East Anglia**

It's common to have questions about university, whether you are looking for yourself, a family member, or a loved one. There is lots of information and support available online to help you navigate opportunities, which can be a blessing and a curse. The detail can feel a little overwhelming, so this article aims to offer some useful information to get you started.

## Support for parents and carers

If you are supporting someone aiming to attend university, it's worth reading the UniTasterDays Parents' Guide. This provides fantastic, comprehensive guidance, and further signposting to other useful sources of information.

Attending events with your loved ones, such as open days and offer-holder days, will enable you to ask questions and gain insight into universities, degree options, and opportunities. Staff are equally happy to help families of applicants with their questions. You can also find further information on university websites.

## Information for mature students

School leavers aren't the only people looking for information about university. Many people will return to education after doing something else, such as work, travel, or settling down. The beauty

of lifelong learning is that education and training opportunities can be accessed when it's most appropriate, which is a bit later for some.

At UEA, specific support is available for people looking to return to education, whether they are studying an Access to Higher Education (HE) qualification or still considering their options. Tailored information is offered during the decision-making process and throughout undergraduate study. The same is often true for other universities too. Search university websites for dedicated mature student pages.

## Online tools for mature students

Many people generally don't know where to start with their research. Lifepilot is a free, online tool for adults looking for educational opportunities or a career change. You can create an account to save content or complete a skills audit, alongside accessing the National Careers Service for more dedicated advice.

HE can be accessed at university, at college, and remotely through online providers, so you have options to manage study and life. Visit the UCAS website to help make your decision. You can find course and university information, helpful guides to support with applying, and what to expect from student life.

## Embrace your inquisitiveness

Most education providers offer support to anyone interested in their educational development. Embrace the possibilities and your inquisitiveness. Ask any questions you'd like answered. Furthermore, attend open days, careers fairs, and online taster sessions to find what support suits you best.



# Support for service children

**By Natalie Bracher, Access & Success Officer at the University of Exeter**

Are you a service child?

The Service Children's Progression Alliance is a partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children from Armed Forces families. The alliance recognises that over 80% of secondary schools in England have service children on their school roll.

A service child is a person whose parent or carer serves in the Regular armed forces, or as a Reservist, or has served at any point during the first 25 years of that person's life.

Service children have many abilities. They are resilient, able to self-advocate, confident communicators, and culturally aware. These qualities can equip you with the skills required to succeed academically in higher education.

## Barriers faced by service children

In 2020, the Office for Students (OfS) identified that children from military families are underrepresented in higher education. The participation rate was estimated to be 24% compared to a national average of 43%.

Service children can face unique challenges when it comes to their education. They have a high degree of social mobility with frequent moves to different schools and often at

short notice. This disruption of learning can understandably impact their education, such as their attainment or pastoral needs. It also increases the potential of missing important information, advice, and guidance regarding their post-16 choices.

Service children experiencing separation from a serving parent can impact negatively on their educational engagement, mental health, and wellbeing. Some might pick up caring responsibilities for their siblings or a parent.

The OfS have included this group in their Equality of Opportunity Risk Register. This identifies risk regarding access to higher education, specifically issues around gaining the appropriate information, knowledge, and skills to make informed choices.

## Supporting service children

If you are a service child, speak to your teachers and advisers. Ensure you receive the appropriate information about your post-16 and post-18 choices. Your school should nominate a point of contact, so you and your family know who to contact for support and information.

Ask your teachers and advisers to make links with your local Uni Connect and higher education providers. Many will offer targeted outreach provision and can advise on available funding options. Furthermore, do your own research too. Support for service children can vary between higher education providers. Remember to tick the 'service child' box on the UCAS application to start your support process early.

**“Service children have many abilities. They are resilient, able to self-advocate, confident communicators, and culturally aware. ”**

# Support for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students

**By Nadia Begum Robbani,  
Outreach Officer at Make Happen**

University should be a place where all students feel able to belong, succeed, and plan confidently for their future. However, students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds can face additional challenges shaped by wider social inequalities. For this reason, many universities offer targeted support for BAME students. Understanding this support can help students make informed decisions when choosing where to study.

## Why this topic matters

Across the UK, BAME students are more likely to experience challenges such as being underrepresented on their course, experiencing discrimination, or facing differences in academic or graduate outcomes. These challenges aren't linked to ability or motivation, but to unequal access to opportunities and support. Knowing the available support can reassure students that universities are actively working to create more inclusive environments to help students succeed during and after their studies.

## Why support exists for BAME students

Targeted support exists to address inequality. Universities use data, student feedback, and lived experience to identify where barriers exist, such as differences in attainment, wellbeing, or progression into employment. Support is then designed to reduce or remove these barriers. This approach focuses on equity, recognising that different students need different types of support to achieve similar outcomes.

## What “support” means at university

Support at university includes academic, wellbeing, financial, social, and career-related help. It is part of university life, designed to be used proactively, not only in times of difficulty.

## Examples of support

- Academic – tutors, mentoring, and workshops to help with coursework and study skills

- Wellbeing – counselling, mental health services, and advisers who understand diverse backgrounds
- Community – cultural, faith, and BAME student societies to build connections and feel included
- Career – guidance for CVs, interviews, internships, and placements
- Reporting – clear ways to report racism or discrimination safely
- Transition – pre-arrival programmes, summer schools, and first-year mentoring to settle into university.

## Financial support

- Maintenance loans from Student Finance England – to help cover living costs such as rent, food, travel, and study materials
- University bursaries and grants – non-repayable support, often for students from lower-income or underrepresented backgrounds
- Scholarships and hardship funds – rewards for academic potential or emergency support if circumstances change
- Paid opportunities – such as student ambassador roles that fit around study

Financial support varies by institution, so it is important to check what each university offers.

## Questions to ask

- What support is available specifically for BAME students?
- Are there active cultural, ethnic, or faith societies on campus?
- How does the university address racism and discrimination?
- Are BAME students involved in shaping support?
- Is there targeted support for transitioning into first year?
- Are students signposted to external organisations for additional help?

## Make an informed choice

Support for BAME students helps to promote fair and inclusive university environments by addressing inequalities through academic, wellbeing, financial, and career support. Understanding this support will help you make an informed choice. Ask relevant questions, and speak to current students through platforms such as Unibuddy, to learn more about university life and the support available.

# Support for young adult carers

**By Afsana Ullah, Human Geography student at Cardiff University**

Starting university is a big change. New place, new people, new learning-style and expectations... That can be hard to juggle if you're a young adult carer.

## Young adult carers

A young adult carer is someone aged 18-25 who cares for someone (usually a family member) with an illness, disability, mental health condition, or addiction. The act of care is unpaid and usually involves providing support on a regular basis, through tasks like household chores, feeding, dressing, and running errands.

Being a young adult carer is very time-consuming. It can be physically and mentally exhausting. This makes it difficult to balance your studies with your caring responsibilities and self-care. However, being a young adult carer should never be a barrier to accessing higher education. This is why it's important to look at the support you may be eligible for at university.

## Application advice

When looking at options for your top five universities, explore each university's student support page. Many universities have specific sections with support for young adult carers. This includes access to mental health services,

and dedicated teams to handle young adult carer needs. Contact the team to seek details about their services to determine if it's the right university for you.

It's also important to visit each university's bursaries webpage to check if you're eligible for grants. For example, Cardiff University offers a bursary of £1,000 to young adult carers for every year of their course. This eases the burden of studying alongside your caring responsibilities.

Finally, once you have selected your five favourite universities, it's time to fill in your UCAS application. Don't forget to tick the box that says "yes" when the application asks if you have caring responsibilities. This will inform each university that you may need additional support to make a smooth transition into higher education.

## Thriving at university

Once you've started at university, let your personal tutor know about your caring responsibilities. They are your primary contact within your academic school, so they can inform you about the support available if you have extenuating circumstances. For example, most universities offer extended deadlines to students who are carers, and some even offer free parking for carers who need to commute.

Overall, young adult carers are extremely resilient individuals with a lot on their plates. Hopefully, this article has given you an insight into how you can thrive at university whilst maintaining your responsibilities at home.



# Support for care experienced and estranged students

**By Caspian Robson, Widening Participation Admissions Officer at the University of Exeter**

A history of care experience or familial estrangement makes some things in life a little more complicated. Luckily, applying to university doesn't have to be one of them. Universities offer a range of support for care experienced and estranged applicants to understand the options, and bespoke support, available to them.

One of the biggest challenges can be understanding the terms themselves, and which ones apply to you. Most universities have dedicated webpages for applicants and current students who meet certain characteristics. A Google search, including the name of the university, should bring up direct links. These webpages usually include a university's specific definition of being care experienced, a care leaver, or estrangement, to help you understand what terms are accurate to you. Never rule yourself out because you aren't a 'textbook' case, or don't think your experiences are 'enough' to qualify – definitions can be very broad and vary by university.

On these webpages, you'll also find details of the support that universities can offer you, both as an applicant and during your studies. You may be eligible for a contextual offer – an offer that is lower than the 'standard' grades a university requires for a place – but there's far more on offer than that.

## Support may include:

- special bursaries and scholarships
- help finding accommodation - some universities will guarantee accommodation, or act as guarantors for private rentals
- access to wellbeing services for your mental or physical health conditions
- signposting to peer groups and support networks

- invitations to bespoke events to help you transition to university life
- the option to arrive at university earlier than most, so you can settle in before term starts.

Accessing this support is also pretty simple. The first place where universities learn about their applicants' circumstances is from their UCAS applications. Applicants are encouraged to tick boxes to say if certain criteria apply to them. You should tick every box that applies to you, so you're looped into all the relevant support. It's common for applicants to identify with more than one characteristic.

UCAS will automatically send that information to the universities when you apply. If needed, they will follow up with you, usually by email. They might ask you to fill out a special form, or provide some more information about your circumstances, to confirm you meet their criteria.

Afterwards, you will receive communications signposting you to information and resources. This may include providing contact details for specific staff members who organise and provide the support, so you can reach out to them as a consistent, supportive point of contact. Contact details for these staff members may also be available on the university webpages, so you can ask them questions before and during your application.

Finding and understanding this information can be overwhelming. Don't be afraid to reach out to universities directly to ask them for information, or help finding it.





University  
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The University of Exeter is ranked in the top 15 of UK universities and in the top 10 in the Russell Group for student satisfaction.

Our Discover University website has a range of activities and resources designed to support your journey to higher education, including:

- Bookable events including our Discover University virtual webinars
- Advice on how to explore your chosen subject
- Academic competitions to strengthen your supercurricular activities

- Subject Q&A panels
- Higher Education Jargon Buster
- Advice on your application and personal statement
- Advice and insights from our Student Ambassadors

Visit our website to find out more:

[exeter.ac.uk/discoveruniversity](https://exeter.ac.uk/discoveruniversity)

To find out more about visiting our campuses either virtually or in person, visit:

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# Support for students with special educational needs and disabilities

**By Verity Lewis, Disability Advice Officer at the University of South Wales**

Starting university is an exciting new chapter filled with opportunities and challenges. If you have special educational needs or a disability (SEND), you might feel uncertain about what to expect. However, rest assured, UK universities are dedicated to supporting you every step of the way. This guide will introduce you to the resources, adjustments, and services designed to help you thrive and make the most of your university experience.

## Declaring your disability

Your first step towards accessing support is to declare your disability on your UCAS application or directly to the university. Many students worry this might affect their application, but universities are legally required under the Equality Act 2010 to treat everyone fairly. Declaring your disability helps universities

understand your needs and arrange reasonable adjustments to support your learning and university life from the very beginning.

## The Disabled Students' Allowance

If you have additional needs due to a disability, learning difficulty, or long-term health condition, you can apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This non-repayable grant can cover the cost of:

- non-medical helpers, such as a mentor or note-taker
- travel costs related to your disability
- specialist equipment, like a laptop with assistive software
- other resources tailored to your needs.

It's important to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) early, as the process can take some time. While it might seem overwhelming at first, universities are here to guide you through it. At the University of South Wales, for instance, you can connect with a Disability Adviser during open days, taster sessions or through their dedicated email inbox, even before you enrol. These conversations ensure you have the support you need in place, ready for when you start your university journey.



## Building independence

University is a step towards greater independence. While there is a lot of support available, universities expect students to take the lead in accessing it. Here are some tips to help you prepare:

- Be proactive – contact the disability support team as soon as possible, ideally before you start your course.
- Ask questions - use open days to ask staff and current students about the support available.
- Learn about yourself - understand how you learn best and what you will need to advocate for yourself.

## Final thoughts

Many universities, such as the University of South Wales, will often take an individual approach to supporting prospective students,

particularly those with disabilities. During open days, disabled students and their families are typically invited to meet with support teams to discuss their specific needs.

Many institutions also provide opportunities for students to meet with support services before applying. This ensures students can understand their entitlements and explore the range of support available during their studies. These early conversations help tailor support plans, enabling students to feel confident and prepared as they begin their university journey.

Your university journey is an opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive. By understanding the support available and reaching out early, you can set yourself up for success. Whether it's through services like the DSA or the tailored guidance offered by universities, support is there to help you achieve your goals. Take the first step today. You've got this!

**“Disabled students and their families are typically invited to meet with support teams to discuss their specific needs... early conversations help tailor support plans, enabling students to feel confident and prepared as they begin their university journey.”**



## Introducing The One In Five Podcast

- By disabled students, for disabled students
- Discover the lived experiences of disabled students
- Advice for disabled students considering university
- A series of 6 insightful episodes



**Listen and share: [www.UniTasterDays.com/OneInFive](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/OneInFive)**

**A collaboration between UniTasterDays, Go Higher West Yorkshire,  
and Kent & Medway Progression Federation**

# Support for international students

**By Ryan Miles, Regional Manager  
- The Americas & Europe, at the  
University of Surrey**

Studying abroad brings exciting opportunities, but it also involves major changes to daily life. You aren't just starting a course. You're learning how to live in a new environment, while studying and making friends at the same time. This is why support plays such an important role. If you understand what help is available, then you'll find university life easier to manage and less overwhelming.

## Before you arrive

You might require support earlier than you expect. Before travelling, international students often have questions about permission to study, travel documents, and what happens when they arrive in the UK. Clear guidance will reduce uncertainty and allow students to prepare with confidence. Rest assured, there are university staff ready to answer these questions and explain things clearly. Feeling prepared before leaving home will ease your anxiety and help you start your journey confidently.

## Finding somewhere to live

Accommodation will be one of your first major decisions. Many international students choose to live in university accommodation during their first year. This can make settling in easier, as you are close to campus and surrounded by others who are adjusting to university life too. Students who prefer more independence may choose private housing. Universities often provide advice on how renting works in the UK and what to consider before signing an agreement. This can be especially helpful for first-time renters.

## Managing everyday life

Everyday tasks can feel more challenging in a new country. Opening a bank account, understanding transport, and managing food and travel costs often involve several stages. Universities offer practical guidance to help students adjust and navigate these changes. It's normal to take things one step at a time. No one expects you to understand everything straight away.

## Making friends and feeling settled

Feeling at home can take time. Some students make friends quickly, while others need longer to feel settled. Both experiences are completely normal. Joining clubs, societies, or informal activities can help you meet people with similar interests. International student groups can also offer comfort, as members share similar experiences of living away from home. Student support services are available for those who feel lonely or uncertain and need someone to talk to.

## Working and balancing study

Some international students choose to work alongside their studies. This can help with living costs and confidence, but it's important to follow the rules. Universities provide clear guidance to help students balance work commitments with academic responsibilities.

## Personal growth

University life in the UK is about more than lectures and assessments. It is a time for personal growth, independence, and new experiences. With the right support in place, you can focus on building connections, developing confidence, and making the most of your university experience.



# Support for students who have English as an additional language

**By Louise Skeet, Head of the English Language Hub at Arden University**

If you are considering university, but English is not your first language, you might worry about how you'll manage. Will you understand your lectures? How will you write academic assignments? Will speaking up in seminars feel intimidating?

These concerns are common, but they don't have to hold you back. Universities understand these challenges and provide plenty of support to help you succeed.

## Language support tailored for you

Most universities have a dedicated English for Academic Purposes department, which offers a range of services designed specifically to help students like you. The support they offer can make a big difference in improving your language skills, confidence, and academic performance.

For example, many of these departments offer:

- **one-to-one appointments** – you can book sessions with Academic English Lecturers to go through some of your written work, in detail. This is a great way to get personalised feedback and practical advice on improving your writing and grammar.

- **workshops** – many universities run optional workshops on essential academic English skills like essay writing, vocabulary, referencing, and giving university presentations. These are usually interactive and tailored to help you build the linguistic skills you'll need for success in your studies.
- **academic English courses** – these courses cover skills such as academic vocabulary, note-taking, paraphrasing, and argument-building in written texts.
- **online tools** – universities often offer self-study resources, such as videos, exercises, and written guides to improve your academic English skills.

## Academic English: a universal challenge

It's important to remember that academic English is a specialised form of communication that all university students must develop. Whether English is your first language or even your fourth language (!), developing academic writing skills takes time and practice.

Writing essays, understanding scholarly texts, and using formal vocabulary are skills that all students work on throughout their university education. Every student, regardless of their linguistic background, is on a journey to improve their academic English proficiency.

In summary, if you're thinking about university, but worried because English is not your first language, know that there is a lot of help available. With access to specialised resources, expert guidance, and plenty of practice, you can gain the confidence and abilities needed to succeed at university.



# My student experience by Dr Leah Brooks



**Medical doctor and graduate from the University of Sheffield**

## Why did I choose university?

University always felt like the natural next step for me. I've always been passionate about learning, and I knew I wanted to continue that journey.

However, I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to study at first. My goals were to develop new skills, explore my interests, and build a stronger sense of direction for my future.

## Why did I choose my subject?

It wasn't until I was 17 that I realised medicine was the path I truly wanted to follow. It took me longer than many of my peers to decide because I loved so many things - science, literature, history - so it was hard to pinpoint a single direction.

Ultimately, it was my desire to help others, my passion for communication, and my fascination with the human body that led me to medicine. The best part is that medicine is such a broad field, so it has allowed me to explore my other passions. I've enjoyed writing essays on the history of medicine and, more recently, even writing this article.

## How did I decide where to study?

One of the most important decisions I had to make was where to study. While I knew I wanted to study medicine, picking the right university was a challenge.

For me, it was vital to find a place I could see myself living and thriving in the long term. I didn't want to be too far from my family, and I preferred a city that wasn't too busy. Many students, myself included, end up applying for jobs in the same city after graduating, so finding a place to settle is essential.

I often tell aspiring medical students, "At the end of the day, after graduating, you'll be a doctor, no matter where you graduate from." This philosophy resonated with me and helped me put the decision into perspective.

## My top tip for students applying to university

My advice to prospective students is simple: choose a university where you will be happiest. League tables, teaching styles, and opportunities are all important factors, but you'll be spending a significant portion of your life there. It will shape your personal growth and mental health. The value of your degree doesn't depend on the name of the institution. It's about how you approach the journey and what you want to get from it. The right experience is deeply personal and unique to each individual.

## My highlight of university

University has been a journey of both highs and lows. The highs include meeting lifelong friends, having the opportunity to support patients during their toughest times, and engaging in meaningful extracurricular activities. One of the highlights of my time at university has been serving as the Chief Operating Officer of Future Frontline, an award-winning non-profit organisation that works to support healthcare professionals.

Additionally, sharing my mental health journey as @wellnessmedic on social media and speaking at public events has been incredibly fulfilling. These experiences have allowed me to build confidence, engage with a wider audience, and share important conversations around mental health.

University has helped me grow into the person I always wanted to be - someone who balances academic pursuits with personal development, and who uses their experiences to support and uplift others. It's been a chance to live in the moment, knowing that I've built my future on my own terms, by my own effort.



**Learn more about Leah's journey on Episode 13 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**





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# How to research universities and courses

**By Sophie Hunt, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Birmingham**

It can be overwhelming to know where to begin when researching your university and course options. With a huge amount of choice available for your higher education, it's important that you are well-informed to make the right decision.

## Prospectuses

Prospectuses are a one-stop-shop to provide an overview of everything that a university offers. This includes courses and entry requirements, accommodation, and extra-curricular activities. Updated every year, prospectuses can usually be accessed as either a physical document or a virtual one.

## University websites and social media

Each university will have a course page section to explore, detailing specifics like the content, teaching and assessment methods, and career opportunities. Lots of universities also have virtual tours and accommodation guides to assist you in your research, or a chat box function where you can speak to current students directly.

Likewise, don't underestimate the power of social media! Universities regularly post content on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and others to provide insight into student life.

## Events

Open days offer a first-hand experience of university life, and a chance to chat with students and staff. You can attend academic and general talks, tour facilities and accommodation, and explore student societies and groups. Open days will help you envisage yourself studying (and living) in that university environment for several years. For this reason, they'll offer you a gut feeling about whether the university suits you.

If you're not able to attend in person, you may be able to join a virtual open day, online taster lecture, or talk to gain further information.

## UCAS

UCAS is the platform used to apply to university, but it also supplies a wealth of information. This includes subject guides, location guides, a search tool, and a career quiz. Through the UCAS Hub, you can make use of subject spotlights and virtual work experiences provided by Springpod. In addition, you can explore apprenticeship options and advice on how to apply.

## League tables

There are various league tables that rank UK universities overall and for specific courses (page 32). Examples include:

- The Complete University Guide
- The Guardian University Guide
- The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide
- The QS World University Rankings.

I would recommend researching a range of these. They all use different criteria and data, and therefore have varying results. League tables should be taken with a pinch of salt because finding your ideal university will go beyond such rankings. You should also consider factors like location, social life, and support services.

## Prospects

The employability website, Prospects, offers information about potential career paths linked to particular degrees. It's a great place for research if you're passionate about a subject but unsure about where it could lead you. Additionally, Prospects will help you investigate opportunities in volunteering, gap years, internships, work placements, and part-time work.

Ultimately, taking advantage of these resources and engaging with a university in-person is the most well-rounded approach. Wherever and whatever you decide to study, you'll be investing in your future self.



**Learn more about open days on Episode 34 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**



# How to choose the right university for you

**By Charlotte Higgins, Marketing Officer at the University of Derby**

Choosing a degree to study is a big decision, as is selecting the right university. At the University of Derby, we believe making your choice should take into consideration three key factors.

## Choosing the right degree

It is vital to select a degree that you are passionate about. You will study the subject for the next few years, so it must be an area that you will enjoy. Review courses on university websites and prospectuses that suit your interests.

There are also various types of degrees to be aware of, including a traditional three-year programme, foundation pathways to help you transition to university, integrated masters if you're looking for advanced learning, or even a degree apprenticeship. Whatever you choose, check it suits your preferred learning and assessment style, such as writing assignments or practical assessments.

Sometimes it's easier to research your dream career, then work backwards to discover what you need to study. But don't worry if you are unsure. Career teams at college and university can help you find out. At the University of Derby, we offer tailored support no matter your chosen course or your previous experience. We provide access to services and programmes to help you reach your career goal.

**Top tip:** If you have a specific career in mind, find out if your degree needs to have any specific accreditations from an industry board.

**Example:** If you want to become a professional psychologist, you need to study a degree that is accredited by the British Psychological Society.

## Choosing the right campus

A university's campus is the heart of your learning journey. You're likely to spend time in a range of lectures, seminars, and other learning activities, so make sure the campus has everything you need to succeed. This includes passionate teaching staff who are experts in their field and excellent facilities available for you to use.

The best way to do this is to attend an open day to discover the campus for yourself. Take the opportunity to attend a subject talk to learn more about your chosen degree and future teachers.

**Top tip:** You will spend time in your university library during your studies. Make sure you visit the library at an open day to find out what is available.

**Example:** At the University of Derby, we have a dedicated team of staff based in the library. They are ready to help you locate books and reference your sources.

## Choosing to prioritise your happiness

University offers the opportunity to explore your independence, grow your confidence, and make new friends along the way.

Universities have a range of support systems available to help you. At the University of Derby, our Student Services team offers support during your application and when you start studying with us. This includes financial advice and academic support plans to help you get the best out of your university experience.

Students' Unions are a brilliant way to develop your social life. You can participate in Fresher events or join a club, society, or sports team to continue your passions or discover new ones.

Choosing a university might also mean choosing a new city to live in and explore. This is an exciting part of the student experience, so find accommodation that suits your lifestyle and needs.

**Top tip:** Research your student accommodation options in advance, so you can apply once you receive your offer to study.

**Example:** The University of Derby offers guaranteed halls in award-winning accommodation for all new first-year undergraduate students if they make Derby their firm choice.

## Making that all-important decision

Going to university helps you build a strong foundation, academically and personally, providing new and exciting opportunities. Making an informed choice on your subject, location, and potential future career gives you the greatest opportunity to succeed. Just remember to make a decision that is best for you and your future, and will help you to thrive.

# Why a university's name isn't the full story

**By Dr Jay Rees, Student Events Manager at The University of Law**

Choosing where to study is one of the biggest decisions you will make. It's not just a logo on a hoody. You aren't simply picking a subject or a campus. You are committing three or four years of your life (sometimes more).

What often dominates the decision-making process is a university's name. Opinions are instantly shaped by a quick google, a glance at league tables, or even asking ChatGPT what the 'best' university is for a subject. But a name or reputation only shows part of the picture.

When making your choice, you must weigh up everything: rankings, location, course content, where your friends are going, and whether the location is a top student haunt. Social life matters, whether it's on a playing field, in the local theatre, or at the local bars. It's at the heart of the university experience.

## Resist rankings

League tables and perceived prestige can be useful starting points, but they rarely reflect the day-to-day reality of being a student. They don't reveal how you'll be taught, if your tutors are accessible, or whether you'll feel supported when deadlines pile up.

What really matters is whether you can sustain your interest and motivation over several years. Teaching and assessment style, class size, and academic contact time have a huge impact on your experience, yet they are often missing from a cursory search. A university might look impressive on paper, but that doesn't mean it's the right environment for you to thrive.

## Culture counts

A university isn't simply a place where you study. It's a place where you live. The culture, community, and overall feel of an institution will shape your experience as much as the course itself. Do students commute or live locally? Is it campus-based or city-embedded? Is it competitive, collaborative, or career-focused?

Understanding the full picture is crucial: societies, wellbeing support, careers guidance, sense of belonging. These factors make the difference between feeling like just another student number and feeling genuinely supported.

## More than a name

Look beyond assumptions. Take The University of Law, for example. Despite the name, it offers far more than just law, with undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and dedicated student experiences, across business, criminology, computer science, psychology, and more.

Similarly, a larger or more renowned university may not offer the reduced class sizes, access to tutors, or hands-on learning that a smaller or more local university can provide. Even beyond academia, a name can't reveal the quality of your student life. The vibrant societies, sports clubs, and creative opportunities truly shape your experience. These aspects are rarely reflected in rankings, branding, or reputation, yet they often define your time at university.

## The best choice for you

A university's name can open doors, but it doesn't guarantee success, happiness, or fulfilment. The best choice is rarely the most obvious one. Look beyond reputation. Really understand how and where you will study. This will help you make informed decisions that work for you, and not just your CV. In the end, a university's name is just the headline. It's what's underneath that truly matters.



# Engaging and researching universities on a budget

**By Ashleigh Little, Head of Post-16 Outreach and Recruitment at the University of Sunderland**

With the cost-of-living crisis, the added pressure of funding visits to universities can put you off before you even begin. However, there are many ways in which you can engage with universities on a budget, or with no cost to you at all.

## University fairs

Your school or college may take you to large-scale higher education fairs (page 55), usually hosted by UCAS or UK University Search. These events have representation from nearly all UK universities. They are free to attend. Your tutor will send you a link to sign up. You can visit each stand and talk to student recruitment staff and current students to find out more about your chosen course or the campus, with no additional costs.

If your school or college doesn't take you to a large-scale event, they might host a fair themselves and invite universities to attend. Make sure you keep your eyes peeled for these events. These will give you an opportunity to engage with universities within your own environment during or after school.

## Taster days

Taster days are free workshops run by universities throughout the academic year. Your school tutors will receive an invitation by email. Some are bespoke sessions tailored to your school or a particular subject. Others involve a general overview of the subject and

campus where more than one school will be in attendance.

A lot of universities advertise their workshops on the free [UniTasterDays website](#), so you can always find out what is on offer, and let your tutors know. Taster sessions are a great way to explore a subject and get your questions answered, without having to self-fund to attend an open day.

## Digital content

If you cannot attend an open day in person, most universities will offer a virtual experience based on your preferences, which can be accessed through their website. This could include course information, 360 virtual tours of facilities and accommodation, and access to support service content. These experiences are free and will give you a feel for an institution without needing to visit the campus.

Most university websites also host platforms such as UniBuddy and The Ambassador Platform. These connect you with current students, so you can chat to them about their university experience. They will answer your questions and queries.

Furthermore, you can find a wealth of digital content on sites such as The Student Room. They share authentic student experiences, and reviews of universities that will support you in your research, along with podcasts and student vloggers on YouTube.

## Finally...

If you still want to visit a university open day in person, have a look for institutions that provide financial support towards your travel costs to help with your budgeting. You can search for universities offering open day financial support using the event incentives search tool on the [UniTasterDays website](#).



# The different types of university

**By Stephanie Willmott, Senior UK Student Recruitment and Outreach Officer at The University of Portsmouth London**

Research is an important part of the planning process for students thinking about university. There isn't one university that fits all students. There are a variety of universities for you to consider based on your preferences and desired experience.

## Campus vs city

Universities take different forms. If you prefer a busy environment, then a city university might be more desirable. These universities offer a buzzing atmosphere and social scene, but they may require more travel between university teaching facilities and accommodation.

Conversely, a campus university typically means the university facilities (teaching and non-academic) are located on the same site. The university will have a campus environment, which is ideal for students looking for a relaxed community environment, with greater opportunities of support and safety.

## Large vs small

The size of a university could help in the decision-making process. A larger university may have a greater choice of courses to study and perhaps more student facilities for their

bigger student population. Meanwhile, smaller universities tend to have smaller class sizes, which could allow for more individualised support.

You should attend open days and visit universities for campus tours. This will help you narrow down your choices, prioritise what you value most, and gain clarity on what you hope to achieve from your university journey

## Comprehensive vs specialist

Specialist institutions offer you the opportunity to study a degree course focused on one specialism. They are sometimes referred to as academies or conservatoires. This could interest students who wish to specialise in a particular area.

Unlike large comprehensive universities, most specialist institutions are small and provide vocational programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. They have strong connections with industry, which will prepare you for the professions you wish to enter.

## Investigate, compare, ask

When investigating their choices, you can visit university websites to browse the course pages and events. You should compare the course content and requirements between universities, and consider university league tables (page 32). Finally, another valuable way to research universities is to speak with current students about their experiences on the course and at their chosen university.



# The different types of university courses

**By David Metcalfe, Student Recruitment Coordinator at Newcastle University**

The different types of university courses can be daunting, especially if you don't have much experience of university. With over 52,000 available courses, the variety of options is huge. This article will make it a little clearer for you, starting with the different abbreviations.

## Degree abbreviations

You may have seen BA, BSc, and similar written before or after the name of a degree. These stand for a Bachelor of Arts (BA), Science (BSc), Engineering (BEng) or Law (LLB). Each is typically 3 years in length in England.

Some subjects can be studied as either a BA or BSc, such as Geography. If this is the case, the Geography BA will typically have less science or maths content compared to the Geography BSc.

Over the last few years there has been an increase in integrated Masters programmes. These are normally advertised as 4-year programmes in England. They are structured as a 3-year undergraduate, with the 4th year being the Masters year, often with an option to specialise. Examples of integrated Masters include MMath (Master of Maths) and MComp (Master of Computing).

Degrees are often referred to as single honours, joint (or dual) honours, and combined honours.

Single honours degrees focus on a single subject. Joint honours degrees bring together two subjects which complement each other. The two subjects are taught evenly with a 50:50 split. Examples include History and Politics, Maths and Economics, or Modern Languages and Business.

Combined honours programmes can vary depending on the university. Newcastle University runs their combined honours programme by allowing you to combine up to 3 subjects from a list of around 20. These subjects can be studied at different percentages and even dropped in later academic years.

These programmes are more flexible and provide a lot of choice. For example, a person studying a combined honours degree of French and Media with a split of 70/30 would receive a BA (Hons) Combined Honours in French with Media at graduation.

## Module choice

There is no national curriculum at university. This means a degree at one university won't cover the same topics as the same named degree at another university. Each degree is comprised of different subject areas, known as modules.

Comparing modules between similarly named courses will help you decide between choices. Remember, Geography BA has very different modules compared to Geography BSc. Understanding the modules will allow you to choose a degree that covers the content you wish to learn.



# Engaging with universities online, on demand, and on campus

**By Lucy Alderman, Student Recruitment & Access Officer at the University of Reading**

Starting to investigate university options is an exciting and a daunting task. It's a challenge to know where to begin when there are so many resources and activities to explore.

## Engaging online

University websites are a valuable starting point. You can investigate different course options, explore available scholarships and bursaries, and find out more about student life.

Many university websites offer the opportunity to chat to a student directly through moderated platforms. This is an excellent way to learn about studying at a particular university from the perspective of current students. You can also ask questions about specific courses and programmes. Depending on the platform, you can chat, read blogs, watch vlogs, and even join the online community once you apply.

## Engaging on demand

Virtual events and campus tours have opened up a whole new range of options for exploring universities from the comfort of your own device. It isn't time or cost-effective to visit every university, so virtual campus tours can be very helpful in narrowing down your choices.

Some even include 3D tours of real student accommodation so you can compare rooms and options. Consider what you're looking for from

your university campus or facilities, then use virtual tours to identify institutions that match your requirements.

Most universities offer a growing suite of webinars on both subject specific and more general higher education topics, ranging from course overviews to interview advice. Even better, these are usually available after the event as on-demand recordings, so you can access them when the information is most relevant.

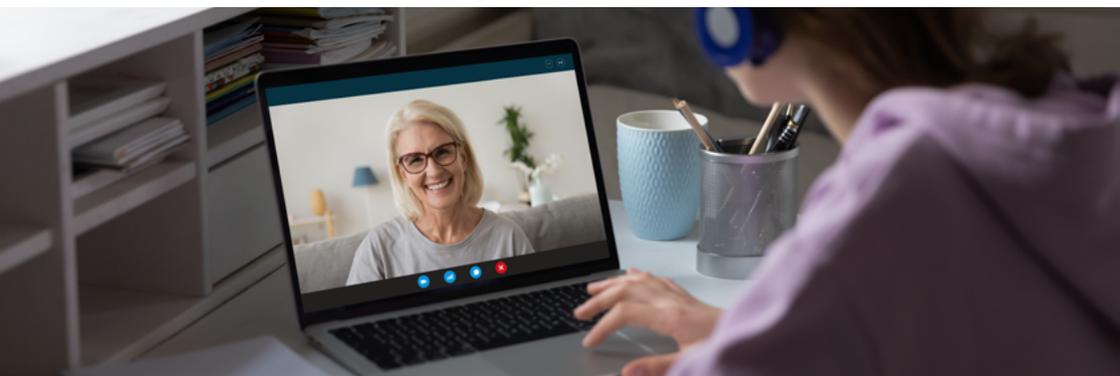
## Engaging on campus

Online options are undoubtedly convenient, but it's hard to replicate the atmosphere and excitement of university open days. These events are your opportunity to see your chosen universities in action, with a range of subject and general talks, tours of the campus and accommodation, and access to current students and staff. Some institutions even offer residential opportunities, such as summer schools, for an extended university experience.

For many students, the choice of subject is the focus of research. Subject-specific taster days offer a perfect opportunity to be a student for a day, participate in sample lectures, and support your decision-making. Look for opportunities on UniTasterDays so you don't miss out on a taste of your favourite subject!

And don't worry if you've missed the open events at your selected institutions. Many provide a second chance to visit in the form of offer-holder days, which are smaller invite-only events for successful applicants.

However you decide to engage with universities, you'll find a wealth of information and a wide range of activities to support your research.



# Understanding university league tables

**By Andy Long, Head of UK Student Recruitment and Access at Keele University**

League tables are often one of the first things you might turn to when comparing universities. They're everywhere, on university websites, in prospectuses, at events, and across social media. In the UK, the most common league tables are The Complete University Guide, The Guardian University Guide, and The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide. If you're considering studying abroad, there are also global rankings such as the QS World University Rankings and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

**But with so many rankings out there, why do we have more than one?**

Each league table uses slightly different methods and gives different weightings to key factors like student satisfaction, entry standards (what students typically achieve at Level 3), and graduate outcomes. Because of these differences, a university might be ranked highly in one table but slightly lower in another. This is why it's so important for you to think about what matters most to you and compare those specific factors across multiple tables.

It's also worth remembering that most league tables don't just rank universities overall - they often rank individual subject areas too. This

can be incredibly useful when shortlisting universities, as the top-ranked university overall might not necessarily offer the strongest course in a specific subject.

Beyond the major league tables, there are also other useful tools, like the National Student Survey (NSS), which gathers feedback from final-year students. The NSS covers topics such as teaching quality, academic support, and access to resources. One of the most valuable aspects of the NSS is its honesty. Students don't hold back when sharing their experiences, making it a valuable resource for prospective applicants.

**So, are league tables worth looking at?**

Absolutely, but they shouldn't be the only thing you consider. Attend open days, sample lectures, and taster events. Seeing a campus in person and talking to staff and students can help you get a real sense of whether a university is the right fit. After all, universities vary in teaching style, location, facilities, and community. It's about the full picture, not just a number on a website or a glossy banner at an event.

Having spoken to thousands of students, parents, and advisers over more than a decade in the sector, I always leave them with this thought-provoking question:

"Is it better to study at the 5th-best university for the 55th-best course? Or is it better to study at the 55th-best university for the 5th-best course?"

If you keep that question in mind, you'll be well on your way to making a well-rounded, informed choice about your future



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# Researching postgraduate options to help you choose your university

**By Andrew Cooper, Hybrid Delivery Coordinator at the University of Liverpool**

“What can I do after university?” is a common question. More students at undergraduate open days are now asking about postgraduate (PG) courses. Researching what you can study after your first degree could help you decide where to study your undergraduate course.

## What is a postgraduate course?

Postgraduate courses are a higher level of study than your undergraduate degree. Typical examples are:

- Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) - this enables you to become a teacher. You can study to become a secondary teacher or do a specialist course to become a primary teacher.
- Masters, taught courses (MA, MSc, MEng) – degrees taught at a higher level, which are more specialised than undergraduate courses.
- Conversion courses - these let you convert your current degree to a different area (such as MSc Psychology Conversion), so you can retrain or gain accreditation for a chosen career.
- Research courses (MRes, PhD) - a specialist piece of research, which can have some taught elements.

## Why study a postgraduate course?

Within a crowded jobs market, postgraduate courses stand out on your CV and increase your employability and earning potential. They can also help grow your professional networks and develop skills such as research, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

## Why think about postgraduate now?

You might want or need to complete a postgraduate course for your chosen career. If so, you might prefer to study your undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the same university. This isn't compulsory, but many students prefer to stay at the same university to continue their studies to reduce the disruption of starting over in a different place.

As such, you should research whether your chosen universities for undergraduate study will also offer your desired postgraduate course. I was interested in a teaching career when I was in sixth form, so I applied to study Drama and English Literature at a university where I could later study a PGCE.

Postgraduate courses also indicate the research strengths of each university. If you have a strong interest in a particular subject and want to be taught by world-leading experts, then look ahead to see if the subject is taught at postgraduate level. If so, those academics are likely to share their insights with you on your undergraduate programme.

## How to find out more

University websites and social media channels are a helpful way to learn more. Equally, there are independent websites like Prospects and FindAUniversity who can offer impartial support. Speak to university staff at careers events and ask tutors at open days about the options available once you complete your first degree. Remember, you can study a postgraduate degree at any time in your professional life, but your undergraduate application journey is the perfect time to begin your research.



# Researching alumni to help you choose your university

**By Grace Spence, UK Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Glasgow**

Alumni are former students of a university. Learning about them can be a useful tool when choosing where to study. The achievements of graduates can indicate how well a particular university can prepare you with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to have successful careers and exciting experiences.

Alumni may hint at what doors and pathways a university can open for its students, whilst helping you visualise where you could end up. If you have specific career goals, it can be useful to check if graduates from an institution have achieved something similar. It can also be inspiring to see the different types of jobs and roles these people have undertaken. Alumni also have first-hand experience of being a student at their university, so are often an insightful and trustworthy source of information about the overall student experience.

Most universities showcase alumni stories on their websites, highlighting their graduates' achievements and experiences. Some have developed alumni networks, where certain graduates have agreed to share their details to allow prospective students or offer-holders to contact them. There might also be alumni panel sessions that you can attend. LinkedIn is another way to discover alumni. Search for an institution's official page and select the 'Alumni' tab. You'll be able to filter by industry, location, and job title.

To help you choose a university through alumni research, it could be useful to consider:

- How many alumni have secured senior leadership positions
- The variety of job roles across the alumni population
- Alumni perspectives on how they think their university's support, resources, and opportunities have impacted their career and personal development
- Whether graduates have pursued further study (and if they returned to the same institution to do so).

It can be daunting to reach out, but many alumni love sharing their experience at university, so don't be afraid to contact them. You can do this through LinkedIn. Create a personal connection by explaining that you're contacting them because they're an alum. Some useful topics to raise could include:

- What they found to be the most valuable part of their time at university
- What types of support for employability development were on offer
- If they'd choose the same institution again!

If you have any worries about the university (perhaps it's far away from home or you're worried about making friends), then alumni have the experience to answer these queries. They've been in your shoes before, and had time to reflect on their university experience, which means their answers will be thoughtful and reliable.

Finally, while alumni research is important, remember to consider it alongside other factors, such as course content, location, and student support.



## Studying higher education at a further education college

**By Beth Curtis, Vice-Principal at Bishop Burton College and Riseholme College**

There are 218 colleges in England. The majority offer some kind of higher education provision. You might be wondering if you should consider this route, rather than studying at a university.

The key benefit is the alignment that colleges have with the local, regional, and national economy. By their nature, colleges aim to deliver the skills and knowledge that employers need to create the next workforce. This is evidenced by the level of engagement that colleges have with businesses to ensure their curriculum is moving with the times, leading to agile curriculum development and delivery models.

Allied to this is the standard of specialist facilities often available at FE colleges. These facilities allow for bespoke and applied learning. They put what is being taught into practical application, allowing you to develop skills alongside the theory and underpinning knowledge. Equally, methods of assessment are linked to real world scenarios. This combination makes graduates highly employable.

Staff teaching in colleges often have a highly specialist background. This means they are expert education practitioners with years of service in the sector that they now teach. This brings significant added benefits to students who can learn from industrial experience and academic excellence.

Colleges tend to be smaller and local. This might be exactly what you are looking for. Many colleges offer residential accommodation with the associated social life. However, others are suited to local learners who want to commute for

their studies but live at home. This allows you to work or retain other responsibilities.

Class sizes can be smaller than at many universities, which allows for a very supportive and engaging learning environment. Students are known to the staff (they are always a name) and these closer relationships allow for more honest feedback. This can help drive engagement and achievement. Colleges are known for offering robust student support services, including academic help, career guidance, and personal counselling, especially useful for mature or non-traditional students.

Colleges also pride themselves on flexible learning options: studying part-time, in the evening, or online. There is often a variety of options for students to fit study around other commitments. Colleges also offer different pathways, where students can commit to shorter periods of study and then build on that base. For example, a student could start with an HNC, move onto an HND, before completing a full degree. This allows learners to move at their own pace, whilst gaining the same qualification in the long run.

Also, many learners who felt HE wasn't for them often find their confidence and success in a more supportive FE environment. Colleges can make bespoke offers to applicants who lack the grade profile for successful applications to larger institutions. This means applicants from under-represented groups, or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, are often able to gain places. This, alongside the tailored specialist support, means that you achieve fantastic outcomes, having genuine social impact and driving social mobility.

This flexible, local, and applied approach to higher education is a desirable alternative. You can complete the same quality qualification, usually accredited by a university, but through a more tailored route.

**“Many learners who felt HE wasn't for them often find their confidence and success in a more supportive FE environment.”**

# Studying a Higher Technical Qualification

**By Louise Wylie, Student Recruitment  
Officer (Institute of Technology) at the  
University of Salford**

## What are HTQs?

Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are approved courses lasting 1 to 2 years offered at universities and colleges. They are level 4 and 5 qualifications, the equivalent of the first two years of a 3-year undergraduate degree. The most common qualifications that are awarded HTQ status are:

- Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (HNC/HND)
- Certificates/Diplomas of Higher Education (CertHE, DipHE)
- Foundation Degrees (FdSc).

However, the above qualifications won't necessarily be HTQs. An HTQ is a recognised technical qualification which has a specific quality mark. This quality mark is awarded by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). For instance, some of the above qualifications will be awarded the additional quality mark from the IfATE, thereby making them into an HTQ, whilst some will not.

IfATE assess the qualifications against a standard developed with employers. This means the skills you gain on the course directly relate to a specific job, so you would be work-ready when you graduate. If you want to study an HTQ, check to see if the course has the HTQ symbol.

## Are HTQs better?

Not necessarily. If a qualification is an HTQ, this means it has been given a big tick by IfATE. They say you get the required skills for the job you

want by completing the course. Ultimately, the HTQ symbol is an indicator of quality.

However, some courses won't have an occupational standard to assess against. The university or college might not have applied to have it assessed, or the assessment might still be in progress. HTQs are relatively new, so it is always worth looking at the course page online and asking questions to see which course is right for you.

## Why study an HTQ?

### Employability

When you graduate from an HTQ, you are work-ready, as agreed by IfATE and relevant employers. Whilst the institution you chose to study at can't promise you a job, you do know that you have concrete skills and knowledge that industry says they want.

### Brevity

The 2-year programme of a HTQ means you will graduate a year before those taking a 3-year programme. You'll also graduate with the skills required to start work in your relevant field straight away.

### Affordability

The 2-year approach also means you pay for one year less than a traditional 3-year undergraduate degree, which reduces the overall cost. And remember, student finance is available for HTQ courses.

### Flexibility

Lots of people who study an HTQ will also have a job. As such, the courses are often timetabled for a couple of days each week, so it's easy to juggle study and work. Always check with the institution you are interested in.

### Interactivity

HTQs are vocational courses, so whilst you can expect some classroom-based activities, the focus will be on more practical learning.



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# Studying a degree apprenticeship

**By Liz Hutton-Brownhall, Widening Participation Senior Officer at the University of Derby**

Are you thinking about university, but want to earn whilst you learn?

Degree apprenticeships combine university learning with paid work, helping you graduate debt-free with valuable experience.

## What is a degree apprenticeship?

A degree apprenticeship allows you to work for an employer whilst studying for a university degree at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, splitting your paid time between your workplace and studying at university. Your employer pays your tuition fees, and you are paid directly from day one. Your salary can start between £18,000 and £22,000 annually, depending on your employer and sector.

Degree apprenticeships are available across diverse sectors, including engineering, digital technology, healthcare, nursing, business, finance, law, teaching, and many more. They typically take between three to six years to complete, depending on the level and subject area. The University of Derby offers degree apprenticeships in areas ranging from civil engineering to operating department practitioner roles.

## Entry requirements

For Level 6, you typically need three A levels grades A\* to C, or BTEC Level 3, alongside 5 GCSEs at grades 9-4 including English and Maths. For Level 7, you need a good undergraduate degree, or significant work experience in your sector of study.

Unlike university applications, you generally apply directly to employers throughout the year and submit a job application or send your CV. You can find and apply to apprenticeship opportunities through the government Find an Apprenticeship service and UCAS apprenticeships pages. Equally, large employers like Rolls Royce, Jaguar Land Rover and PwC run dedicated recruitment programmes advertised on their website, so start searching early and apply to multiple opportunities.

## How it works

You spend at least 20% of your time studying towards your apprenticeship. This could be attending university or completing assignments. The rest of your time is spent in the workplace on real projects. For support, you will have a personal tutor/assessor, workplace mentor, and access to academic and wellbeing support at university.

At the end of your apprenticeship, you complete an End Point Assessment to demonstrate your skills and knowledge. Once passed, you receive a full degree. You graduate alongside your apprentice friends and traditional degree students.

## Advantages

- No tuition fees or student debt
- Earn a salary whilst working
- Gain a degree alongside work experience
- Strong career prospects with your employer

## Considerations

- Competitive application process
- Less flexibility with holidays
- Limited traditional university lifestyle experience
- Requires strict time management and commitment
- No access to student loans

Degree apprenticeships suit students who prefer hands-on learning, have a clear career direction in mind, and are ready for workplace responsibilities alongside academic study.

## Taking the next step

You can apply for both apprenticeships and traditional university simultaneously, keeping your options open. Research opportunities and university apprenticeship websites to find options available to you. Attend apprenticeship/ employer fairs to speak to organisations and current apprentices. You should also consider what skills you can develop and demonstrate to employers from your current studies, hobbies and interests, and part-time work or volunteering.

Both degree apprenticeships and traditional university degrees offer exciting and life-changing opportunities. You simply need to decide which option best matches your learning style, career aspirations, and personal circumstances.

# Studying an online university course

**By Becky Timmins, Senior Digital Officer at Falmouth University**

Online learning has advanced at pace over the past few years. Studying a degree online is increasingly a first-choice option for students. This is the result of emerging technologies and more awareness of how to make the experience immersive and collaborative.

At undergraduate level, studying online may better suit some students' circumstances and learning styles. For others, the ability to study from home makes higher education more accessible, both physically and financially.

## Learn without leaving home

With an online university course, there's no need to relocate or commute. Students can remain living at home, which means studying in a space that's familiar. For many students, learning at home better suits their personal study style and allows them to focus without the distractions of a busy campus environment. This may be particularly appropriate for students with learning differences and mental or physical health conditions.

Online study also removes the geographical barriers of going to university. Students are no longer limited to choosing a university based purely on location. Instead, they can apply to their ideal institution - even if it's across the country, or on the other side of the world - without having to move away from home. They can study with a university that aligns with their ambitions, values, and career goals, all from the familiarity of their own environment.

## Stay connected and supported

Online doesn't mean alone. In fact, many online courses are specifically designed to support collaboration and meaningful relationship-building.

Seminars, group projects, and dedicated online spaces offer plenty of opportunity for students to connect with peers, share ideas, and build a support network. Tutors are also on hand to offer regular feedback and guidance, ensuring students feel supported every step of the way.

## Tailored and inclusive study

Online courses are designed to enable flexible study. They're typically asynchronous, meaning students can dive into the material whenever it works best for them, free from compulsory live elements. You may prefer to work in short bursts with breaks in between or to block out longer study sessions. Either way, they can manage their time however they like.

Studying online also means joining a global community of learners in which students' unique perspectives are valued. Course tasks are designed to encourage contributions through collaborative tools and group webinars, all tailored to individual abilities and ambitions.

## A more affordable way to study

Studying online can also be more affordable. Students can save significantly without the added expense of campus accommodation, commuting, or frequent travel. Online learners can work alongside their studies too, helping to support themselves financially and reduce reliance on student loans.

## Best of both worlds

An online university course offers the best of both worlds. You gain a respected qualification and the flexibility to study in a way that fits around your life. Studying an online degree is an empowering way for you to access education if moving to university isn't right for you.



**Learn more about the benefits of living at home whilst studying in Episode 29 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**



# Studying a part-time university course

**By Munimur Rahman, Student Recruitment at the University of Wolverhampton**

Most students will study an undergraduate course on a full-time basis. However, that might seem impossible for people with work, family, and other priorities. Studying a part-time course allows you to study for fewer hours a week, whilst maintaining your other responsibilities. Generally, an undergraduate degree takes around 3 years, so a part-time course takes around 6 years. The journey is longer, so lots of patience and motivation is needed.

## Researching part-time study

When choosing to study part time, it is vital to find a course that fits around your lifestyle and other needs. Consider what subject you want to study, and how many hours of study is required each week. This allows you to plan your other commitments and keep a balance between both study and work. Part-time courses vary in different ways. Some are taught in the evening, whilst others are taught online. Research the different options available to see which one suits you best.

One of the main things to consider when studying part time is funding. If you plan to apply for student finance to pay for your course, then you must budget carefully, as the payments will be spread over the years of your course.

## Considering part-time study

Part-time courses offer flexibility to work around other priorities. You also have more time to focus on a certain module, work on your assignments, and revise for exams. During a full-time course, 2 or 3 modules can run simultaneously, so balancing them can be tough.

The downside of part-time study is that it may take double the amount of time to complete the course. This isn't an issue for some, but unforeseen circumstances can arise over the required 6 years. This is also true of full-time study, but the shorter duration means a full-time course can be finished faster.

## The part-time journey

When researching, ask yourself key questions about the part-time course you want to study, such as whether you can commit to the longer timeframe. This will help you decide whether to pursue part-time study. Ultimately, it doesn't matter how long your degree takes to complete. It's all about finishing the journey.



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# Studying a creative university course

**By Katrina Fuschillo-Cozens, Outreach Officer at the University of East Anglia**

Studying a creative subject offers far more than developing your artistic ability. Creative degrees provide you with a wide range of highly transferable skills, strong career pathways, and the opportunity to work in one of the world's most influential creative economies.

## Creative employability

The UK has a large creative sector, and our billion-pound industry exports content worldwide. The creative sector plays a significant role in UK financial growth, adding £119.6 billion to the economy in 2023. It grew twice as fast as the whole UK economy. In 2024, there were over 250,000 creative businesses, with an estimated 2.4 million jobs within the sector (1 in every 14 jobs).

## Creative benefits

Studying a creative subject allows you to pursue something you love, whilst developing transferable skills such as creative thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and collaboration. Through hands-on learning, you'll grow your confidence and develop resilience. You'll experiment with different techniques and mediums to find your own unique style whilst you grow as an artist. Equally, you'll be immersed in an environment that encourages artistic expression, where you'll hone your artistic and practical skills to produce a strong portfolio of work.

## Creative study

Creative subjects combine practice with theory. You will engage with areas such as history,

philosophy, and contemporary debates relevant to your field of study. By researching and contextually analysing your subject, you will learn to articulate your ideas and reflect on your own practice. You'll observe the world around you, and cultivate essential critical thinking skills, so you can analyse and evaluate an issue.

Creative subjects encourage self-expression, experimentation and individuality, so you can build your own creative identity. Throughout your learning, you'll set your own agenda and make independent decisions that help you develop your own unique approach.

## Creative careers

Many UK universities have close connections with creative employers. Courses often include opportunities to work with industry professionals, through placements and internships, client projects, networking, and showcasing events.

Within the creative sector, freelance work and self-employment are common and respected pathways. Your university will prepare you for these pathways by providing training in business skills, marketing, and self-promotion. Many institutions offer incubators, funding opportunities, and start-up support for graduates. These tools will help you build a sustainable creative career.

## Creative future

Choosing a creative subject is a smart, future-focused decision, and can lead to a wide range of careers. Creative courses often integrate technology, so you'll develop a unique blend of technical proficiency, creativity and adaptability. This prepares you for success in today's dynamic job market. As automation and AI continue to grow, we need creatives more than ever. Creatively and originality are irreplaceable.



# Studying a creative university course in the age of AI

**By Sarah Jones, Faculty Marketing Manager for Arts, Humanities, Education and Social Sciences at Anglia Ruskin University**

The number of new entry-level jobs in the UK has dropped by almost a third since the launch of ChatGPT. While this may seem like a sudden shift, it's part of a broader and long-anticipated transformation. For over a decade, organisations such as the World Economic Forum, Microsoft, and McKinsey have warned of the seismic changes that AI and automation would bring to the global labour market in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). And it's happening now. How do we prepare you for the jobs of the future when those jobs don't even exist yet?

We don't. At least, not by preparing you for specific job titles.

Instead, we prepare you by focusing on transferable skills. It's not new but it's an increasingly difficult message to communicate, particularly to parents and carers who view higher education as a direct investment in a defined career path. But in a labour market defined by rapid change and disruption, the currency of career success is adaptability coupled with lifelong learning.

The challenge is exacerbated by a longstanding policy focus on STEM subjects at the expense of the arts and humanities. STEM is undeniably vital for innovation and economic growth, but the disproportionate focus has led to the undervaluing of the arts and their contribution to the UK economy. However, ironically, rapid technological advancement is forcing change.

The World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs report highlights that creativity, critical

thinking, communication, problem-solving, and adaptability are skills increasingly sought after by employers. These are precisely the skills that arts and humanities help develop. As automation handles more routine and technical tasks, it's these human-centred competencies that offer enduring value.

The UK's creative industries – such as advertising, architecture, crafts, design, film, video games, software, publishing, music, performing, and visual arts – generate £124 billion annually for the UK economy. They also employ 2.4 million people, which is about 1 in every 14 jobs in the UK.

The government's ambitious Creative Industries Sector Plan proposes to cement the UK's position as a global creative powerhouse by 2035, with a £380 million investment package. Underpinning this investment is the need to build a resilient, skilled workforce for the future. As the plan outlines, creativity has been identified as the most significant predictor for an occupation's growth, and creative thinking is expected to be one of the most important skills for employment in 2035.

This being the case, why are we still pushing STEM subjects or specific job titles at young people? Many young people guided down STEM routes against their skills or interests will fail. And who wants that outcome?

Already graduate earnings increase at a faster rate than those of non-graduates. Between the ages of 23 and 31, average earnings grow by 72% for graduates compared to 31% for non-graduates. This gap will only increase when you consider the disappearance of entry level jobs for non-graduates.

As digital disruption reshapes traditional roles, a creative education will emerge as the answer to career resilience and socio-economic opportunity.

**“How do we prepare you for the jobs of the future when those jobs don't even exist yet? ,,**

# Studying Medicine at university

**By Alasdair Robertson, UK Student Recruitment and Widening Participation Manager (Faculties) and Lynda Khun, Medical Student, at Queen Mary University of London**

Unlike most undergraduate degrees, Medicine takes longer to complete, so it is important to consider what studying this subject is like before making the commitment.

There are lots of different elements that make up teaching and learning on a medical degree, and every medical school has a style unique to itself. Here's an example of how it is taught at Queen Mary University of London.

In your first year, you will expand on the basic biology you learned in school to look more deeply into the normal physiological processes of the human body. As the year progresses, you will traverse through the different systems that align to ensure the functioning of our bodies. To facilitate this, there will be around 10 lectures each week, accompanied by problem-based learning sessions, anatomy and physiology practicals, and clinical skills teaching. You will attend a whole day of GP placement every fortnight, giving you the amazing opportunity to have patient contact from the very beginning of your medical school journey.

In your second year, you will move on to looking at what the body looks like when it is malfunctioning. The teaching methods are much the same as in the first year, and the same roadmap of systems is followed.

From your third year onwards, you will spend most of the academic year on hospital

placements. On placements, there is a list of tasks to complete that ensures you develop the skills a doctor requires. Each placement lasts 5 to 8 weeks and focuses on a different specialty.

In your fourth year, you will have contact with more vulnerable patients. In your final year, you will undertake Assistantships, designed to familiarise you with tasks that Foundation Doctors are expected to complete. At every placement, there's a list of tasks to complete that ensures you develop the skills a doctor requires.

Every student finds Medicine difficult to adjust to at first. It's important to realise you aren't the only person in this situation. Understanding this, and turning to your peers for support, will allow you to progress much faster. The journey of Medicine is long and hard, but there is no better way to make lifelong friends than on an extended road trip.

Furthermore, those who teach on your course will be happy to provide support. They teach because they are passionate about fostering the next generation of doctors. There is also a range of other academic, welfare, and financial support on offer at medical schools.

Is it all hard work? No, it's important to de-stress. There are lots of ways you can do this with sports, cultural societies, volunteering opportunities, and clinical specialties. Lots of students also work part-time, either at the university or outside. This helps with living costs, whilst giving you new opportunities and experiences.

Finally, it is incredibly rewarding to know that the skills and knowledge you gain as a medical student will enable you to make a difference in the future.



# Studying graduate-entry medicine at university

By **Amanda Moralee, Marketing Campaigns Officer at the University of Sunderland**

Graduate-entry medicine offers an alternative route into the medical profession for students who didn't receive offers to study medicine, are considering a different degree, or would like to change careers from another field.

Emma Carnell shares her experience as a graduate-entry medicine student on the five-year MBChB Medicine course at the University of Sunderland.

## Why pursue medicine as a graduate rather than through the A-level route?

After finishing A-levels, I went to Newcastle University to study biomedical science. I didn't fully commit to studying medicine until after my degree. I had always been interested but I lacked confidence in my academic ability and whether I could pursue such a demanding career. I took a gap year, working as a teaching assistant for SEN children at my local school, then applied to medical school the following autumn.

## What was your experience of the application process?

Having already completed my degree, I wasn't waiting on any academic results, which took some pressure off. However, it also meant that everything hinged on the interview, which brought its own stress.

Sunderland was my first interview, so naturally I was nervous, but it ended up being my favourite interview. The positive experience played a big role in my decision to study here.

## Did your previous degree provide you with specific advantages?

It helped me avoid getting too caught up in the comparison that often comes with studying medicine. It's easy to see others pulling all-nighters in the library or studying constantly and feel you need to do the same. Being slightly older helped me recognise what works best for me in terms of revision and balance, which allowed me to settle in a bit sooner.

## How did you manage financially?

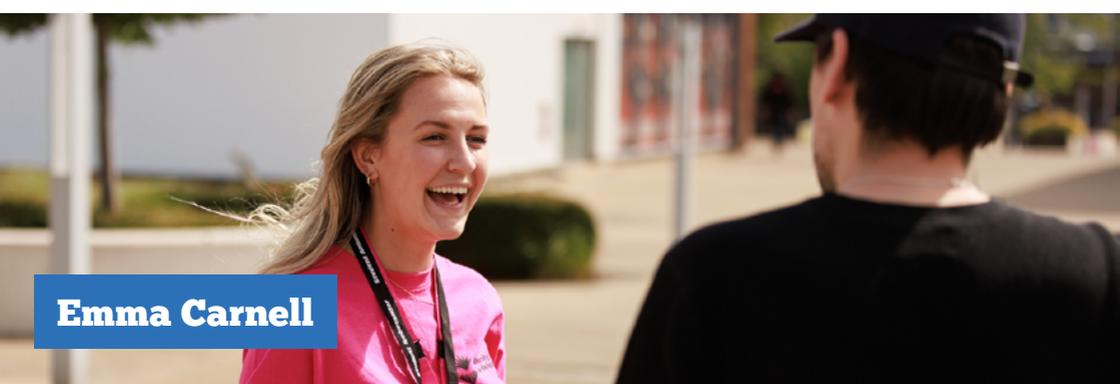
As a postgraduate on the undergraduate course, I didn't get a tuition fee loan. My parents helped, I received a maintenance loan, and I work every summer holiday in various roles, enabling me to save for living expenses.

## What are the benefits of work experience or further study before studying medicine?

Exam results pending, I'll be the first doctor in my family. This is something I'm proud of. It can be incredibly difficult to get shadowing experience without connections in medicine. That's why a bit more life experience really helped for interview preparation and, more generally, in feeling confident speaking with people from all walks of life.

## What advice would you give to other graduates considering this route?

Choosing to study medicine as a graduate is a big decision. I remember worrying that I'd fall behind peers who were already progressing in their careers or buying houses. But now, towards the end of the course, I can honestly say it's been absolutely worth it. My biggest advice would be to enjoy the journey. It's not a race. Five years will pass anyway, and if you're doing something you love, that time is well spent.



**Emma Carnell**

# How location can enhance your university experience

**By Jessica Page, Student Recruitment and Widening Participation Officer at Aberystwyth University**

Picking your university can enhance your student experience in many ways, and it all depends on what kind of person you are. You may want to move to a big city, a smaller town, or far away from home. Perhaps you've always wanted to live near the sea. This is your chance to choose your new home.

## City vs town

City universities offer a range of events, night life, and culture on the doorstep. Typically, there are more diverse social opportunities. However, city universities tend to be spread around the city, and you might miss out on the opportunity to experience on-campus living.

Town and smaller city universities offer a quieter student experience, but they have lots you can get involved in. There is often a higher sense of community, with most town universities having campuses and lower cost of living. Accommodation is typically on campus, so you can walk to your lectures within the space of minutes.

## Cost of living

Cost of living varies greatly in the UK. Consider the cost of living in the area you wish to study. How expensive is student accommodation, private renting, the cost of a pint?

Universities with a lower cost of living will help your student loan stretch further because you're spending less on accommodation and living expenses. This means you can do more with your money, such as social activities. Generally, universities in big cities will typically have a higher cost of living. You can visit the StudentCrowd website to learn about the cheapest student cities to inform your choice.

## Industry and nature

Living in a region with industry links can offer opportunities to immerse yourself into your chosen sector, through internships, graduate prospects, industry years, and guest speaker opportunities. London and Manchester might be better for certain industries, but smaller cities and towns have surprising links too.

You may wish to choose a green, open university surrounded by nature. Equally, a coastal university might be preferable if you've always wanted to live by the sea. Local beaches, mountains, and nature reserves may be an important decision-making factor, especially if you have a specific interest in a hobby such as water sports or mountaineering.

Remember, location is proven to impact overall happiness and lifestyle at university, so it's important to decide which aspects are important to you.



# How location can enhance your learning experience

**By Del Evans, Marketing Campaigns Officer at Aberystwyth University**

If you know what you want to study but aren't sure which university to choose, have you thought about how where you study could shape what you learn?

When thinking about location, we often focus on lifestyle. People might ask whether you want to stay close to home or move further away, or if you want to live in a big city or somewhere more outdoorsy. While these questions matter because they'll influence your day-to-day life, it's easy to overlook that location can also play an important role in your studies.

The examples below show how different subjects make the most of their surroundings. Even if your chosen subject isn't directly mentioned, having a sense of the influence of location will help you make a more informed decision on your university choice.

## Learning beyond the classroom

Learning doesn't only take place in lecture theatres. For many subjects, learning is strengthened when students can step outside the classroom and engage directly with their field of study.

Universities located near distinctive natural, cultural, or social environments can use these locations for field trips and research, and lecturers often use these settings to inform what they teach. So, even when you're in the classroom, location can still influence what you learn.

## Subjects shaped by their environment

Some subjects make strong use of their surroundings. If you're looking at marine biology, for example, you'll want a coastal campus with exciting equipment, like research boats, to take you out to sea.

If you're interested in animal behaviour and want to study wildlife in their natural habitats, your location will shape what you focus on, whether that's dolphins in Cardigan Bay or golden eagles in the Scottish Highlands.

If geography is more your thing, cities are ideal for human geography, where you can explore diverse populations and study how different communities live, work and interact. Physical geography, on the other hand, might be more exciting to study if you are closer to nature, such as near coastlines, mountains, rivers, and valleys.

## Creative subjects inspired by place

Other subjects make strong use of location in ways you might not expect. The arts, for example, often draw inspiration from their surroundings.

Courses such as creative writing, art, or photography may include modules that encourage students to respond to the places around them. Ask yourself, if you were working on a creative project, would you rather take inspiration from sandy beaches, rolling hills, historic buildings, or bustling streets?

## Choosing what works for you

There's no single right answer, but remember that choosing a university is about more than the course. Finding a place that brings what you learn to life can make your studies more engaging and memorable. By keeping this in mind, you'll be in a stronger position to choose a university that's right for you.

**“Learning is more memorable when it's connected to a place. It will help you gain a deeper understanding of your subject beyond textbooks. ”**

# The benefits of studying in Scotland

**By Anna Johnston, Interim UK Recruitment & Access Manager at the University of Aberdeen**

Scotland's higher education sector is one of the best in the world. We are home to 19 higher education institutions, 3 of which are in the world Top 200 according to the Times Higher World Rankings 2026. Scotland's universities are proud to welcome students from across the UK and internationally. Choosing where to study is a significant decision. Here are some reasons why a Scottish university might be the right choice for you.

## World-class education

Scotland is home to some of the oldest universities in the world. University of St Andrews was founded in 1413, University of Glasgow in 1451, and the University of Aberdeen in 1495. Alongside ancient universities, Scotland boasts many modern and specialist institutions in arts, creative industries, and the natural economy. Scottish universities rank consistently high in the National Student Survey, particularly in relation to teaching and academic support.

## Flexible degree structure

The four-year undergraduate degree provides increased flexibility and depth for students. Typically, the first two years allow you to sample a wider range of subjects, before narrowing down your specialism for the final years. Studying across disciplines can enrich your perspectives.

You might even graduate with a degree in a completely new subject!

Many Scottish universities offer an option to start in second year if students perform strongly in their A-levels or Advanced Higher. This allows you to obtain an honours degree in three years.

## Graduate prospects

Many Scottish universities offer placements and internship opportunities integrated in their degree programmes, giving students valuable real-world experience. The four-year degree can allow space for increased flexibility or dual qualification. For example, the LLB Law with English Law offered at University of Aberdeen and the University of Dundee gives students the choice of pursuing professional legal training in any part of the UK.

The latest data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on Destinations of Leavers show that 73% of Scottish university graduates are in graduate level jobs 6 months after graduation, which is 4% higher than their peers in the rest of the UK.

## Vibrant student life

University life is more than attending lectures. You should consider social aspects too. Many Scottish universities dedicate Wednesday afternoons to extracurricular activities or sports. All under 22s in Scotland get free bus travel, and Scotland's major towns and cities are well-connected by public transport. Vibrant cities, historic sites, beautiful countryside, mountains, beaches... Scotland offers something for everyone.



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Saturday 6th June (Medicine)

Tuesday 25th August

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# The benefits of studying in Wales

**By Cerys Davies, Student Recruitment and Widening Participation Officer at Aberystwyth University**

Choosing your university is an important part of your journey into higher education. Many automatically look at universities in England, but have you ever considered studying in Wales?

Wales offers a similar experience, with a few extra perks that make student life even better. Academically, there's no difference. A degree from a Welsh university is just as respected as one from England. The teaching, facilities, and career opportunities are right up there too. You most definitely won't be 'settling' for anything. You're simply choosing a different location in which to study.

## Wales is affordable

Cost is often one of the biggest worries about university. However, Wales is generally more affordable than many English cities. This means cheaper rent, cheaper nights out, and less stress when you get your student loan. Having a little bit of wiggle room with your money can genuinely make your life more enjoyable during your studies.

## Wales is supportive

Moving away from home can be scary for some.

You may need extra support to get you settled into your new life. Welsh universities excel at creating a supportive environment, from mental health services to academic support, especially if you are feeling nervous.

Welsh universities also foster a sense of community to help you settle in. Many are slightly smaller, which means you get to know your lecturers closely. You'll also meet everyone on your course, which makes it easier to get involved in lectures, make friends, and feel like you belong.

## Wales is beautiful

Wales is ridiculously beautiful. One minute you're shopping in a city, next you're hiking through the mountains or exploring a new beach. It's perfect if you want a balance between studying hard and properly switching off. Even if you don't love the outdoors, having that space and environment around you makes a difference.

## Wales is welcoming

Welsh universities are welcoming and full of life. Societies are active, and people are easy to talk to. There's something for everyone, whether you love clubbing, chilled evenings, barbeques on the beach, or simply wish to try something new.

Is studying in Wales really any different to England? The answer is yes, but in all the best ways. Same quality education, same opportunities, with a more affordable, supportive, and memorable experience.



# The benefits and challenges of studying in London

**By Rachel Stanley, Schools and Colleges Recruitment Manager at St Mary's University**

London attracts students from all over the world with its rich history, vibrant cultural scene, and world-famous attractions. Whether you're into theatre, sport, comedy, or live music, there's something for everyone in London. Made up of 32 boroughs, London is home to more universities than any other city in the UK, with around 40 institutions across the capital. No two universities are the same, and each offers a different student experience. This article explores the benefits and challenges of studying in London.

## World-class resources

You'll have access to a range of museums, libraries, art galleries, and research collections to support your assignments and research projects. Lecturers with smaller classes often take advantage of these opportunities by organising trips to talks, exhibitions, and shows that complement the course!

## Work opportunities

There are lots of work opportunities in London, including part-time jobs, work placements, and graduate roles. London is a hub for many industries, and universities have strong links with these organisations. This gives students the opportunity to build their network and enhance their CV alongside their studies.

## Diversity and culture

There are more than 300 languages spoken in London, making it an extremely multicultural

city. This diversity is reflected across London's universities, offering students an education that goes beyond the classroom through new perspectives and lifelong friendships.

## Travel

London has a world-class public transport system, making it easy to explore the city, travel across the UK, and discover Europe. Students can take advantage of the 18+ Student Oyster card, which offers a 30% discount on all journeys across London. London's transport can get very busy during rush hour, but students can often avoid peak times because most lectures don't run from 9am-5pm.

## Hustle and bustle

London is home to nearly 9 million people. It also welcomes millions of tourists each year, so it can get busy, especially in central London. This can feel overwhelming if you don't like crowds. However, not all universities are in central London. Some have campuses with lots of green space, giving you the best of both worlds!

## Cost of living

The biggest challenge of studying in London is the higher cost of living, although students receive a higher maintenance loan to help. Accommodation is the largest cost, so research your options, as prices vary based on where you study. Some London universities have limited halls and don't guarantee places for first-year students, so check this when doing your research. University accommodation teams will support you in finding safe, suitable private accommodation in the local area.

London isn't the cheapest place to live, but there are plenty of free things to do and student discounts to enjoy. You can visit free museums and galleries, eat affordably at London's many food markets, and attend world-class theatre for amazing prices!



# The benefits of studying overseas

**By Dr Matthew Yeo, Educational Consultant at The University Guys**

Have you ever wondered if your Granny being from Ireland might be useful or interesting?

Granny's Irish citizenship gets you an Irish passport as well as your British one. It is estimated that the number of people with multiple passports has doubled in the last decade, with a fivefold increase in the number of UK citizens who hold British and EU passports. Having an EU passport clearly makes things easier at the airport, and it can have a massive impact on your choices when it comes to higher education and university.

An EU passport opens a continent of possibilities. It entitles you to live and work without restriction in the 26 countries of the EU. Studying abroad in English or another language offers you a thrilling opportunity for adventure, a valuable set of skills, and the ability to distinguish yourself in the graduate employment market.

Students with EU passports can access European institutions at local fee levels, which makes courses comparable to (or cheaper than) their British counterparts. For example, a bachelor's degree in the Netherlands will cost you €6000 in fees. In Ireland, you will pay only

€2500. The financial arguments are certainly compelling, but research is required. What do you want to do? How do you want to do it?

British universities are world class, but European institutions are equally impressive. For instance, the Netherlands has outstanding marine biology courses, and Switzerland is the world leader in hospitality courses. In some cases, there are degree courses that relate to the industries or professions that make the town famous. For example, Leiden University College in The Hague (the home of the International Court of Justice) has an innovative course in global challenges. This course prepares students to tackle the world's big issues through group work, projects, and new modes of assessment.

Remember, you can apply to a European university alongside your traditional UCAS process. In many cases, the European applications are less time-consuming. The CAO in Ireland takes 10 minutes. Alternatively, you can re-use your UCAS personal statement to craft a supporting letter. That said, the timeframes and expectations for your teachers and supporters are different to UCAS arrangements, so inform your tutor or Head of Sixth Form about your intentions in the Spring of Year 12.

Whatever you decide, take ownership of this thrilling period of change and growth. With the restoration of the ERASMUS study option, European universities are a truly exciting prospect for undergraduate study and beyond.



# My student experience by Tami Okubote



**Year 13 student and co-host of The Uni Guide Podcast**

## 1. Why did you apply to university?

With all the different pathways presented to aspiring students today, I still believe that university remains the best way to pursue further education, and one of the smartest ways to enter the job market.

I applied to learn more about my subjects of interest, right down to their intricate details. Simultaneously, a degree grants me the opportunity and the time to choose the topics which I personally align with and therefore want to pursue further. I might even discover something new that catches my interest. University also exposes me to several industries and companies, so I can learn how my theoretical work is implemented in practical work.

## 2. How did you choose which subject to study?

My interest is technology and maths, so I chose to study a subject that combines both of my interests in computer science and/or data science. I suggest you do the same. Studying what you love will make learning fun and stimulating. Even the challenging aspects of the course will fascinate you when you study. Study your passion, otherwise you won't love the course, the subject, or university life.

## 3. How did you decide where to apply?

I decided my chosen universities through a combination of research, insight from individuals, and LinkedIn. It's imperative to look independently about your courses of interest. Learn about the modules, how they're taught, and the mixture between theory and coursework. See what fits your archetype best.

While they don't mean everything, looking at subject rankings will show how respected and academic your course is compared to other institutions. Gaining advice and insights from friends and mentors already at university also offers unfiltered opinions about the course and student experience. Meanwhile, LinkedIn allows you to evaluate which companies and industries are accessible to your course of interest.

## 4. What is your top tip for applying to university?

Start your personal statement early. Coming from my current experience in Year 13, this academic year is very busy, and you'll be juggling coursework, exams, UCAS admissions, and any possible admission tests. Make sure you have at least a solid draft of your personal statement done, so you can spend your time editing and improving it, rather than spending time writing it in the first place.

Also, make sure you revise for any admission tests early. Presuming examinations are in October, revising in the summer term and holidays will give you plenty of time to prepare. This allows you to feel as confident as possible on exam day, and to obtain the best possible mark. This could be the very difference between getting an offer or not. Finally, use free resources too. YouTube, Google, and the emergence of AI chatbots are at your disposal to use to your advantage.



# The different types of university event

**By Joelle Pointing, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Liverpool**

When you are thinking about studying at university – and where to study – attending university events throughout the year is a brilliant way to make your all important decision.

There is a wide range of events to help you consider your options. This includes exhibitions attended by hundreds of universities, events on university campuses, and a growing number of online events too.

## Exhibitions

There are several free, large exhibitions across the UK that you can book onto. These give you the chance to meet a range of different universities all in one place – hopefully somewhere close to where you live.

You can have initial conversations with universities on your shortlist, and those you haven't come across before. It could be your first chance to ask questions about university life, and specific ones about the courses on offer. Prepare a few questions to ask on the day.

## Open days

Attending an open day is the best way to get a taste of university life. It's your chance to experience the university's unique atmosphere, explore facilities, and speak to students,

lecturers, and support staff.

You'll discover first hand whether the environment is right for you. Also, try to visit the surrounding town/city because you'll study and live there for the next three years or more.

## Summer schools, taster events, applicant days

These provide an intensive, subject specific insight into studying at university. Depending on the type of event, you might stay in student accommodation, attend subject specific lectures and workshops, and meet other students with similar interests.

These events are often highly specialised, giving you a strong understanding of what studying at university is really like.

## Online events

There are many online events you can attend from home. These include open events, subject specific sessions, and Q&As. These are ideal for gathering information without needing to travel.

You can explore universities that are too far away to visit in person. Online events also fit around your work and study commitments. Universities typically share recordings of their online events, so you can watch them at your own convenience.

University events are a brilliant way to gather information to reach a decision about your university applications. Look at some of your current top choices, sign up to their mailing lists to hear about upcoming events, and add key dates to your calendar so you don't miss out!

 UniTasterDays.com

## Find a university event to help you decide your future

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# The benefits of attending a university event

**By Rachel Mountford, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer (North West) at the University of Huddersfield**

Universities host a wide range of events, from open days to smaller subject-specific taster sessions. You can book onto open days, summer schools, and applicant visit days yourself. You can also bring along family members or friends to help you navigate your visit. Other events, such as group workshops, are usually organised by your school directly with the university. Attending these events will offer you several personal, academic, and social benefits.

## Informing your decision

Attending a general event will give you opportunities to attend a variety of sessions, such as academic course talks, guest lectures, and student ambassador panels. You can delve into the course topics and module options, then discuss if they are right for you. Most academic course talks discuss career paths and offer inspiring stories from alumni.

You will also have the chance to engage with a wide variety of student support services, including career advisers, wellbeing and accessibility teams, and academic skills tutors. This provides a clear picture of the support network available to you when studying at a particular institution.

## Developing your skills

Universities continue to look at the skills you've developed, as highlighted in section 2 and 3 of your personal statement. Attending university events can give you the boost needed to develop or unleash those skills.

For example, perhaps you attend a taster workshop where you had the opportunity to participate in a practical task. This experience will give you a deeper understanding of studying the subject beyond school. It will also offer you specific skills to mention in your personal statement, such as communication, teamwork, and leadership.

## Finding your belonging

University events aren't solely for collecting course information. They make sure you find a sense of belonging. Events help you become familiar with your surroundings, talk directly with tutors, ask them questions about their experience, and start to build a network of fellow students. You'll also gain a sense of the campus, student support, facilities, and the general atmosphere. Compile a list of universities, then compare your experiences and feelings. Can you picture yourself using all that is on offer?

## Inspiring your career

Lastly, attending university events will ignite your passion further and advise you on which route to take. You might not have a set career in mind. Events will expose you to different opportunities. Student or alumni panels can showcase careers you haven't considered before. Use these events to do more research and boost your confidence before going into higher education.



# How to prepare for a university fair

**By Liv Squires, Senior Student Recruitment Officer at Southampton Solent University**

Whether you are beginning your university research, or right in the middle of it, a university fair is a helpful experience to give you a boost of confidence in your 'next steps' journey.

This article will ease any uncertainty you may have. You'll also gain some small (but effective!) tips and tricks towards preparing for your next university fair.

## Know the size

A large-scale event could be held at an exhibition or arena. This can sound quite intimidating, but these events offer you a chunk of time to focus on your needs and gain independence in your research. There could be activities for you to get involved in and goodies to take home with you after a day out. If the fair you are attending is large scale, I recommend planning your time wisely by writing out a list of institutions you would like to visit.

I always feel that the same rules apply for smaller events, which are usually held at your own school or college. Still, make your own list of who you would like to visit and have questions ready to go. Where possible, sign up for alerts from your universities of interest so you are told about open days, and any in-person or virtual sessions that they host throughout the year.

## Prepare to engage

You don't have to write pages and pages of questions. Three questions will do just fine. These can evolve into more conversation. Examples could be:

- What courses do you offer in this area?
- How many UCAS points do I need for entry onto the course?
- How many contact hours does the course offer weekly?
- Is the course practical or theoretical?
- What are the accommodation options?
- Where is the university campus?
- Is part-time work a possibility?

## Support your friends

Fairs can be quite overwhelming, especially if there are lots of exhibitors and you don't know where to start. If a friend is unsure about their next steps, but they are curious to see what's on offer, be as encouraging as possible! I've seen so many students being a cheerleader for their friends. It has such a positive impact on their visit.

## Keep an open mindset

Take advantage of having lots of institutions in the same room at the same time. It's like a bite-sized experience of an open day, but you get to visit more than one university in a day. You never know what can come from a conversation. It could lead you to an answer, or even some final decisions you've been hoping to make. Go for it!



# Top questions to ask at a university fair

**By Jenny Patterson, Student Recruitment Officer at Heriot-Watt University**

Picture this: you make your way to a university stand at a careers fair. The university rep smiles and says, “Hi there, how can I help?” and you draw an absolute blank. Sound familiar?

Hopefully, by the end of this article, these moments will be a thing of the past, as we talk through the top questions you can ask at a university fair.

The purpose of attending a university fair is to gather information about the different institutions where you might apply. Try to focus on two things: the courses offered at the university, and their student life. These will form the fundamentals of your experience studying there. To break these two points down, below are the Top 5 questions you can ask about each area.

## Filtering your options

These questions will provide a solid foundation of knowledge about each institution, which will help filter out the right place for you. For example, you might find that two universities offer your chosen course, but one has a better snowboarding society. Equally, you might find a new university for your shortlist because you now have a better understanding of their offering. These questions provide a useful tool for you to compare, contrast, and gather intel on your options.

## Ask away

Of course, you aren’t limited to these questions. You might have something specific you want to know, so ask away! University reps are there to answer your questions, not just about their institution but university life in general. We are asked all sorts of questions by thousands of students throughout the year. There is no such thing as a silly question or too many questions. Therefore, make sure you make the most of university fairs and ask everything you need. If you get stuck, you have the lists below to get you started.

### Course questions

1. Does your university offer [course of interest]?
2. What facilities do you have for this course?
3. What sort of modules are included in the course?
4. How is the course assessed?
5. I really want to become a [dream job]. Will the degree help with this?

### Student life questions

1. What societies do you have at your university?
2. What is your accommodation like? Is it easy to find somewhere to live after first year?
3. What is it like getting a part-time job?
4. What is your local area like? Is there lots to do?
5. Is your area well-connected with public transport?



# How to prepare for a university open day

**By Amy Fairbrother, Student Recruitment and Access Manager at the University of Reading**

Open days are an important part of your journey to university. Often held from April to November, open days let you see the campus, facilities, accommodation, and the local area. Most importantly, you can ask staff and students what it's really like to study there. This article will help you prepare for an open day, so you make the most of the day.

## Check entry requirements

Check entry requirements on the university website before your visit to see if they are achievable. Be aspirational but also realistic. Most importantly, confirm the university offers the course of interest to avoid a wasted journey.

## Prepare your travel

Most open days are held on Saturdays, but some universities offer events on Fridays and Sundays. You might be able to see two nearby universities in one weekend.

Car parking is often limited, and roads can get congested, so consider taking public transport. Many universities provide free shuttle buses from the local station or Park and Ride. This also gives you a feel for the area, and how easy it is to get around.

Some universities provide travel bursaries or discounted travel for students from eligible backgrounds. You can search for these using the new [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#).

## Explore the area

After the open day, it's worth investigating the local town or city. Talk to current students about their experiences living both on and off-campus. They will often give you very honest answers. Would you person feel happy living there?

## Plan your day

Register your attendance at the open day in advance to receive a schedule of talks and subject lectures. You should attend course talks and visit accommodation as a priority. There's generally a printed programme available on the day, but some universities ask you to download an app.

Prepare questions before your visit to help you gather the necessary information to make a better judgement between universities later in the process.

## Questions to ask

If you aren't sure which questions to ask at your open day, then here are some questions to get you started

- What modules can I study? How many can I choose?
- Do you make contextual offers?
- Can I receive lower entry requirements with an EPQ?
- Can I do a placement or a year abroad with this course?
- Will I get help to find my placement?
- How many contact hours will I have?
- What support is available if I need extra help?
- What's the weekly cost of accommodation?
- Where do students live in their second and third years?
- How much work will I need to do outside the lectures?
- What happens if I miss my required grades?
- What is the nightlife like?
- Can I get a part-time job?
- What societies and sports clubs are available?



**Learn more about open days in Episode 34 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**



**“Confirm the university offers your course of interest to avoid a wasted journey.”**

# Making the most of your university open day

**By Daisy Hawkins, Graduate Advocate at Liverpool Hope University**

Open days are the best way to decide if a university is the right one for you, so you should attend as many as possible. Here are some top tips for any open days you attend.

## Speak to the ambassadors

These are current students, so they are the best people to talk about the university, the location, and student life. Ask why they chose that university.

## Enjoy a campus tour

Take a guided tour of the university and explore its accommodation options. You will spend at least 3 years there, so make sure it feels comfortable and has everything you want. If you are considering halls, see if you can imagine yourself living there, and if you think it's worth the price!

## Attend a subject talk

Gain a deeper understanding of your chosen subject and how it's taught at the university. Learn specifics about the curriculum and assignment opportunities. You can also use these sessions to decide if you like the tutors as well.

## Visit a subject stand

If you are interested in multiple courses, then you might struggle to attend both subject talks. Instead, go to your preferred subject talk, then visit the subject stands for the others to talk to the lecturers. They will be happy to discuss their courses and answer your questions.

## Speak to support teams

These teams include wellbeing and learning support, admissions, accommodation, careers, and finance. They have staff available at open days to address your queries and provide clarity. For example, admissions staff can explain what Level 3 qualifications are accepted, and wellbeing staff can share the bespoke student support options available to students.

## Take someone with you

Whether friends or family, having a second (or third) perspective on the day can be very useful. They may pick up on things that you have missed and vice versa. It's still your decision, but you may appreciate another's insight.

## Explore the local area

If you're moving to a new city - like Liverpool, for example - then explore the city and the tourist attractions. It's important that you enjoy the wider area as much as the university. This will be your new home for at least 3 years, perhaps longer if you decide to stay after graduation. Make sure there are plenty of things to do.

Most importantly, enjoy your open day!





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# BOOK YOUR OPEN DAY

The best way to get  
a feel for our University  
is to come and see it  
for yourself.

## 2026 OPEN DAYS

Sat 27<sup>th</sup> June

Sat 17<sup>th</sup> October

Sat 14<sup>th</sup> November

Wed 2<sup>nd</sup> December



Scan the QR  
code to book  
your place.

# Attending two open days in one day

**By Hope Nightingale, Student Recruitment Manager at Aston University**

Open days help you decide if a university is the right fit for you, but what happens when open days clash? Is it possible to visit two open days in one day? The answer is yes! Follow my top tips for making the most out of your day.

## Research

Look on UCAS.com and [UniTasterDays](#) to find university open day dates. If you're planning to visit a university, see if nearby universities are having an open day too. If not, contact them anyway to request a campus tour to make the most of your trip. Be realistic about what is achievable in a single day. It's more feasible to visit two universities in the same city, or those which are less than an hour apart.

## Plan

Open days are long days, but you need to be prepared when trying to attend two in one day.

- **Book your place** - this means your place is secured and you'll be sent the details required for the day.
- **Check your timings** - work out your exact arrival and departure times, and how long you can spend at each university.
- **Prioritise your sessions** - look at both

event schedules to decide which sessions are most important to you. This will most likely be the course session, but you might also want to tour campus or visit accommodation. If you miss your course session, universities might have other opportunities to speak to academics on the day or see course facilities, so you don't miss out.

- **Arrange your travel** - universities may offer open day travel support, so keep an eye on your emails, especially for public transport discounts. If you are driving, make sure you know the parking locations at each university. There may also be offers for hotel discounts if you plan to stay overnight to explore the area.

## Enjoy your day!

It may feel a little busy but make the most of your time at the universities. Take a pen and notepad to make notes on the day. Use your phone to capture those little things you might want to re-visit later. If you can stay longer, try to explore the area to see what it could offer you.

## Missed something?

Course pages, virtual tours, and on-demand content on university websites are really helpful for further information. Remember, if you apply to a university, you will be invited to an offer-holder day between January and May, so you have an opportunity to visit again. If you still have questions, email the admissions team and they will point you in the right direction.



# The benefits of attending a summer school

**By James Casey, Widening Access Officer at Royal Holloway, University of London**

Ever wondered what university life is really like? A university summer school is a short-term programme run by a university during summer break or towards the end of summer term. They can last from between one night to several weeks. Courses are often free and funded by a university, but some have a cost depending on the specialism of the programme and the audience. They have many benefits.

## Academic benefit

You will enter a 'mini' university experience from the moment you step onto the university campus. You will be expected to act like university students and put your all into the experience.

You will gain exposure to degree-style teaching through lectures, seminars, lab sessions, or practical work. This will include access to state-of-the-art facilities, perhaps an MRI scanner or performing in a brand-new theatre.

If you already know your preferred subject at university, the summer schools can inform what style of university course suits you best. Practical or academic? Exams or coursework?

Equally, it's completely fine if you haven't yet chosen a subject. Sessions are designed to guide your final decision if you choose to apply.

## Personal benefit

As part of your summer school programme, you will experience the social side of university life. You may take part in taster sessions for your favourite sports, hobbies, or societies. These help you meet the people who share your interests and outlooks when you become a university student.

Universities will likely include the offer of accommodation as part of summer schools. At Royal Holloway, accommodation is an essential part of our summer school experience, as it gives you the freedom to taste what independence feels like within a safe and secure environment. This may excite you, or you may find this daunting, but challenge yourself and give it a go.

## Application benefit

Admission teams love summer school attendees. It proves you have gone 'outside the classroom' to engage with a university experience. It's one of the best pieces of content for your personal statement. Programmes may include group projects, where you can develop your teamwork, communication, and critical thinking skills. These transferable and academic skills will make you stand out in your application, and admissions teams love to read about them when linked to a summer school.

If you're interested in available summer schools, look through opportunities advertised on UniTasterDays and university websites. You will need to apply for a programme, so make sure you explain why you are the ideal person to take part. You never know what they could lead to, so make the most and enjoy them!



# Accessing university events on a budget

**By Chris Hakes, Higher Education Adviser at the University of East Anglia**

There's a wide range of university events that you can attend: open days, applicant days, taster days, and summer schools. Universities are keen to engage with prospective students to give you the chance to learn more about them. Virtual events are efficient, but attending in person provides a clearer sense of what a university is really like. However, attending multiple events is very costly, especially for those who need to travel, skip part-time jobs, or stay overnight. But with careful planning, you can access these events without breaking the bank.

## Choosing the right events

With so many options, you need to think about your stage of the applicant journey. Prioritise the events that give you the insights you need. Skipping events isn't a disadvantage if your choices are intentional. For example, open days are best if you hope to get a broad overview of the university and facilities. Alternatively, a summer school is more effective for an in-depth look into student life. Meanwhile, an applicant day is perfect if you've already applied and now wish to meet your fellow applicants and future academic teams.

## Seeking support and incentives

Universities understand that financial constraints are a barrier for event attendance. As a result, you'll find that many offer financial support to make attending easier. This could be travel bursaries, discounted accommodation, or even discounts at local food, drink, and entertainment outlets. The latter is ideal if you plan to explore the local area. You can find discounts listed on the UniTasterDays event incentive platform and university websites.

## Combining events to save money

Consider how you can combine events to reduce repeated costs. For example, when booking open days, try to cluster them by location. Seek dates when several universities in the same area are hosting events simultaneously. Perhaps you could attend one in the morning and another in the afternoon. With some extra thought, you could make date clashes work in your favour, financially.

## Bang for your buck

Ultimately, think how you can get the best bang for your buck. One well-used visit can be more valuable than several rushed ones. Think about the questions you want answered. Look at timetables in advance, so you have time to attend the sessions important to you.

With cost-of-living pressures, many students face the same financial barriers. By planning ahead, and using the financial support available, you can still engage fully without unnecessary costs.



## Do you need financial support to attend an open day?

- Use our new event incentives search tool
- Find universities offering financial support for their events
- Discover travel bursaries, refreshment vouchers, free parking
- Explore discounted trains, coaches, and hotels



**Search for event incentives at [www.UniTasterDays.com/EventIncentives](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/EventIncentives)**

# Advice for attending an online university event

**By Helen Bery, Digital Outreach Coordinator at the University of Brighton**

Attending online university events can help you decide your next steps. Most universities offer a range of online events: subject tasters, information sessions, online summer schools. Some will help you learn more about a subject you love, whilst others explain how to apply to university.

## Finding online events

University websites and [UniTasterDays](#) are good places to start. Make a shortlist of the events you will find useful. Most universities have live online events and encourage you to ask questions. This is a brilliant way to learn what it's like to study a subject by talking to tutors, students, and staff. You can normally book onto these sessions directly through university websites.

## Preparing for online events

Firstly, make a note of the date and time of the event in your diary. Sign up to the event with an email address you regularly use. This is how the universities will keep in touch with you.

You will receive a link and instructions on how to join the event by email. This could be through Teams, or another platform. You may need to download an app. It's best to do this beforehand, so you are ready to join the event on time.

Finally, remember to prepare questions before the event. It could be anything from "What's the student life like?" to "How many classes will I have a week?" You can ask these questions in the online chat if you would rather not speak on camera. It's also helpful to read questions from other students as they might be relevant to you.

## Benefits of online events

Online events are usually free and viewable from the comfort of your home. They are easier to fit around study or other responsibilities, and perfect for those who prefer to digest information at their own pace. Registering also means you will receive follow-up communications to support you further.

Brighton's online summer school is open to Year 12 students. It offers 13 different subject areas, covering a range of topics across four days. You can learn about university life from current students, watch subject taster videos by academics, attend interactive sessions, and access lots of useful resources. You can also complete a short subject-specific project and receive feedback, which can be used to support your personal statement.

*"It was amazing! I learned so much about physiotherapy and other allied health professions, but also all about the course, the application process, and uni life." - Year 12 student, Health Online Summer School 2025*

Our online summer schools run from 20 to 23 July 2026. They are free to join, and everyone is welcome. Visit our website to register your interest and we'll be in touch with the next steps.





**University of Brighton**

# THINKING ABOUT YOUR FUTURE?

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+ Chat to students, tutors, and staff to find out what it's really like to study at Brighton

+ Join online from the comfort of your home



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# My student experience by Jerry Ndi



**International Finance and Economics Student at Queen Mary University of London**

I didn't care about university at first.

If you'd asked me two years ago for my post-school plans, I'd have confidently said a degree apprenticeship. It made perfect sense. Combining work experience and studying at the same time felt like the ultimate win. But life doesn't always follow a straight path, does it?

Family norms nudged me towards the university route, and there was also this intangible idea of wanting the "uni experience," whatever that meant.

Now, I'm a second year International Finance and Economics student at Queen Mary University of London. I've realised something huge: only I can create my university experience. And honestly, I'm glad I chose this route.

## 1. Why did I choose university?

The decision wasn't black and white. University felt like a challenge – a way to grow and push myself. I also wanted more out of life than

just an endless roulette of study and work. I wanted to learn from people, opportunities, and experiences. I commute to campus and live at home. Some might think this limits the whole "uni vibe," but there's so much more to university than where you sleep.

## 2. Why did I choose my subject?

I chose International Finance and Economics because I wanted to understand the big picture: how economies connect, what drives growth, and where I fit into it all. Economics gives you tools to tackle real-world problems, and finance teaches you how money moves the world (and maybe how to make some of it). It's not always easy – numbers and stats can test me – but that's part of why I'm drawn to it.

Okay, now here's the more authentic answer: finance is intricately connected to everything we do. The tap water you wash your hands with was supplied by an organisation that was funded by a bank. The operating system on your phone is there because a bank facilitated the merging of two tech companies to create it. The NHS provides good pension incentives for its workers, and guess who manages those pension funds? Financial institutions. I could go on and on.

Long story short, finance is very impactful, competitive, and lucrative. I didn't want to graduate from university without a good job, and finance is an expertise in high demand.

**“University felt like a challenge - a way to grow and push myself. I also wanted more out of life than just an endless roulette of study and work. I wanted to learn from people, opportunities, and experiences. ”**



### 3. How did I decide where to study?

Queen Mary stood out for its diversity, its location in London, and its vibrant campus community. I could stay at home and still get a world-class education. Commuting works for me. It gives me time to reflect, catch up on reading, or (let's be honest) take a nap. Plus, being in London means I can dive into opportunities outside my course, like building my network, working a part-time job, and organising events.

### 4. My top tip for students applying to university

The "uni experience" is what you make it. Whether you live on campus or commute, whether you're an introvert or a social butterfly, the opportunities are out there. You just have to take them. For me, that meant stepping out of my comfort zone and creating opportunities for others too.

Firstly, I've joined The Uni Guide Podcast and had a fantastic time ever since, having great conversations with guests about higher education.

Secondly, I've launched a mentoring scheme through my platform Super PE Online. This connects students with professionals to help them navigate their career journeys.

Finally, I hosted the Next-Gen Business Fair on the 27 January 2025. This is where young entrepreneurs and professionals share their insights and inspire the next wave of talent. It was attended by consultancy firms, food vendors, fitness platforms, and more!

Initiatives like these are part of my university experience. They've helped me grow as a student, person, and connect with like-minded people.

### 5. My highlight of university

My highlight has been the moments where I've created something meaningful. These include being a clutch team player by delivering an intense group project assignment, helping a student feel confident about their next steps, or meeting new and exciting people. University is about growth. Every challenge I've faced has pushed me closer to the person I want to be.

If you're deciding on university, remember: the experience is yours to shape. It's not just about lectures, deadlines, or the location. It's about the choices you make, the people you meet, and the opportunities you create. I came to university looking for growth, and I've found so much more.

**“ Whatever path you choose - own it! ”**



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- Exploring key university guidance topics
- Can even be embedded into your school website!



**Please listen in and share: [www.UniTasterDays.com/TheUniGuide](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/TheUniGuide)**

# Student finance in England - Three must-know facts for students

By **Jon Cheek**, Founder of **UniTasterDays.com**

Student finance is one of the biggest worries for students thinking about university. It often feels confusing, intimidating, and full of unknowns. The reality is that once you understand the basics, the system is far more straightforward than many people expect.

Student finance can (and does) change over time, so it's important to get clear, up-to-date advice. The information below applies to students starting university in England from September 2026 onwards. Different systems apply in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. For details, please see the excellent guidance from Martin Lewis.

Here are three essential facts every student, parent, and supporter should know.

## 1. You only repay when you earn over £25,000

You don't start repaying your student loan until you earn more than £25,000 a year:

- Repayments begin from the April after you graduate
- You repay 9% of anything you earn above £25,000
- If you earn less than the threshold, you repay nothing.

For example, if you earn £30,000, you repay 9% of £5,000. This is around £37.50 each month.

It may be lower if the repayment threshold rises in line with inflation in the years ahead, as I expect it will. But let's not overcomplicate things here!



### Top tip

Student loan repayments are based on what you earn, not what you owe. Earn less, pay less. Earn below the threshold, pay nothing.

## 2. Loans are written off after 40 years

You may repay your student loan for up to 40 years after leaving university. Any remaining balance after that time is written off.

Many graduates will never repay the full amount. For some people, student finance will work more like a graduate contribution than a traditional loan.

## 3. Maintenance loans depend on household income

Student finance usually comes in two parts:

- Tuition fee loan – this covers course fees, which are up to £9,790 a year for students starting in September 2026. This is paid directly to the university.
- Maintenance loan – this is paid directly to you to help with living costs such as accommodation, food, and travel.



The amount of maintenance loan you receive depends mainly on household income. Higher household income usually means a smaller maintenance loan, but every eligible student receives some support.

### Top tip

Use the Student Finance Calculator to estimate what you might receive. Parents and supporters often find this helpful too.



### Further support

Some students may be eligible for additional financial support, including:

- Disabled Students' Allowance
- Extra funding for specific subjects
- Support linked to personal circumstances, such as being a young carer.

### Final note

I haven't included the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) in this article. The LLE is intended to reform the post-18 student finance system into a single funding model. The LLE is expected to apply to courses starting on or after 1 January 2027, with applications opening from September 2026. This doesn't affect students applying to university now, so the information here focuses on the student finance currently available.

Student finance policies change over time. The information in this guide is correct to the best of our knowledge at the time of writing but should be used as general guidance only. Students are encouraged to check official sources for the most up-to-date information. Always ensure you explore official guidance from the Student Loans Company and seek advice from trusted experts such as Martin Lewis.



# University scholarships and bursaries

**By Scott Mahoney, Schools, Colleges and Outreach Officer at the University of South Wales**

The financial side of university can sometimes feel overwhelming, particularly with rising tuition fees and the general cost of living. Fortunately, there is support available to help make higher education more manageable.

Many students and families are unaware that universities across the UK offer a wide range of scholarships and bursaries. These can help cover living costs, reduce tuition fees, or even contribute towards equipment and study materials. These support packages exist to make higher education more accessible and affordable.

## Scholarships vs bursaries

The terms are often used interchangeably, but there are some differences.

- **Scholarships** – usually awarded based on merit, such as academic achievement, sporting excellence, or musical talent. Some scholarships are competitive, with an application and review process.
- **Bursaries** – typically awarded based on financial need or personal circumstances. These are designed to support students who face additional barriers in accessing or progressing through higher education.

## Potential and performance

The key message is this: scholarships and bursaries aren't just about rewarding achievement. Many are aimed at recognising potential and increasing access to higher education. There may be support available for those who have:

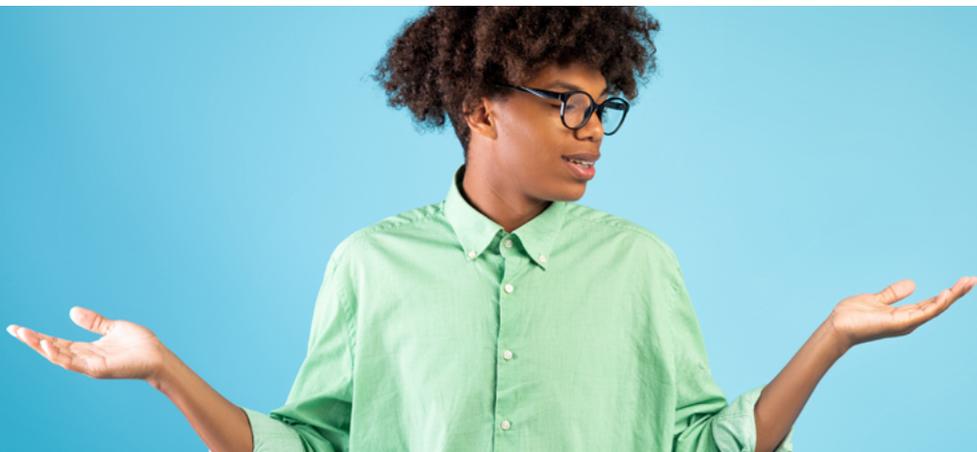
- overcome specific personal or educational challenges
- chosen a course or subject area that is underrepresented
- come from an area with lower progression rates to university
- faced financial hardship or other barriers.

Some universities offer support based on a student's postcode, their background, or their route into higher education. Institutions across the UK are committed to welcoming a diverse student population and have created financial support to reflect this goal.

## Finding scholarships and bursaries

Each university has its own selection of scholarships and bursaries. These are usually listed under the 'fees and funding' or 'student support' sections of their website. Take time to explore the options and see if you meets the eligibility criteria.

Many awards go unclaimed because students are unaware they exist or assume they won't qualify. Do your research, note any application deadlines, and reach out to universities if you have questions. Whether you are applying straight from school, returning to education, or facing personal challenges, you shouldn't rule yourself out.



# Blackbullion: finding and securing scholarships

**By Larissa Eddy, Corporate Manager  
at Blackbullion**

Over the past 3 years, scholarships have finally begun to take hold as a real opportunity for students in the UK. With the cost-of-living crisis exacerbating the already expensive commitment of pursuing a university degree, stakeholders outside of the education sector have taken notice and begun to step in.

We've seen the unveiling of Santander's new education strategy, which included a multi-million pound scholarship programme. Even UK grime artist, Stormzy, is getting involved by funding dozens of scholarships for Black students at Cambridge.

However, even with more opportunities opening up for you, the market for scholarships is still small and very competitive. This article will help point you in the direction of the right opportunities and maximise your chances of securing the awards by smashing your applications.

## When to expect scholarships to launch

You should be aware of these funding windows:

- April – A key period when many scholarships open. Prepare your applications in the spring.
- September – Another wave of scholarships launches in early autumn, giving you a second chance.
- National Scholarships Week 2026 – This

takes place between 20 and 26 April 2026. The previous event, run in partnership with Amazon, launched over £1.1 million worth of scholarship funding through corporate partners.

## Scholarships as a gateway to opportunities

Many scholarships provide more than just financial aid. They offer internships, mentorships, and work experience. These extras can be pivotal in building your career. Seek scholarships aligned with your goals, as these opportunities make you more appealing to future employers.

## Finding opportunities

The scholarships marketplace remains fragmented, but students now have more ways to find the right opportunities. Students can search directly through universities, or using a scholarships aggregator like Blackbullion's Funding Hub, The Scholarship Hub, and even the British Council.

**“Many scholarships provide more than just financial aid. They offer internships, mentorships, and work experience. These extras can be pivotal in building your career.”**



However, you should also be aware of additional channels where scholarship information is shared. For instance, platforms like TikTok and Instagram are increasingly being used by scholarship providers to promote their programmes. You can also sign up for newsletters from scholarship websites and follow key scholarship influencers on social media who provide regular updates on new opportunities.

### Increasing chances for success

We work with providers from both the higher education and private sectors. Both sides give us the same answer when it comes to what makes an application stand out: the student sharing their genuine story with the funder. This is particularly true when it comes to widening participation scholarships. The funders want to know why the student is applying and, more importantly, how the scholarship will help the student achieve their goals.

Try to feel comfortable sharing experiences about your family, your personal achievements, and what your aspirations are. Linking future goals to the subject that you have chosen to study will demonstrate your commitment to your education and your future, which goes a long way with funders.

Another excellent way to stand out is to show off the research that you have done into the funder. Each scholarship application is different. Demonstrating to the funder that this application is for them, and only them, ensures that you will be noticed.

Another important note is to provide evidence. Many scholarships will be targeted towards students who truly require the funding due to their personal circumstances. In these situations, most funders will ask for evidence of your financial situation, so you should have bank statements, SLC entitlement letters, and photo IDs within reach to speed up the process!

One final word of advice: there are a lot of students, and too few opportunities out there. Please apply to as many scholarships and bursaries as possible for the best chance of success.



**Hear more from  
Blackbullion on  
Episode 22 of The  
Uni Guide Podcast.**



**CAUTION:** *Reviewers can tell when students use AI on their scholarship applications! That doesn't mean you shouldn't use ChatGPT to assist with your applications, but it does mean that you need to be careful*





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# Accessing a hardship fund

**By Tom Allingham, Communications Director at Save the Student**

Nobody wants their student life to be hampered by financial difficulty, but universities can help. In addition to their wide range of bursaries, most universities offer a hardship fund too. Many have even added more cash to the pot of their hardship fund and expanded eligibility in response to the cost-of-living crisis.

But these funds are still limited. To help, this article will introduce you to hardship funds, how much funding you can receive, and how to access them.

## Understanding hardship funding

The focus tends to be on the seriousness of a student's financial challenges, and often if it's arisen unexpectedly through no fault of their own. That last part is crucial. Although the exact rules vary by university, they usually specify that students must have been careful with their money, budgeted, and taken the maximum maintenance package they were offered.

If a student spends recklessly and goes out every night, or routinely buys designer clothes, they might find it more difficult to access hardship funding. But what if someone had a part-time job (page 76), kept to a strict budget, only to be made redundant and unable to pay their bills? Chances are, they'd be more likely to receive help.

The key point is that despite their expansion in recent years, hardship funds aren't infinite. Universities still try to reserve the money

for those who tried to make things work, but suffered an unforeseen blow.

## Cash offered by hardship funding

In most cases, hardship funding is non-repayable. Precisely how much students get will vary depending on both their university and the issue they're facing. If their problem can be solved by a one-off payment of £100, that's likely all they'll receive.

But if they're facing a far bigger challenge, their university may offer much more. In particularly urgent cases, a university may even pay a small amount upfront to help the student while their application is processed.

## Applying for hardship funding

Each university's application process is different, but it's typically an online application. Most will have guidance on their website about the requirements. Failing that, the students' union or money advice team should be able to help.

You needn't worry too much about the specifics at this stage, but it's worth knowing that you'll have to supply evidence of your hardship. This could include bank statements, and potentially an explanation of any large or unusual outgoings. As ever, it will vary by circumstance. For example, if a student is claiming they've been made redundant, they may need to provide written proof.

## Awareness of hardship funding

Please familiarise yourself with hardship funding before you go to university. It will help calm your fears about unexpected financial difficulties later. Remember, the onus is on you to manage your finances carefully, because factoring hardship funding into your budget will likely only damage your chances of receiving it.

**“A university may pay a small amount upfront to help the student while their application is processed.”**



**Learn more about student finance in Episode 31 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**



# Budgeting at university

**By Jen Barton, Schools Outreach and Widening Participation Manager at Durham University**

Starting university often means managing your own money for the first time. It might feel overwhelming, but learning how to budget - and sticking to it - will make life so much easier!

## Make your budget

There are loads of free tools to help you, like MoneySavingExpert, UCAS, Whatuni, and Save the Student. Start by working out your income. This could be:

- Student loans or maintenance grants
- Scholarships or bursaries
- Part-time job earnings
- Support from family
- Any savings you already have

Next, list your essential expenses, such as:

- Rent and accommodation
- Bills - internet, water, gas, electricity, TV licence
- Insurance
- Travel costs
- Phone bill
- Food

Subtract your essential expenses from your

income. The money left over is for non-essentials, such as clothes, eating out, nights out, cinema trips, and other fun stuff. Divide this by the number of weeks in the term to get your weekly spending limit.

## Stick to your budget

Planning is one thing, but sticking to it is another! Use online templates or a simple spreadsheet to track what you spend. If you overspend one week, cut back the next to stay on track. Alternatively, if you want extra cash for socialising or treats, then consider getting a part-time job.

## Seek support

Life happens. Unexpected costs or opportunities can throw your budget off. Don't panic! Universities have support teams and hardship funds for students in financial difficulty. Equally, there may be additional funding for special opportunities, like sports competitions or academic events.

## Be money-savvy

Small changes can make a big difference:

- Swap takeaway coffees for a reusable flask
- Take cash on nights out to avoid overspending
- Sell or swap clothes and textbooks you don't need
- Use student discounts and discount codes
- Share subscriptions (Netflix, Amazon Prime) with housemates.





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# Part-time job opportunities at university

**By Ross Pickering, UK Student Recruitment and Schools Liaison Officer at City St George's, University of London**

Students are often looking for ways to gain experience in the working world, and top-up their income whilst they are a student. Part-time employment is a great way of fulfilling both objectives. You also don't need to wait until you start at university to seek part-time employment, as many employers look to recruit around the winter break and during the summer months.

## Benefits to part-time work

During your time at university, working part-time or undertaking an equivalent, such as an internship, is a valuable way to gain practical real-world experience. It enables you to gain skills that often complement your knowledge and learning. This helps you become a well-rounded graduate.

Many courses have an optional placement year, which we encourage students to consider too. Gaining employment alongside your studies has financial benefits and supports your career development in the future.

## Student-friendly jobs

Lots of students find part-time employment in sectors such as retail, hospitality, and leisure. These are fantastic sectors for young people to first discover the world of work. Many of the

large supermarket and hospitality chains allow you to transfer between stores, so if you already have a role in your hometown store, you can seek a transfer to your local university store, and vice-versa. This gives you the flexibility and consistency of having a job throughout the entire duration of your university years.

Universities themselves often employ many students as student ambassadors and office administrators. These are usually more flexible than off-campus jobs. You can pick up shifts when you have more availability and work less when things get busy, especially when assignments and exams are approaching.

## Becoming a student ambassador

Most universities across the UK have a student ambassador scheme or something similar. As a student ambassador, you represent your university at events such as open days. You showcase the institution by engaging with visitors in person, and online on social media platforms and in marketing materials.

It's a rewarding opportunity to gain many new skills including public speaking, delivering presentations to large audiences, and working public events. You'll also hone those all-important soft skills, such as verbal and written communication and working collaboratively in a team. These skills and experiences are highly regarded by graduate employers!

Student ambassador schemes are completely flexible, so there are usually no committed hours, other than the large public events such as open days. These are often on Saturdays, so they don't clash with your studies.



# The benefits of becoming a student ambassador

**By Kate Nelson, Recruitment Officer (Content & Communications) at Teesside University**

Student ambassadors play a vital role in bringing university events to life. They support open days and campus visits, attend higher education fairs, and represent their university at national exhibitions. As the authentic voice of the institution, ambassadors share their experiences and insights to help prospective students make informed decisions about their future. There are many reasons to become a student ambassador. We're here to break them down for you.

## Earn while you learn

Firstly, and maybe most importantly, it's an effective way to earn extra income. At Teesside, ambassadors are paid over £13 an hour. Institutions vary, but jobs are normally advertised through an online platform, giving you the flexibility to choose shifts that fit around lectures, seminars, and assignment deadlines. Universities understand that your studies come first, so ambassador work is designed to be flexible and fit seamlessly alongside your academic commitments.

## Develop transferable skills

This role helps you build and develop key skills that employers value. You might be asked to lead campus or accommodation tours. You will learn to adapt your communication style for different audiences, such as prospective students, parents, or other visitors. Ambassadors also deliver presentations in schools and colleges on topics such as the UCAS application process, student finance, and personal statements. This gives you valuable experience speaking confidently in front of large groups. You'll also

develop strong time-management skills as you balance your ambassador duties alongside your studies.

## Boost your confidence

Speaking to large groups or travelling to events across the country might feel daunting at first. However, your confidence will grow with every experience and interaction. You'll learn to communicate clearly and professionally in any situation.

## Expand your network

You'll connect with staff across different departments, and meet industry speakers and external partners. These relationships expand your professional network, opening doors to valuable advice, strong references, and even future job opportunities.

## Make new friends

You will meet people beyond your course or accommodation. This opens doors to new opportunities and experiences you might not have discovered otherwise. You could join a new club or society, visit somewhere different, or hear about social events you might not have attended.

## Recruitment processes

Recruitment varies between universities. Some have a single intake each year, while others recruit multiple times. Application processes differ too. Some may require a formal application and interview, while others take a more informal approach. Enquire at open days so you're ready to apply when opportunities open.

## Stand out from the crowd

When you graduate, you'll be one of thousands entering the job market. Becoming a student ambassador helps you stand out. The role gives you unique experiences and real-world examples to showcase in job applications and interviews.



# Saving money with student discount cards

**By Kaffe Locke, Schools, Colleges and Outreach Officer at the University of South Wales**

Student discounts have become a valuable tool for saving money, with more companies than ever offering deals for students. You should actively seek out these offers and take advantage of them. Discounts can go a long way to reduce financial stress, allowing you to make significant savings on quality products from top brands.

## Cards and apps

Access discounts with the TOTUM card. For a small annual fee, you will receive a physical card to use in-store for discounts. The TOTUM website provides a list of participating companies, making it easy to see where the card can be used.

In addition, two popular free apps for student discounts are UNiDAYS and Student Beans:

- UNiDAYS partners with over 800 brands
- Student Beans offers discounts from more than 1,000 brands.

Each app offers unique discount codes for students to use. Both apps cover a wide range of sectors, including fashion, food and drink, travel and entertainment, technology, and more. You'll find discounts from well-known brands such as Nike, Deliveroo, ASOS, The Gym Group, and many others

To use these apps, you simply need to provide some basic personal information and verify the institution where you're studying. It's a quick and easy process. Both apps are completely free for students, with no sign-up fee required.

## Travel discounts

Students can save money on travel. Two popular options:

- National Express Students Coachcard – offers 1/3 off coach travel for £15 a year or £35 for three years.
- 16-25 Railcard (Student Railcard) – offers 1/3 off rail travel for £35 a year or £80 for three years.

Both cards are rewarding money-saving options for students who commute or travel home during the holidays.

## Supermarket loyalty schemes

Several supermarkets offer cards to help students make their budgets go further:

- Tesco Clubcard – unlocks lower prices on selected items and earns points on purchases.
- Sainsbury's Nectar Card – unlocks lower prices and allows students to collect points to spend on future shops or with partner brands.
- Lidl Plus – offers regular coupons, scratchcard prizes, and special discounts.

## Entertainment subscriptions

Finally, two companies offer useful student entertainment subscriptions:

- Spotify Student – £5.99 each month, giving access to music, audiobooks, and podcasts.
- Amazon Prime Student – £4.49 each month, offering access to films, TV shows, exclusive deals, and free delivery on eligible items.

These services can help students stay entertained and make the most of their downtime at university.



# My student experience by Martyna Thomas



**Law student at St Mary's University, London**

Going to university is one of the most popular paths taken by students after sixth form or college. In this article, I'll share what helped me decide what and where to study to hopefully help you make an informed decision about your next steps.

## Why did you decide to go to university?

My decision was largely influenced by my chosen career path. I wanted to pursue a career in law, and an undergraduate Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree is the most common first step towards that goal. However, university offers many more opportunities beyond your course. It provides the chance to meet new people, explore hobbies and sports through societies, build professional networks, and gain work experience alongside your studies. This influenced my decision, because I was keen to meet other aspiring lawyers, explore future opportunities, and hear from guest speakers at careers events.

## How did you choose which subject to study?

I always knew that I wanted to go to university, but I didn't decide to study law until the summer of Year 12, so if you're still unsure, please don't worry. It takes time to decide what to study!

When choosing my A Levels, I picked subjects based on my interests and strengths, which kept my options open. What ultimately led me to law was speaking with industry professionals, completing some work shadowing, and gaining insights from friends and family who were already at university.

## How did you decide where to study?

Personally, I wanted to live at home while studying, so local universities were my priority when researching options. I grew up in London and being based here was important to me, as it's where I hope to work after I graduate. When comparing universities, I looked closely at the modules on offer, class sizes, and overall student experience.

I also attended open days to explore the facilities and gain a better understanding of what studying at that university would be like. One of my key priorities were smaller class sizes, as this allows lecturers to know individual students better. This makes them feel more supported and encouraged to actively participate in lectures and ask questions.

## What is your top tip for students applying to university?

Choose the university that best suits your needs and preferences when it comes to location, size, teaching quality, and opportunities, rather than solely relying on league tables. Rankings can be useful, but they don't guarantee that a university will be the best fit for you. It's important to consider where you feel comfortable and supported!

## What has been your highlight of university so far?

University is a great place to try new things and gain more confidence whilst doing so. Some of my highlights include joining the badminton sports club, which I've really enjoyed. I've also become a student ambassador, which is a fantastic scheme offered by many universities. It has enabled me to gain valuable work experience and develop transferable skills such as teamwork, communication, and an overall growth in confidence.

**“ University is a great place to try new things and gain more confidence whilst doing so. ”**

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# Understanding the university admissions process

**By Matt Chesters, Student Recruitment and Schools Liaison Assistant at City St George's, University of London**

This article will detail each step of the admissions process, from receiving offers to results day, to help minimise the anxiety of applying to university.

## UCAS

UCAS stands for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. To apply for almost every university course, you'll need to create an account to access the UCAS Hub. Here, you'll carry out most stages of your university application process:

- Making applications
- Receiving responses to applications
- Searching for courses or universities
- Finding events like open days
- Calculating UCAS Tariff points

The UCAS Tariff Point Calculator is enormously helpful if you're studying BTECs or T Levels and aren't sure how your predicted grades translate into entry requirements.

## Completing your application

Students can apply to a maximum of five universities. As of 2026, it costs £28.95 to

submit a UCAS application, although this is waived if you are a care-leaver or you have received Free School Meals at any point in the last 6 years.

You'll need to submit your grades, where you achieved them, and details of your current courses. You'll also need to write a 4000-character personal statement (page 84).

Your school will ask you to complete your statement by their own preferred deadline, so they can review the content. If not, it's good to aim for a final draft before Christmas.

Some universities or courses may require additional steps. For instance, most healthcare courses require a form of interview. You may also be asked to complete an additional test or piece of work. It's best to research courses thoroughly, including what extra steps may be involved, to make sure you don't get any surprises down the line.

## Submitting your application

UCAS applications can be submitted from the start of September. Oxford, Cambridge, and Medicine, Dentistry, and Veterinary Sciences courses have an earlier deadline of 15 October. For everyone else, the Equal Consideration deadline is usually mid-January each year.

It's possible to submit an application after this date, with the final deadline falling around the end of June. However, any application submitted after mid-January will be considered "late" which means universities don't have to review it.



## Receiving offers

Universities will respond to the application in one of four ways:

- **Conditional** - you have been offered a place on the condition you meet certain grade requirements.
- **Unconditional** - you have been offered a place regardless of your results.
- **Alternative Course** - the university has offered you a place on another course instead.
- **Rejection** - a place has not been offered.

Once all offers have been received, you need to respond in one of the following ways:

- **Firm** - your top choice. If you meet the conditions of the offer, you will study at this university.
- **Insurance** - your back-up choice. If you don't meet the conditions for your Firm choice, you will automatically gain a place at your Insurance choice if you meet their conditions.
- **Decline** - you can only choose one Firm and one Insurance. You must decline the others.

If you don't receive any offers, you are eligible to apply again through UCAS Extra between late February and early July. You can only apply to one university at a time through UCAS Extra.

After 30 June, any further applications are automatically sent through Clearing. This is a UCAS process which continues to help you secure a university place if you didn't receive an offer during the main application process or UCAS Extra.

## Confirmation and results day

Around the end of July, universities enter a period called Confirmation in which they receive your exam results. This culminates on A Level Results Day in August when you gain confirmation about whether you have secured a place with your Firm or Insurance choices. If you haven't, you will need to seek a place through Clearing, which will involve communicating with universities directly.



# How pre-16 and post-16 choices can affect your university application

By **Ben Pettitt, Higher Education Adviser at the University of East Anglia**

Applying to university is a journey full of choices. Which GCSEs should you choose? Which type of qualification should you study? Every choice you make will have an impact on your university application.

## GCSEs

Consider which subjects you would like to study during Year 10 and 11. Choose subjects that you are good at, that might help you with a future career, but most importantly, choose the subjects that you are passionate about. This is your first opportunity to have a say in your own future, so use it wisely!

Look at a few university course pages too. While many universities offer low GCSE entry requirements, competitive university degrees like Medicine will require higher GCSE grades, along with certain subjects. Be prepared.

## A levels

When you reach sixth form or college, there is a huge variety of qualifications to choose from. The good news is there's no right or wrong answer. A levels are the most common and the most popular, so universities in the UK will accept them.

Have a look at university A level entry requirements before deciding. Are those grades achievable? Will you achieve them in that particular subject? Will you enjoy studying that

subject in school? If you don't meet the grade requirements, this could negatively impact your university application.

## International Baccalaureate (IB)

The IB is a similar qualification to A levels, except you must study 6 subjects instead of 3. Maths and English Language/Literature are compulsory, and you must choose one science related subject and a humanities subject.

It's a lot of work, and you have less choice than the traditional A level route. However, it does leave you more options when it comes to applying for specific degrees at university, as you have studied a wider range of subjects.

## BTEC and T Levels

BTEC and T Level diplomas are an alternative qualification to A levels. They are more vocational, meaning each subject focuses on a specific job or a broad employment area. For this reason, they are slightly more practical than A levels, which better suits some students.

Most universities will accept these newer qualifications, but not every university, and not for every course. Use prospectuses and UCAS to learn the different entry requirements for different universities. Speak to university staff at open days or university fairs to better understand which institutions and courses will accept BTEC and T Level diplomas. Don't limit yourself before you've even started applying.

In summary, choose your subjects carefully. Use university prospectuses to investigate grade requirements and any specific subjects needed for a course. When deciding on the type of qualification, you can use university requirements as a guide but ultimately choose the path that feels right for you. You've got this.



# The 2026 changes to personal statements

**Dylan Dunbar, Senior Student Recruitment Officer at Liverpool Hope University**

The personal statement is part of your UCAS application. It allows you to showcase your strengths, experiences, and qualities to impress your chosen universities. As many courses don't require interviews or auditions, this side of the application is crucial for the institution to decide if you're a good fit for your course of interest.

## What has changed?

In the past, the personal statement was a single piece of text. However, from 2026 onwards, the application form asks you three questions to sharpen the focus of your submission. You may find that some of your points could be linked to more than one question, which is absolutely fine. The questions are there to prompt you to cover important points. This article offers advice on the three questions.

### 1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?

This is where you can explicitly outline your motivations for wanting to study your chosen course. Everyone's motivations will be unique. You may want to talk about a longstanding passion and how it resonates with you and your journey until this point. Equally, you could talk about someone who has inspired you to pursue this career path.

Furthermore, this question is a good opportunity to showcase your independent and research skills. You can't name a specific university

because your statement is sent to all 5 of your chosen universities. However, you could explore key topics, modules, or assessments that fuel your excitement to learn more about the subject area.

### 2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

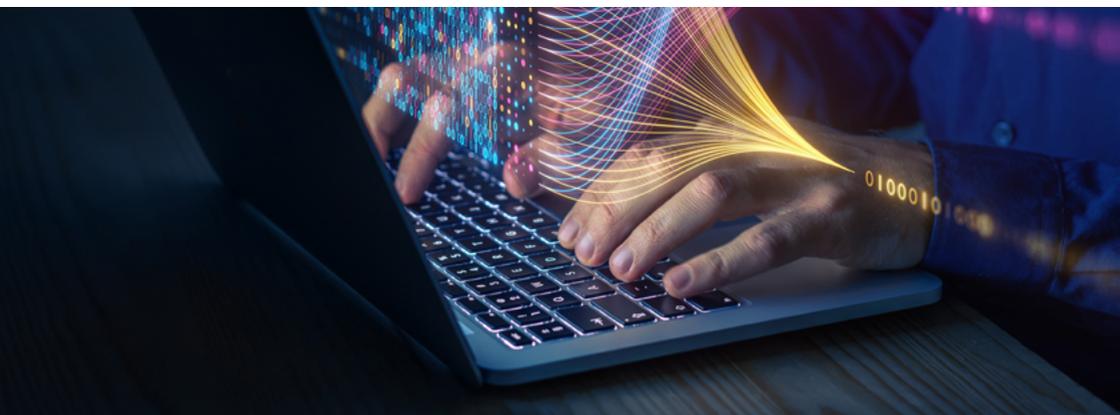
Linking to question 1, there could be a particular theme or topic which has influenced your interests and motivations. You can discuss the different skills you have gained from your current level of study, and how these will transfer to your next level of study at university. You may also wish to discuss any achievements gained in school: being a prefect, mentoring a student, or winning a competition.

### 3. What have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

You could take the extracurricular stance further in this section. Discuss your volunteering activity, work experience placements, and wider awards/achievements. Generally, you can talk about any experience which has made you feel proud, provided you with worthwhile skills, and made you an ideal candidate for university. Even if your work experience doesn't directly relate to the course, you can still unpick the key transferable skills that you have gained.

#### Three top tips

- Evidence your course research – reference keywords that interest and stand out to you
- Be enthusiastic – showcase your passion for wanting to study this subject, with examples
- End on a positive note!



# Writing an outstanding personal statement

**By Ailsa Mackay, Student Recruitment Officer at Heriot-Watt University**

The best personal statements are exactly this – personal!

You only have 4000 characters to communicate why you want to study a course, and what is unique and special about you. It can be stressful, but it's also an opportunity to carefully consider your choices and why.

The restructuring of the personal statement format for 2026 applications (page 83) will help you plan what to write, but it can still be a daunting prospect. So, here are my top tips for helping your personal statement stand out:

- ✓ Plan what you want to include. List your experiences, achievements, and key strengths.
- ✓ Allow enough time to write and review your statement. Ask a trusted adviser to proof your drafts and provide constructive feedback.
- ✓ Be authentic and honest.
- ✓ Highlight your positives and achievements.
- ✓ Use personal examples to explain what you have gained from study, work experience, or extra-curricular activities. It's not enough to state you did something if you haven't explained how that experience has helped you.
- ✓ Include your future career plans, and how you will use the skills and knowledge gained on the course to achieve your goals.
- ✓ Use concise and non-pretentious language.
- ✓ Check for grammatical and spelling errors.

If you've experienced difficulties or challenges, your personal statement can be used to highlight the steps you have taken to overcome these. However, avoid emphasising any negatives or excusing why you haven't done something. Your tutor can provide this context by adding supporting information to their academic reference. There are some things to avoid too:

- ✗ Using quotes from famous people – admissions teams are more interested in your experience and motivations.
- ✗ Trying to be funny – your humour might not be shared.
- ✗ Copying – anti-plagiarism software will catch you out.
- ✗ Exaggerating or lying.
- ✗ Name-dropping specific universities – all five university choices will read the same personal statement.

You might want to know whether it's okay to use AI tools, such as ChatGPT, to help write your personal statement. Most universities agree they can be a useful tool to help with ideas and structure, but they warn against copying and pasting directly into your statement. Remember, it's your personal qualities and experiences that are most important. If your personal statement doesn't appear as your own work, then it may count against you.

You may also worry about what to include, and whether your skills and experience are good enough. Universities understand that access to work experience and extra-curricular activities can vary depending on personal circumstances. However, they also value research and volunteering experience undertaken in your own time. For example, if you've been inspired by reading an article or watching a TED talk online, include this in your statement and explain how it's influenced your next steps.

Lastly, it's a good idea to close your personal statement with a sentence or two summarising your key points. Finish with a positive impression!

The biggest hurdle is often starting, so I recommend not worrying about the finer details initially. Start with brainstorming what to include and work from there.



**Learn more about making your personal statement stand out on Episode 36 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**



## *Sarah* forged her career path at Heriot-Watt

- Studied BSc (Hons) Mathematics, 2025
- Developed logical thinking and communication skills
- Became Vice President of the Sports Union
- Now working as an analyst at NatWest

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# Creating a strong portfolio for a creative industries course

**By Elizabeth Noble, Associate Head for the Creative Industries Institute at Sheffield Hallam University**

Creative degrees often request a portfolio of your work as part of their application process. The exact requirements vary from university to university, and even course to course. It can seem overwhelming but don't get disheartened. Your portfolio allows us to see your knowledge, skills, personality, and passion. This article will help you create a strong portfolio for your university application.

## Prepare

Gather everything you have. Sketchbooks, notebooks, doodles, research notes, links, photographs, visits, visual tests, experiments, and the glorious outcomes. The good, the bad, the ugly. At this stage don't be critical. Your portfolio may include personal projects and works in progress too. If your school or college work is sent away for assessment, remember to keep copies to include in your portfolio.

## Reflect

Once gathered, take over the front room and lay everything out. What stands out? Where are your strengths? What are you most proud of? What aren't you showing about your creative ability? Ask friends and family for constructive feedback. Don't take it personally. You must learn how others view your work. The academics reviewing your portfolio will recognise your strengths.

## Select

Take time with your selection. Check what each application requires. Are there gaps? Can pieces

fill multiple criteria? Don't include everything. Assemble a good, clear, lively collection that represents your abilities. Show the breadth and depth of your work.

## Present

Start with a title page to introduce yourself. Place your strongest pieces at the start of your portfolio, then take us on a visual journey. We love to see final outcomes, but we also love how you got there. This shows your determination, your ability to try new things, and your passion to be creative.

## Layout

Having a set layout throughout your portfolio allows consistency for the viewer, so they can focus on enjoying the content rather than navigating each page. You could see each page as steps: introduction, research, visual experiments, outcome, summary.

## Commentary

Consider answering some of the following questions. This will ensure your portfolio is understood in the way you want it to be.

- Where did the project start? With a brief, a question, a theme?
- What did you do next? Take photos, research artists?
- Where do you find inspiration? What is your work and what is the influence of others?
- What visual experimentation did you do? Which techniques, materials, processes? Digital analogue, 2D, 3D, motion? How many versions or attempts were there?
- How did you arrive at your outcome or solution?
- What worked well? What could be improved?



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# Top tips for a successful teacher education interview

**By Dr Andrew Morrison, Dr Sarah Williams, and Dr Marie Helks, Sheffield Institute of Education at Sheffield Hallam University**

Teaching is an exciting and rewarding profession. It's somewhere you can make a real difference to young people's lives. At Sheffield Hallam University, you can train to be a teacher for any age-phase from early years to post-16. For entry to our courses, you will do an interview and a short teaching task. If that makes you anxious, please don't worry! With the right preparation, you can stand out as a confident and committed candidate. Here's how to make a great impression.

## The interview

The interview is an important part of the application process for a teacher education course. You'll be interviewed by experienced lecturers. They'll understand that you'll feel nervous, and they'll aim to put you at ease. The purpose of the interview isn't to catch you out. It's to find your potential for teaching.

### 1. Reflect on your motivation

Interviewers often ask why you want to teach. Avoid answers like "I enjoy working with children." Instead, share personal experiences that have inspired you, such as moments where you helped someone learn or overcome challenges.

### 2. Show awareness of current issues

Education is always changing. Be ready to discuss topics like:

- Inclusive teaching
- The curriculum relevant to your chosen age-phase
- Technology in the classroom

You don't need to be an expert, but awareness shows you're engaged and interested.

### 3. Demonstrate good communication skills

Teaching is about communication. You'll naturally be nervous but try to communicate clearly with the interviewer and pay close attention to the questions.

### 4. Highlight relevant experience

Draw on your personal experiences: volunteering, tutoring, working with children. Explain what you've learned and how it will help you as a trainee teacher. Even non-teaching roles, such as retail or hospitality work, can demonstrate transferable skills like teamwork and resilience.

### 5. Ask thoughtful questions

Prepare one or two questions for the end of the interview, such as:

- What support do trainees receive during placements?
- Are we supported for teaching in diverse classrooms?

## The teaching task

The second part of the application process is the teaching task. This usually lasts 4-5 minutes. The requirements vary depending on the age-phase and/or subject specialism you've applied for. You may be asked to teach your interviewer a skill.

You should:

- Use clear instructions
- Let your interviewer know what they will be learning
- Involve them in the learning.

Previous examples have included teaching some words from a foreign language, how to serve a tennis ball, how to use sign language, and how to juggle.

We'll consider your potential to be a good teacher, so we'll evaluate your communication skills, how you deliver the learning, and the preparation that you've undertaken. And remember, we want you to succeed. So, go for it!

**“Teaching is about communication. You'll naturally be nervous but try to communicate clearly.”**

# Contextual university admissions

**By Jen Barton, Schools Outreach and Widening Participation Manager at Durham University**

You will often face challenges that impact your educational journey and potential achievement at school or college. Most universities make adjustments through 'contextual admissions' to give you a fair chance to access the course you have chosen.

## What is a contextual offer?

A contextual offer is an offer made by universities where they have taken into account your personal circumstances. It's an offer that is lower than the standard entry requirement for a course. For example, ABB rather than AAA. It may also include an offer of a place on a foundation year, a guaranteed interview, or a course with additional support in place.

## How do I know if I am eligible?

Not every university will make contextual offers. If they do, the offer may vary depending on the university and your chosen course. It's best to check with each institution you are considering. Examples of circumstances considered include:

- where you live – this will be based on your postcode, and whether it's classed as a low progression area or an area with a high level of deprivation.
- your school or college – usually if it's a state-maintained school or college, or the academic performance is lower than the national average, or there are low progression rates to higher education.

- outreach programmes – if you have participated in one at the institution where you are applying.
- care experience – if you have spent time in care or you're a young carer yourself.

There may be other factors considered, but each institution will have their own criteria, so it's important that you check. If you can't find the information on the university website, you could contact them to ask.

## How does a university know that I am eligible?

Universities will be made aware of your circumstances through your UCAS application. There is a question or section on the UCAS application to cover most circumstances. For example, your postcode and your school or college's postcode are captured as standard in the application.

There are additional questions about care experience and other circumstances that may qualify you for a contextual offer. You or your teacher can also talk about your circumstances in your personal statement or academic reference. You can seek advice from your chosen institutions to learn how to best evidence your circumstances.

## What does a contextual offer mean?

Receiving a contextual offer doesn't mean you'll be treated any differently to other students. In some cases, you may get additional support before your studies commence and while you are studying. But in most cases, it just means lower grades to get in.

You won't see anything on your UCAS Hub to indicate that you have been given a contextual offer. But the university making the offer may write to tell you.



# What happens after you receive your offer

**By Jim Calcutt, Head of UK Student Recruitment at the University of Winchester**

You've applied to university and received your offers. What's next?

## Receiving your offers

Whether you've applied to one university or five, you should have received one of three offers: conditional, unconditional, or unsuccessful. What do they mean?

- **Conditional** – a conditional offer means your place at that university depends on achieving certain conditions. These could be specific grades, passing an interview or audition, or supplying a portfolio.
- **Unconditional** – an unconditional offer means you have a confirmed place at that university. You will attend that university if you accept it. These offers are often for students who have already received their grades, but they are occasionally offered to students with an exceptional academic portfolio.
- **Unsuccessful** – this means you haven't been offered a place at that university. You can request feedback by contacting the university directly. You can apply again during Clearing, if the course still has space.

## Responding to your offers

Now that you've received your offers, you will need to choose which to accept or decline. You'll need to accept your two preferred offers. You'll need to decline your remaining three offers. You'll then need to decide which of your two accepted offers is your firm choice and your insurance choice.

Your firm choice should be your preferred choice. This is the university you want to attend and the course you want to study. Your insurance choice should be your back-up choice, typically with lower entry requirements than your firm choice.

You should consider several factors when deciding what offers to put as your firm and insurance choice. Here are some tips on determining which offers to accept and which offers to decline.

## Considering your offers

- **Return to your original research** – look back on the notes and reasons why you decided to apply to each university and course in the first place. Delve deeper into module choices, available opportunities, and support at each university.
- **Visit in person or online** – many universities offer exclusive offer-holder events where you can visit the campus, speak with academics and students, and get hands-on with your course. Alternatively, many universities offer virtual tours or online events, which are also valuable.
- **Trust your gut** – trust yourself when deciding which universities to choose as your firm and insurance. Remember why you fell in love with the university and course. Follow your gut. Also, you can change your mind later if you decide it isn't right for you through Clearing (page 93).

## After responding to your offers

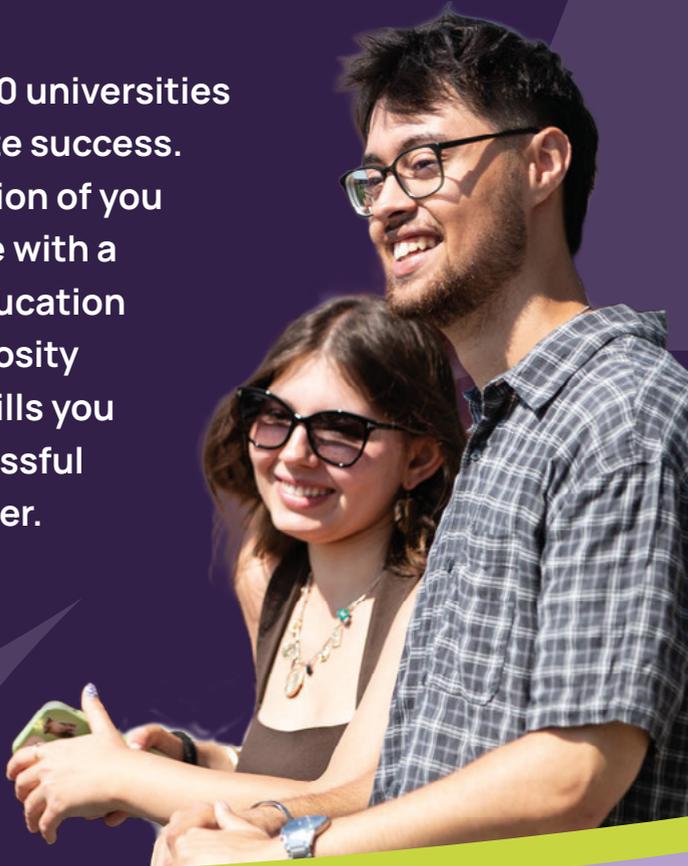
Picking your firm and insurance choice is one step toward starting university, but there are several other things to consider:

- **Student finance** – if you require a student loan, apply to Student Finance when it opens in early March. Also, research additional support, such as scholarships and bursaries (page 69), and specialist support, such as the Disabled Students' Allowance.
- **Accommodation** – if you plan to live in university accommodation (page 92), you'll need to apply between the April and June before you start. Some universities operate on a first-come-first-served basis, so make sure you know the dates that the applications open.
- **Clearing** – Clearing opens at the start of July, but it really gets going after A level results day in mid-August. Clearing is your chance to secure a place at university if you don't achieve the grades required by your firm and insurance choices. It's also an opportunity to change your mind about the university or course you have chosen previously, because you might think differently after receiving your grades.

Wherever and whatever you decide to study, remember that the most important thing is to find a university and course where you will enjoy your experience.

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# How to choose your university accommodation

**By Kate Nelson, Recruitment Officer (Content & Communications), Teesside University**

University accommodation is increasingly becoming one of the biggest factors influencing student decision-making.

You need to apply the same method when researching your accommodation options as you did when researching universities and courses (page 25). Think about your priorities, consider what's important to you, and see what's available to visit at open days or offer-holder days.

## Location of accommodation

Some university accommodation will be close to campus, or even on campus. This is useful if you struggle getting up in the morning and don't leave yourself much time to get to class. It also means you don't have to spend money commuting.

Other accommodation options might be further away from campus, but closer to facilities such as shops, train and bus stations, or local places of interest.

Consider how much you'll use facilities such as the gym, library, or students' union. How close are they to your accommodation? How much access will you require to them?

## Cost of accommodation

Accommodation costs vary massively from city to city and town to town. Where you choose to study in the country might impact how much you spend on rent, but also costs such as eating, drinking, and socialising.

Accommodation costs in London are more expensive than the rest of the UK. However, this is reflected in the amount of maintenance loan offered through Student Finance England.

## Type of accommodation

Most universities have different types of accommodation to suit a range of budgets.

Some will offer dorm style living with private bedrooms, whilst other facilities such as the

bathroom, kitchen, and living spaces are shared.

Others might be houses, flats, or self-contained units, which benefit from en-suite facilities, but still have shared kitchen and living facilities.

Private student accommodation is another option. This isn't managed by the university, so you need to read the small print in your contract to understand the terms and conditions. Check if your chosen university has a list of approved providers.

## Included with your accommodation

Check what your rent covers. Are the bills included? Do you need additional insurance for your contents? Do you need to pay extra for Wi-Fi?

Also, some accommodation is catered, meaning your meals are provided for you. However, this often works out more expensive than preparing meals yourself.

Universities may offer you a good deal on bedding and cooking equipment. If you accept, these will be ready in your room when you arrive.

## Questions about accommodation

Here are a few of the more important questions you might want to ask.

- Does my accommodation have wardens?
- Are they accessible?
- Is there security?
- Is car parking available?
- Where's the laundry room?
- Can I choose who I live with?

Accommodation is normally allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, so make sure you've done your research and you'll be ready when applications open.

Moving away from home for the first time can be overwhelming. Asking the right questions and finding accommodation that ticks all your boxes will make university feel like your home away from home.

# Understanding and preparing for Clearing

**By Kate Filimon, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer (North West) at the University of Huddersfield**

UCAS Clearing is a way for universities to fill additional places on courses that aren't completely full after most students have made their choices. Clearing opens in July, offering places for the academic year starting in September just a few months later. Most universities use Clearing, and there is usually a wide range of fantastic courses still open.

## Benefits of Clearing

Clearing is a back-up option. It allows you to apply for university if you don't achieve the grades required by your initial firm and insurance choices. However, there are other reasons why you might apply through Clearing:

- You were initially unsure and only decided to apply for university later in the year (after 30 June).
- You changed your mind about the course or university you wanted to study after applying.
- You don't meet the offer conditions of your initial firm and insurance choices.

Applying through Clearing is the best option for many people to find a course that is a great fit for them, whether it's due to unexpected results or a change of heart.

## Applying through Clearing

Clearing vacancies are listed on the UCAS website from July onwards. Entry requirements for Clearing courses aren't always displayed online, so you may need to call universities

directly. They will ask for your exam results, then let you know if they can offer you a place or an interview.

You can call as many universities as you want to, and you only accept a place when you add it on your UCAS Hub.

## Preparing for Clearing

It can seem daunting to apply for a university course in Clearing, especially in August, which begins just a few weeks later. You can prepare yourself by having a Clearing plan prior to receiving your results:

- Research alternative universities and courses of interest, in case you don't achieve your predicted grades. Make a shortlist. Then, when you do have your results, visit the UCAS website to check if your shortlist has vacancies.
- Complete any Clearing expression of interest forms if these are offered by your chosen universities ahead of Clearing. This will save time and effort later in the process.
- Re-read your personal statement. Do some interview preparation if your course may require an interview.
- Have your results to hand, including GCSE results, when calling universities. They can't make you an offer without this information.
- If you are interested in a competitive course, get in touch as early as possible. A level results day is the busiest day of Clearing, and some popular courses will fill their vacancies quickly.

Finally, if you want or need to use Clearing, please try not to panic. There are plenty of fantastic options still available at a wide range of universities that will start you on the path to your future.



**Prepare for Clearing with our helpful Clearing Guide!**

- Listen to 3 mock Clearing calls so you know what to expect
- Understand the importance of "knowing your why"
- Complete our worksheet to prepare for your own Clearing call
- Gain advice from current student, Leah Brooks!

[www.UniTasterDays.com/ClearingGuide](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/ClearingGuide)



# My student experience by Reece Buckley



**Micro and Molecular Biology Student at Manchester Metropolitan University**

## Why did I choose university?

I decided to attend university to pursue personal and professional growth. I wanted to immerse myself in a subject I'm passionate about. I wished to broaden my horizons by learning from experts, whilst gaining valuable skills and qualifications.

Further education was crucial for expanding my career opportunities and providing a solid foundation for my aspirations. My decision was driven by academic curiosity and a desire for representation. I was the first in my family to navigate this path, without anyone to guide me or offer advice. This goal wasn't just for me, but also for younger individuals of colour from disadvantaged backgrounds. I made it with resilience, and so can you.

## Why did I choose my subject?

Choosing which subject to study is a journey of self-discovery. I began by reflecting on my interests and strengths. I realised that my curiosity and passion lay in the natural world of Biological Sciences. I dedicated time to researching various fields, exploring job prospects related to the degree I was considering, and learning about the opportunities available in that area. It's essential to envision your future. Choose a subject that excites and motivates you. This decision isn't made overnight. It requires careful thought.

## How did I decide where to study?

I saw university as a strategic investment in my future. I'm committed to making the most

of my years at an institution, so I thoroughly researched my options. I identified three key priorities for myself. First, I sought a university firmly dedicated to sustainability and climate change initiatives. Second, the importance of course accreditation can impact the value of your degree, awards, and ongoing investments in your assigned faculty. Lastly, I evaluated the National Student Survey (NSS) reviews of my intended degree from current students. I attended open days to get an authentic feel for the campus and surrounding area.

## My top tip for students applying to university

Create a strong personal statement, research your degree thoroughly, and express your genuine passion. Be honest about your motivations. Avoid generic answers. Strong references from knowledgeable individuals can enhance your application too.

Also, seek advice from career advisers. Attend open days to connect with university course representatives and current students for real insights. Stay organised by developing an application timeline and checklist. UCAS deadlines often conflict with exams, so a timeline will help reduce additional stress during that busy period.

## My university highlight so far

I've had so many incredible experiences at university so far! The most memorable aspects have been the fantastic people I've met, and the numerous opportunities available through extracurricular activities. These range from my field of study to entirely new hobbies and societies (page 100).

Connecting with individuals from diverse cultures and countries has allowed me to create wonderful memories with friends studying a variety of degrees and backgrounds. To truly embrace your time at university, dive in and seize the vibrant experiences that come your way. Step out of your comfort zone and explore new avenues to enrich your journey. Your experience will be as fulfilling as you make it!



**Hear more from Reece on Episode 37 of The Uni Guide Podcast and learn whether university is right for you.**



# What happens after results day

**By Eleanor Krawczyk, Outreach Project Lead at the University of Greenwich**

Hours are spent during education to prepare students for what happens before results day. Your teachers deliver information about the university application process, so you feel you have everything you need to succeed.

Then, results day arrives. The period between results day in August and the start of university courses in September feels too short. Anxiety about the future creeps in. Once your place is confirmed, what do you think about now?

Within the six-week window between confirming your place and starting your course, you should consider the following.

## Accommodation

For students living away, the first thing you'll need to confirm is your accommodation. If your confirmed place is an insurance choice or through Clearing, the university should contact you to start the process. You pay a deposit and sign a contract. Rooms get snapped up quickly, so make sure this is priority!

## Budgeting

Now you know your destination, you can confirm your chosen university with student finance. Once

you know the amount of your maintenance loan and your living costs, you can start planning your weekly budget (page 74).

## Registration and enrolment

The university will ask you to set up your student email address and access to the student portal. They may also ask you to provide documentation. Watch your emails and junk folder like a hawk!

## Course materials

Depending on your course, you might be asked to buy or obtain materials. Materials might include stationery or the books on a reading list. Look for second-hand sales. Re-use what you already own to keep it cheap.

## Packing

Now, it's time to think about what to bring with you. There are obvious items like clothes and kitchen utensils, but also items you might not have considered, like a toilet brush and mementos to make your room feel like home. If you're a commuting student, you might need to pack your railcard or bus pass.

Once you have contemplated the above steps, you can focus on making friends online and researching your new home. Starting university on the right foot is challenging. If unsure, contact your university support networks. They are there to help you.



**Learn more about choosing your university accommodation, including whether to live at home, on Episode 29 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**





# Get a taste of life at Greenwich at one of our Open Days.

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# An introduction to student life

**By Philippa Dobrée-Carey, author of *From High School to Uni* and *The Essential Job Search Guide for Students***

Starting university is sold as the start of adult life: freedom, friends, independence, and late-night noodles. What you don't see in the prospectus is the moment you arrive, look around, and wonder how you're meant to transform into a functioning adult by the following week. Everyone feels unsure at first, even if they look confident. Here are the basics to help you settle in.

## Homesickness happens fast

Most students wobble the first week. You might be thrilled to leave home, only to find yourself missing your bed, the dog, and family dinners. This is normal. Things will level out as you meet people, learn the shortcuts around campus, and settle into a routine. Give it time.

## Freshers' flu is real

Freshers' flu is a rite of passage nobody wants. You're sharing spaces with hundreds of new people while running on little sleep. The result is a week of self-pity and feeling lousy. Lower the risk by sleeping enough, eating decent meals, staying hydrated, and washing your hands often. If you get ill, rest and skip social events until you're back on your feet.

## Freshers' week isn't the peak

Freshers' week is heavily advertised, but not everyone enjoys it. Some love the noise and chaos. Others find it awkward, and a bit forced. Go to a few events, talk to people on your course, and take breaks. Real friendships are formed over shared interests, not at 2am in a nightclub queue.

## Meeting people takes time

You don't have to secure a lifelong friendship group in the first week. Chat to flatmates, attend induction lectures, and join at least one society to find 'your people.'

## Studying is different

There's a big shift from school to university study. Lectures may not be mandatory, and nobody will chase you to keep up. Independent study takes more time and discipline than you think. Go to your early classes, note down deadlines, and stay on top of your work. Ask tutors for help if you're struggling.

## Living with others requires tact

Flatmates can be great, annoying, or both. Basic respect is key. Keep shared areas clean. Deal with problems respectfully and quickly to avoid drama.

## Pack light

Student rooms are smaller than you think, with very little storage. Pack the basics and bring anything else back after your first visit home.

## Money disappears faster than expected

Your student loan instalment looks huge. It isn't. Social life, food, and transport will shrink it faster than you think. Make a simple weekly budget and stick to it. Keep emergency funds for the end of term when funds run low.

## Use on-campus support

Every university has wellbeing teams, academic support, and student advisers. If you feel overwhelmed with work, loneliness or health worries, get in touch with them early on.

Millions of students have done this before you. You'll get the hang of it too!



# Exploring unexpected opportunities at university

**By Sophie Jones, Regional Recruitment Officer at the University of Essex**

University is about so much more than just earning a degree. From joining societies to traveling the world, your university years are some of the most enriching and exciting of your life.

## Find your people and try something new

One of the first things you'll hear about at university is the students' union (page 104). It's there to help you feel supported and part of the community. One of the best parts? Societies! These student-led groups let you meet new people or try something you've never done before, like joining a sports club or exploring a creative hobby.

You can even get involved in shaping university life by joining campaigns or running for positions in the students' union. Whether you're improving policies or organising events, it's your chance to make a real difference while having fun and connecting with others.

## Step out of the classroom

Learning at university goes far beyond lecture halls. Summer internships, placement years, and research projects provide amazing opportunities to step into the professional world. These experiences help you develop transferable skills, see how your subject applies to industry, and build valuable connections for your future.

Many universities have partnerships that allow students to work with researchers or companies, contributing to real-world projects before they graduate. These are perfect for CV building.

## Study and see the world

You don't have to limit your learning to one country. Universities offer the chance to combine your studies with travel (page 106). A year abroad lets you study at partner institutions overseas, and you can tailor the year to fit your plans, whether it's a full year, a term, or a summer. You could even do all three and explore multiple countries.

Traveling as part of your degree doesn't just satisfy your wanderlust. It builds confidence, broadens your understanding of your subject, and leaves you with memories to last a lifetime.

## Create, perform, innovate

University is the perfect place to unleash your creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. At the University of Essex, initiatives like Languages for All give you the chance to learn a new language alongside your studies. Our on-campus theatre provides a space to showcase your talents, and students can pitch for funding to bring their shows to life.

If you're thinking of starting a business, Essex Startups connects you with experts to help turn your ideas into reality. Many universities offer similar opportunities to help you grow and explore options you might not have considered before.

## Ask the question

University might be about getting a degree, but it's so much more than that. It's about building skills, discovering passions, and growing into the person you want to be. By the time you graduate, you'll have an outstanding qualification and unforgettable experiences that will stay with you forever. So, don't be shy when you're at a university fair or open day. Ask the question, "What unexpected opportunities can I explore here?" You never know what amazing experiences might be waiting for you beyond the lecture hall.



# How to make friends at university

**By Molly Dinnage, Education Liaison Assistant at Edge Hill University**

“How will I make friends at university?” This is one of the most common questions students ask before starting university, so you’re not alone. Starting university can feel overwhelming, but meeting new friends doesn’t have to be. Drawing on my own experience as a student, and my work in student recruitment, I have put together my top three practical tips to help you find your people!

## 1. Join a society

Joining a society is a solid way to meet new people at university that you may not otherwise meet. It’s worth looking into this before starting university. Many institutions have over 100 different societies to join!

It’s almost a cheat code to navigating that initial conversation. You already have a shared interest, whether it’s an artist, TV show, or even a type of food. Most societies meet weekly for fun activities, giving you plenty of chance to connect. And because societies aren’t exclusive to year groups, you can meet students who are already settled into university life. They can be a brilliant source of advice when it comes to navigating university!

## 2. Sit next to someone new

A big part of your university experience revolves around your learning, and you’ll get to know your course mates very well. Making a conscious effort to sit next to different people in seminars and lectures is a good way to get to know your course mates that little bit quicker. By sitting next to someone new, you will start a conversation without even thinking about it.

Slowly but surely, those conversations will become more natural and might even be the start of a friendship. Your course mates can become your lifeline at university. Not sure on an assignment? Phone a friend. Fancy a snack between lectures? Phone a friend!

## 3. Make suggestions in group chats

You will quickly find plenty of university group chats to join, from accommodation to course chats. Join some of these before you arrive. Chats are a nice way to reach out to others in the same position as you. They can even make it a little easier, as you don’t have to introduce yourself face-to-face straight away, you can simply pop a message in the chat.

Offering small ideas in group chats can be a simple but effective way to break the ice, such as “Does anyone want to walk to uni together?” or “Coffee date anyone?” I met some of my closest university friends by asking if anyone wanted to do their food shop with me!



# The benefits of joining a student society

**By Mandeep Kaur, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer (West Yorkshire) at the University of Huddersfield**

One of the most valuable and memorable experiences you can have at university is joining a student society. It's an opportunity to have fun, socialise, meet new people, and make new friends alongside your studies. Societies help you get involved in university life, relieve stress, and build confidence while doing something you truly enjoy. There is lots of choice and a few things to consider when choosing the right society for you.

## What is a student society?

A society is a group of people who explore a common interest together. The society may be academic, social, sporting, cultural, or volunteering. There are hundreds to choose from. You can even start your own with students who share your interest. You can leave a lasting legacy at your university by becoming the founder of a society which will continue for years to come.

## Activities in student societies

Societies are themed, so they differ in what they offer and how they operate. There may be regular meetings and socials to catch-up or discuss topics. Social events may include group meals, nights out, or fun activities such as quizzes and karaoke. You may have the opportunity to

attend talks from guest-speakers, engage in skill-building workshops, or attend fun trips to explore your interests with other students. Members of a society are often involved in deciding what the society does, so voice your preferences if you have an idea or activity in mind.

## Benefits of student societies

Societies are led by students for students. Your level of involvement is optional, from being an active member to having a proactive committee role. For instance, you could be the President of the Law Society, gaining key employability skills in leadership and communication as head of the committee. Or you could be the Events Officer for the Gaming Society, gaining transferable skills such as organisation and events management when planning activities for members. These experiences and transferable skills are useful in everyday life and beyond graduation, including job interviews.

## Networking in student societies

Student societies make it simple for you to meet new people in a relaxed setting. You can join your chosen society at any point in your student journey, and you'll meet other students from diverse year groups and backgrounds. By joining a course-themed society such as Politics or Engineering, you can ask a final year student for advice on assignments or choosing modules. Cultural societies such as the African-Caribbean or Asian Society can connect you to people around the world, celebrate heritage and cultural events, and offer you a community. Often, these friendships and connections can last a lifetime!



# The benefits of joining a sports team

**By Tiegan Rider, Captain of the Women's Rugby Team at Bournemouth University**

Joining the Women's Rugby Team at Bournemouth University has been one of the most rewarding parts of my three years as a student. It has offered a unique set of benefits that go far beyond the pitch, especially the sense of community at SportBU.

## Friends and belonging

Starting university can feel overwhelming, especially if you're away from home for the first time. I found that by joining the women's rugby team, I was instantly connected to a group of people who share a common interest. Within the first few months of starting my degree in 2022, my team and I trained together, played together, and frequently socialised together. I formed close friendships that I will take forward into my postgraduate life.

## Health and wellbeing

Being part of a sports team massively benefited my mental health throughout stressful and challenging semesters. Rugby is a demanding sport that builds strength, endurance, and coordination. My experience of the regular training and matches kept me active and healthy, further alleviating the stress of academic life.

Beyond physical fitness, committing to the rugby training sessions positively supported my mental wellbeing. The focus, discipline, and

team environment I experienced was a powerful counterbalance to academic pressure, improving my resilience and confidence over the 3 years.

## Discipline and leadership

Balancing rugby with my degree taught me time management, commitment, and discipline. Regular training sessions and match days required planning and accountability. These are skills that directly translated to my academic studies and future professional success.

Being part of the women's rugby team also offered opportunities for leadership and growth. SportBU provided opportunities to take on leadership roles, whether it was as a captain, coach, or social event organiser. These positions helped me develop my communication, problem-solving, and leadership abilities, all valuable assets on my CV and in life post-university. For example, I gained captaincy in my final year of playing rugby for the university. It has been one of the most incredible journeys and opportunities so far!

## Socialising and networking

The women's rugby team hugely benefited my social life and networking at Bournemouth University. Rugby created a sense of belonging through team dinners, charity events, and post-match socials. These connections with my teammates extend beyond university now that we have finished our studies. We have a powerful alumni network that will open doors to my future career and sporting opportunities.

## Community and representing

Overall, joining the women's rugby team meant more to me than just playing a sport. It opened up a community, built lifelong skills, and allowed me to make the most of my university experience. Rugby has something to offer everyone, whether you're chasing trophies or just looking for a supportive and fun group to join.

Throughout my rugby journey, I have trained and played internationally, representing my country. I strongly believe I wouldn't have been half as successful without the support from the sporting team and my teammates!



**Tiegan Rider**



Bournemouth  
University

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# The benefits of volunteering at university

**By Niall Seenan, UK and Ireland Student Recruitment Manager at Glasgow Caledonian University**

Volunteering is one of the activities that you can do outside of your studies to benefit you now but also in the future. University is about much more than just the academic side. Volunteering can help you get the most out of your university experience.

## Personal growth

Volunteering fosters personal growth by instilling a sense of responsibility, empathy, and compassion. Employers value volunteer experience, as it demonstrates commitment, teamwork, and leadership skills. Many universities hold Volunteering Fairs that connect students with relevant opportunities. These can help develop skills such as communication, problem-solving, and time management. Furthermore, opportunities like volunteering at the NHS provides hands-on experience that are beneficial for future careers.

## Networking opportunities

Volunteering provides the opportunity for students to build connections with professionals, peers, and organisations that may prove useful for your future career. Universities collaborate with local charities and other institutions to create excellent networking opportunities. Engaging with like-minded individuals and industry experts can open doors to internships, mentorship programmes, and potentially future jobs.

## Mental and physical wellbeing

Volunteering can vastly improve wellbeing. Acts of kindness and altruism have been shown to reduce stress and increase overall happiness. Universities encourage students to participate in initiatives that support mental health, such as befriending programmes and volunteering time to run a university club or society. Getting involved with a club or society also provides an opportunity to develop lifelong friends.

## Enhanced experience

University life extends beyond lectures and exams, with extracurricular activities playing a crucial role in a well-rounded student experience. Taking part in volunteering allows you to develop friendships, gain leadership experience, and become more engaged with campus life, enriching your overall university experience.

## Making a difference

One of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering is making a meaningful difference in communities. Whatever cause is close to your heart, volunteering will provide you with the chance to give back and make a difference. This sense of purpose and impact is incredibly fulfilling. It helps shape a strong sense of social responsibility that can feed into whatever you do after university.

## Ready, set, volunteer

Volunteering at university is a valuable experience that goes beyond academic achievements. It enhances personal growth, develops skills, builds networks, improves wellbeing, and allows you to contribute positively to society. With many universities offering structured volunteering opportunities and partnerships with local charities, you have the chance to make a difference while also benefiting from your experiences.



# Making the most of your students' union at university

**By Dominic White, Schools and Colleges Regional Assistant at the University of Derby, and President of the Union of Students at the University of Derby 2023/24**

University open days are an exciting experience. Between campus tours, meeting new people, and exploring a new campus or city, it's easy to overlook one of your greatest resources: the students' union (SU).

More than just a building or organisation, the SU is your gateway to a student experience like no other. From support services to unforgettable events, they can help you make the most of your time at university.

## What is a students' union?

A students' union is a student-led organisation that aims to represent, support, and improve the lives of every student at a university. Whether advocating for your rights, organising events, or providing welfare services, the SU works to ensure you have the best possible university experience.

The SU has a unique democratic nature. Each year, students elect representatives to speak on their behalf, from course reps to the SU President. These representatives ensure your voice is heard in university decisions and beyond.

## What is on offer?

Students' unions offer a wide range of services tailored to every aspect of student life. At the University of Derby, we have more than 150 sports clubs and societies catering to all interests, from drama to cricket, and a range of

academic groups. These offer a fantastic way to meet like-minded people, make friends, and develop new skills.

The SU also organises a variety of events and activities, including movie nights, cultural celebrations, and festivals. Freshers' Week is just the beginning of the exciting events on offer.

The SU provides support too. If you're struggling with housing issues, exam stress, or financial troubles, most unions provide free and confidential advice through their welfare teams.

Additionally, many unions offer part-time job opportunities (page 76) within the union itself, and local volunteering projects, which are perfect for boosting your CV while giving back to the community.

## How to get involved

There are so many ways to interact with your SU. For example, you can attend the Freshers' Fair, an annual event showcasing everything the union has to offer, from student societies and sports teams to local businesses and university services. At the University of Derby, students automatically become a member of our students' union when they enrol and start their course.

Whether you're passionate about photography, football, or debating, there's a group for you. If you don't see one you like, you can even start your own! Leadership opportunities are also available for those who want to make an impact, such as running for a committee or elected role.

Whether you want to have fun, access support, or find opportunities to shape your future, the SU is there to help. When exploring potential universities, remember it's not just about the course - your personal life is just as important. Researching what your students' union offers is a crucial step to ensuring you have a well-rounded and fulfilling university experience.



# The benefits of undertaking a year in industry

## Building your network

Seshaadri Vijayachandaran,  
BSc Chemistry and Forensic Science

Undertaking a work placement year allows you to gain additional experience. You'll create connections within businesses and fields, which can lead to job opportunities in the future. There are various ways to do this during your placement, such as networking events, team days, and through your co-workers. Co-workers are a valuable link when returning to an industry after university. They offer you an "in" at their company, but also at other companies where they have previous experience.

## Improving your skills

Finlay Baker,  
BA Marketing and Media

Placement years improve your digital skills. You'll learn to use new tools, whilst gaining a deeper understanding of tools you already use, such as Excel and Outlook. For instance, I previously only used Outlook to check my emails. However, my placement has taught me to use the calendar function along with other features to plan my time. This is something I can use when returning to my studies to improve my organisation around assignments and deadlines.

## Understanding work culture

Aakash Jain,  
BSc Psychology and Philosophy

When I started my placement, I realised it involved more than just skills and communication. It helped me understand the importance of a good work-life balance and how to work productively without overdoing it. My placement showed me what to expect from the industry, what I can do, and what I cannot do, all with support from my placement team and the employer. Through the placement, I learned about industry requirements and what I would enjoy in a graduate role. Moving forward, I feel more confident about applying for jobs.

## Exploring your interests

Amante Motshewa,  
BSc Computer Science

An overlooked benefit of undertaking a year in industry is finding out more about yourself. Doing a placement can help you discover what you want to do. As a STEM student, taking a placement outside my field made me rethink my plans and skills. It pushed me to evaluate my strengths, passions, and how they link to my course. Work offered clarity on my yes-no-maybes, which is important when planning your path into adulthood. For the first time, I knew what I wanted my future to look like. In one year, you can learn more about yourself than you ever did before!



# The benefits of undertaking a study abroad placement

**By Matthew Capes, Student Recruitment and Marketing Assistant at the University of Essex**

A study abroad placement gives you the chance to live in a new country, experience a different culture, and grow in independence as part of your degree. Most placements take place in the third year, before returning home for the final year of study.

## Study abroad options

The countries available to you will depend on your course and university. For example, students from the University of Essex have studied in Mexico, Italy, and Hong Kong. If a full-year placement isn't available, short-term summer programmes, internships, or volunteering abroad can offer similar experiences.

You can study in an English-speaking country like the US, Canada, or Australia, or a country where you can learn a new language, such as France, Spain, or Japan. Using the local language day-to-day helps you improve communication skills and build abilities that strengthen your CV. Watching videos from local students on YouTube or TikTok can help you imagine daily life while preparing for the move. Equally, learning about local culture will help you settle in, make friends, and get the most from the opportunity.

## Settling into a new country

Living in a new country can feel daunting at first, but it's also where much of your personal growth happens. Partner universities run welcome events, social activities, and local trips to help you meet others and feel part of the community. Embracing new activities allows

you to acclimatise, meet people, and develop independence, resilience, and confidence in unfamiliar situations. Activities might include sampling local food, volunteering, or attending cultural events.

Arriving a little early can make the transition smoother. It gives you time to explore the area, navigate public transport, and tackle practical problems like managing your schedule or paying for things in a new currency. These daily tasks will strengthen your problem-solving skills to benefit you beyond your placement.

## Academic, professional, personal development

Studying abroad can feel different academically, with new teaching styles, assessments, and expectations. While challenging, adapting to a new academic system develops flexibility and resourcefulness, which are skills valued by many employers.

You'll build confidence and independence by preparing for lectures, adjusting how you take notes, and asking questions when you need support. This helps you deepen your understanding of your subject in an international context, exposing you to new perspectives and approaches, and preparing you for future opportunities worldwide.

Studying abroad also gives you the chance to build a global network. Attending events, working with students from different backgrounds, and speaking with lecturers about their research can expand your career reach, develop cross-cultural communication skills, and boost employability.

## Why study abroad?

Studying abroad is a unique and transformational experience. The benefits of travel extend beyond the classroom, such as adaptability and a global mindset. It's a chance to challenge yourself, grow as a person, and create memories that become the highlight of your degree.



# Accessing careers support at university

**By Bethan Peace, Schools and Colleges Coordinator at The University of Law**

University is an exciting milestone and a major step forward in your life. For many students, it's the first time they've had the freedom to make important decisions about their education and career direction. At the same time, it's normal to feel unsure about how your career plans fit into everything, especially if you don't know exactly what you want to do. Everyone's journey is different, and university Careers Services will support you at every stage, no matter where you're starting from.

Many second and third-year students wish they'd focused more on developing their employability skills earlier. Looking back, they realise that first year was the ideal time to gain experience, build a strong CV, practice applications, and improve interview skills without the pressure of final-year deadlines. Employability and careers are usually introduced during first-year inductions, but these sessions are easily forgotten while students adjust to lectures, coursework, social life, and living independently. However, careers advisers offer flexible, personalised support that fits around academic commitments and can be accessed at any point.

Meeting with the Careers Service early in your university journey can help you plan and use your time effectively. Careers advisers can help

you assess your current skills and experience, explore different career options, and set realistic goals for the end of your degree. Together, you can create a simple, personalised plan that breaks career development into manageable steps. Whether you have a clear career goal in mind or are still exploring your options, having some structure can make the process feel far less daunting and help you build confidence over time.

Careers Services offer a wide range of support, including CV and cover letter advice, interview preparation, skills workshops, careers fairs, employer talks, job and internship portals, volunteering opportunities, mentoring programmes, and one-to-one appointments. Workshops are a great way to learn the basics and practice new skills in a supportive environment, while individual appointments allow you to receive tailored advice that suits your goals. Mentoring schemes can connect you with professionals or alumni who have followed similar paths and can offer valuable insight and encouragement.

Try to attend careers inductions or visit the Careers Service during freshers' events to find out what support is available. Careers teams are friendly, approachable, and want to help you succeed. You're not expected to arrive at university with a perfect CV or lots of experience. That's what university is for. By engaging early and using the support on offer, you can graduate feeling confident, prepared, and ready for whatever your next step may be.



# How your degree opens up your employability

**By Hannah Vincent, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Staffordshire**

In today's competitive job market, it's natural for you to question whether a university degree is the right route into employment. With the cost of living currently rising, and more alternative options becoming available, there isn't a one-size-fits-all option. However, going to university remains a powerful tool for students to access a fantastic career.

## Skills development

A university degree used to set you apart from the rest. This is still the case, but employers are looking for more from their employees, with a big emphasis on transferable skills. At university, students develop their critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, communication, and research abilities. Graduates will come away from university with the ability to synthesize information, present ideas clearly, and collaborate effectively.

## Transferable skills

No matter what course you study, the University of Staffordshire places strong emphasis on developing skills valued by workplaces across all sectors. This includes:

- communication – writing and speaking clearly, presenting ideas, and listening effectively
- problem-solving – approaching challenges logically and creatively
- teamwork – collaborating with others in diverse, fast-paced environments
- adaptability – being flexible in the face of new tools, ideas, or roles
- digital literacy – using digital tools confidently for work, research, and collaboration
- leadership and initiative – taking ownership of projects and decisions.

## Placement options

Another way for you to become more employable is to undertake a placement year. This integrates practical employment skills into the curriculum by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Students take the knowledge learnt in lectures and apply it to real life situations in the workplace. This reinforces your learning and increases confidence.

Placement opportunities are also fantastic for networking. Working for a company for a year will highlight the transferable skills offered by the student. This can lead to employment straight after graduation because the company can see how well they work.

The University of Staffordshire offers placement opportunities for most of our courses. 97% of our graduates who take part in a placement have progressed into graduate-level work, self-employment, or postgraduate study. This shows how crucial placements are for student progression. Placement options include:

- 6-week placement blocks
- course-based placements, such as nursing or paramedics
- placement years or sandwich years
- international placements.

## Careers support

Universities also support you after you have graduated. At the University of Staffordshire, students have lifelong support. Our careers team can help with:

- CV writing
- interview preparation
- job application support
- employer events

Remember, university is much more than a qualification. Degrees are gateways to the careers that you hope to secure in the years ahead.

**“ Going to university remains a powerful tool for students to access a fantastic career. ”**



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# Preparing for your future career

**By Lois Gordon, Student Recruitment and Marketing Assistant at the University of Essex**

Preparing for your future career isn't about having everything figured out from day one. It's a journey that develops over time, shaped by the choices you make and the opportunities you embrace at university. Achieving a degree is important, but university is also about building skills, gaining experience, and equipping yourself with the tools to navigate your future.

## Education as a strategic investment

Higher education is a valuable investment in your future. Academic study strengthens your subject knowledge, but university also helps you develop transferable skills valued by employers, such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptability. Attending lectures, engaging in seminars, and using feedback effectively will build your confidence and academic ability.

A strategic approach to education means making informed choices. Select modules that align with your interests and future ambitions so you stay motivated while building relevant expertise. At the University of Essex, this investment is supported by dedicated careers guidance alongside academic study. Students have access to our Careers Service support, designed to help with CV writing, job applications, interview preparation, and long-term career planning.

Additional opportunities help students apply their learning to the real world, such as workshops, short courses, and guest lectures. These experiences provide practical guidance to clarify your next steps.

## Gaining experience, building employability

Alongside academic learning, gaining practical

experience plays a crucial role in preparing for employment. Internships, part-time work, volunteering, placements, and student societies develop transferable skills such as teamwork, organisation, time management, and leadership.

This allows you to explore different career paths and gain insight into what you value in a working environment. Employers often look for evidence of initiative, commitment, and adaptability – qualities best demonstrated through hands-on involvement. Even small roles can provide meaningful examples to draw upon in applications and interviews. It's also important to reflect on your learning and how these experiences contribute to your personal and professional development.

## Building your professional presence

Communicating your skills effectively becomes just as important as developing them. Think of yourself as a personal brand to clarify how you present your strengths to others. Employers are interested in what you've done, but how you demonstrate skills, interests, and values.

Building connections with peers, academics, and professionals can boost confidence and expand your network. A professional online presence is increasingly important. LinkedIn allows you to showcase academic achievements, work experience, and interests while documenting your growth over time. Starting early means your profile evolves naturally, rather than being rushed at the end of your degree.

## One step at a time

Career preparation is an ongoing process. Make the most of educational opportunities, gain practical experience, and build a professional presence so you approach graduation with confidence. University provides a supportive environment to explore possibilities, develop skills, and lay strong foundations for a positive future beyond study. Every career begins the same way: one step at a time.



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