



**Featuring expert contributions from  
over 65 education practitioners**

 UniTasterDays.com

# **Students' Guide to University 2025**

The key higher education facts for students  
thinking about university

Produced in collaboration with  HELOA

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# Welcome to the UniTasterDays Students' Guide to University 2025

University is a big decision. Right now, you probably have lots of questions. Is university right for you? What should you study? Where should you study? How do you pay for it?

This is understandable. University is a significant change. It introduces you to new ways of studying, living, and socialising. You'll venture beyond your routine, your comfort zone, and often your home.

Spoiler alert: university is worth the disruption. It offers an unrivalled opportunity to grow your knowledge, network, and confidence. In doing so, you will secure the skills, relationships, and career you've always wanted.

But it's not the right path for everyone. That's why we produce this guide every year, brimming with information and insights. We want to help you make the best possible decision for your future.

These pages are packed with carefully curated articles. They are written by over 65 university practitioners and experts working within the education sector. We're forever thankful for the words and wisdom of our contributors, now more than ever, because this is the most important guide we have ever produced.

Change is afoot in the higher education sector. Tuition fees have increased for the first time since 2017 (page 52), alternatives to traditional study continue to grow (page 28), and UCAS is changing the personal statement (page 65).

And let's address the elephant in the room, the Zoom, and the classroom. The UK is facing a cost-of-living crisis. Prices are rising. Budgets

are tightening. The decision to attend university is less clear-cut than ever, despite our empowering (and often misunderstood) student finance system.

The cost-of-living crisis echoes throughout this guide, but several of the articles are designed to help you overcome financial difficulty. You'll learn how to research universities on a budget (page 23), secure "free money" to fund your student experience (page 55), manage your money at university (page 61), find a part-time job (page 62), and explore options like studying online (page 29).

And we'll continue to support you at UniTasterDays. We began as an event platform back in 2012 where you could search for university taster days, summer schools, open days, and more. Over the years, we have created new ways to share university insights with you, such as our leading podcast (page 51), jargon buster (page 27), and this handy guide currently gracing your screen.

Last year, the cost-of-living crisis inspired us to create a university regional representative platform. This allows your teachers to find university representatives near your school or college, so they can invite them to bring their expertise into your very own classroom. We also launched an events incentive search tool (page 44) where you can find every university offering financial support to attend their open days.

Next year, and every other year, we'll continue to support you, your parents, your supporters, your teachers, and your career advisers throughout the university application journey.

Yes, it's a difficult time of change and challenge and crisis. But don't worry. You've got this. And we've got you.

Simon Fairbanks,  
Head of Community  
Engagement, UniTasterDays



 UniTasterDays.com

**Supporting you to make great university decisions**



Search university events:  
[www.UniTasterDays.com/Search](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/Search)



Watch subject guide videos:  
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Listen to our podcasts:  
[www.UniTasterDays.com/Podcasts](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/Podcasts)

# Reasons to consider university

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

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 61). 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. „**



St Mary's  
University  
London

175 Years of  
Inspiring  
Excellence

THE #26%<sup>+</sup> TIMES  
THE 5<sup>TH</sup> MOST  
GOOD  
UNIVERSITY  
GUIDE  
2024  
TOP 5  
FOR TEACHING  
QUALITY

THE #82%<sup>+</sup> TIMES  
THE 5<sup>TH</sup> MOST  
GOOD  
UNIVERSITY  
GUIDE  
2024  
TOP 10  
FOR STUDENT  
EXPERIENCE

# St Mary's Masterclass Days



St Mary's is a campus-based university just 30 minutes from the hustle and bustle of central London. We have a strong and supportive community of staff and students, and offer the best of both worlds.

Founded in 1850, we have a long and distinguished history in education. 96% of our graduates are in employment, vocation, or further study within 15 months of graduation (HESA, 2024).

We have world-class sports facilities and 14 Simmies competed at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

## Get hands-on university experience at a St Mary's Masterclass Day

Come along to one of our Masterclass Days, where you'll get to experience workshops in the subject area you're interested in. Each event is delivered by academic staff and supported by current students. This is a great opportunity to gain academic evidence for your UCAS application.

## We're running masterclass events in the following subject areas:

- Business & Communication
- Law & Criminology
- Computer Science
- Primary Teaching
- Creative Arts
- Psychology
- English Literature
- Sports Science
- History & Politics

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

[Book your place here](#)

## Any questions?

Get in touch with [schools.colleges@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:schools.colleges@stmarys.ac.uk)

# Understanding fair access and widening participation

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

Education is far from an even playing field. Students experience varying levels of support and challenges throughout their educational journey. You might have the odds stacked against you through no fault of your own. For instance:

- you might have additional caring responsibilities meaning you can't prioritise your studies
- you might not have access to a quiet, safe space to complete your homework
- you might have been at numerous education establishments before you get to secondary school.

Widening Participation (WP) teams exist to recognise and address these barriers. We recognise that there is a huge loss of potential, simply due to the systemic barriers that exist in the education system.

WP teams come in many shapes and sizes. Broadly speaking, they comprise of practitioners who work with local schools and colleges to raise expectations and attainment. They ensure all students have the ability, knowledge, and confidence to progress to higher education should you wish to.

WP teams are impartial. We aren't here to recruit you to our university, or even higher education. Instead, we support informed decision-making to make sure you have the tools to make the right decisions for your future.

WP teams across the country are collectively working towards:

- **enhanced social mobility** – based on the assumption that a degree is a gateway qualification to the professions.
- **cultural enrichment** – universities need a diverse student population so that the classroom is full of different perspectives and experiences. It is important that their teaching spaces don't become echo chambers.
- **reduced inequality** – addressing educational disparities helps to reduce social and economic inequalities and promotes a fairer, more equal society.

It's worth noting that while there's a moral imperative behind this work, there's also a statutory obligation. Universities can only charge you the maximum tuition fees if they have an approved plan detailing how they'll invest in widening participation work.

Each institution will target their activity in a slightly different way, but will generally target schools based on deprivation measures, for example, Pupil Premium eligibility. The Uni Connect website is a good place to find out what your school is eligible for.

**“ WP teams are impartial. We aren't here to recruit you to our university, or even higher education. Instead, we support informed decision-making. ”**



# 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.

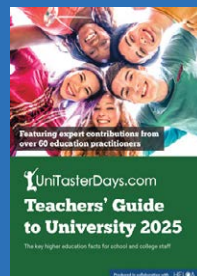
**“ Many universities offer bespoke outreach programmes for underrepresented students considering higher education. ”**



**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.

[www.UniTasterDays.com/Resources](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/Resources)





# Support for mature students, parents, and carers

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

It's common for people to have questions about university, whether they are looking for themselves, a family member, or a loved one. There is a lot of information and support available online to help with navigating opportunities, which can be both a blessing and a curse. Having so much detail available can sometimes be a little overwhelming. This article aims to break down some useful information to help you make a start.

## Support for parents and carers

If you are supporting someone interested in university, it's worth reading the [UniTasterDays Parents' Guide to University](#). This provides some fantastic, comprehensive guidance and further signposting to other useful sources of information.

If you can, attending events with your loved ones, such as open days or offer-holder days, will allow you to gain insight into degree options and opportunities. You can often find further information on university websites, and university staff are happy to help families of applicants with general questions.

## Information for mature students

It's worth bearing in mind that school leavers aren't always the only people looking for information about university. Many people will return to education after doing something else instead, 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. For some, that's a bit later.

For instance, at the University of East Anglia, specific support is available to anyone looking to return to education. This includes people studying an Access to Higher Education (HE) qualification and those still considering their options. Tailored information is offered during the decision-making process and throughout their undergraduate studies. The same is often true for other universities too, many of whom have dedicated mature student webpages.

## Online tools for mature students

Mature students often need to revisit level 2 (GCSE or equivalent) and/or level 3 (A level or equivalent) qualifications prior to applying to university. 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. It is a brilliant place to start exploring. Users can create an account to save content, complete a skills audit, and access the National Careers Service for more dedicated advice.

Higher education can be accessed at a traditional university, but also through alternative organisations. This includes certain colleges, and also online providers like the Open University or Arden University. This means there are options available to help you manage study and life.

If you're in the process of weighing up these kinds of options, it's worth spending some time on the UCAS website. You can find course and university information, helpful guides to support with applying, and what to expect from student life.

## Final message

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

**“There are options available to help you manage study and life.,,”**

# 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  
of Exeter

# Discover University in Exeter and Cornwall

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 conferences
- Advice on how to explore your chosen subject
- Essay 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:

[exeter.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/visit](https://exeter.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/visit)



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@UniversityofExeter

Access, Participation and Outreach Office, Exeter EX4 4RN  
[exeter.ac.uk/discoveruniversity](https://exeter.ac.uk/discoveruniversity)



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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) (page 60). 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 Philippa Dobrée-Carey, Founder of FromHighSchoolToUni.com**

Starting university is a huge adventure for international students. Thankfully, you will find lots of support at your university, and within the UK more generally. By knowing where to look for this support, you'll be ready for this new chapter in your life.

## Finding accommodation

Living in university halls of residence is ideal for international students, especially in your first year. Halls will help you integrate into campus life, meet fellow students, and discover fun events onsite. Meanwhile, rented accommodation situated off campus will offer you independence, and allows you the flexibility to choose your housemates and location. Many universities will support you in finding approved landlords.

## Managing finances

You'll need to open a UK bank account to manage your money. Major banks offer accounts for international students, which might include benefits like travel cards. Research reputable online banks that cater to international transfers, such as Wise, if you'll be receiving money from home regularly.

## Saving money

Switching to a UK phone plan is advisable for a cheaper way to stay connected with home. You can save money on train travel by registering for a 16-25 Railcard. You can also receive

discounts on a variety of other items through student cards, such as Student Beans, TOTUM, and UNiDAYS (page 63).

## Making friends

University is an opportunity to make new connections and lifelong friends with people from lots of different nationalities and cultures. One way to meet new people is to sign up for university societies or clubs. Or you could simply strike up a conversation with someone in a coffee shop on campus! If you do feel lonely, you can contact student support services and international societies. They will help you get settled.

## Working in the UK

International students can work up to 20 hours a week during term time, although check your visa to confirm. You can usually find jobs on campus, retail positions in local shops, or tutor roles through an agency. You'll need a National Insurance number to work legally. You can apply for a number online once you have a UK address.

## Coping with holidays away from home

Don't worry if you can't make it home for the holidays. You won't be alone. Many universities host events for students staying on campus, or you could organise your own trip to explore a new city within the UK. Either way, stay connected with your family. Regular calls will make the distance feel shorter.

## Remember...

University life in the UK isn't just about studying. It's also about new experiences, challenges, and opportunities. With the right preparation and mindset, you'll not only survive, but thrive. Make the most of your time here in the UK, and don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.



# 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.



# An introduction to Uni Connect and how it can support you

**By George Foote, Outreach Assistant at Make Happen**

## What is Uni Connect?

The Office for Students (OfS) Uni Connect programme is a national collaborative initiative aimed at supporting young people from underrepresented groups in making informed decisions about their future.

The programme brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges, and local partners to offer free and impartial outreach activities and information to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since its inception in 2017, over one million young people from underrepresented groups have engaged with the programme.

The programme helps young people overcome academic, financial, and cultural barriers to higher education. This is achieved by facilitating collaboration between educational institutions and communities. The overall aim is to bridge the gap in higher education, and ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed.

## Objectives of Uni Connect

The primary objectives of Uni Connect are to:

- **increase higher education participation** – Uni Connect aims to raise aspirations and awareness of higher education opportunities among students from underrepresented groups.
- **provide targeted support** – the programme offers tailored support to students, helping them overcome barriers to higher education and achieve their academic potential.
- **enhance collaboration** – Uni Connect fosters partnerships between schools, colleges, universities, and local organisations to create a cohesive support network for students.
- **evaluate impact** – the programme assesses the effectiveness of its activities to ensure they are meeting the needs of students and making a positive impact on their outcomes.

## How Uni Connect can support you

All Uni Connect activities are free for students like you, ensuring that financial barriers do not

prevent participation. Uni Connect provides a range of services and activities designed to support students at various stages of their educational journey. These include:

- **outreach activities** – workshops, presentations, and events to raise awareness of higher education opportunities.
- **university visits** – visits to partner universities and colleges, giving students the chance to experience university life and learn more about the courses and facilities available.
- **information and guidance** – impartial information and guidance on the higher education application process, including advice on writing personal statements, preparing for interviews, and student finance.
- **partnerships with schools and colleges** – Uni Connect collaborates with schools and colleges to identify students who need extra support. By working with educators, Uni Connect ensures its services are targeted and effective.

## Uni Connect success stories

Many students have benefited from Uni Connect's support, going on to achieve their academic and career goals. For example, students who participated in Uni Connect activities have reported increased confidence, improved academic performance, and a greater understanding of higher education opportunities.

## Support for parents

Uni Connect offers information, advice, and guidance to parents and carers on how to support young people in their education and future choices. We provide resources and workshops for parents and carers, available both online and in person. Our commitment to impartiality ensures the advice given is in the best interest of the student.

## Final thoughts

In an evolving educational environment, it is paramount that you are given the tools required to succeed. This is achieved through the activities and support that is offered by the programme. By supporting schools, students, parents, universities, and colleges, Uni Connect ensures that all young people can overcome barriers and achieve their education goals regardless of their background.



# Opportunities offered by the University Alliance

**By Annie Bell, Head of External Affairs and Communications, University Alliance**

Choosing the right university is hard. There are hundreds of places to study in the UK. How do you tell the difference between them?

One way is to look at which group a university is part of. You've probably heard of the Russell Group, but there are other university groups in the UK. You can tell quite a lot about a university by its group. The University Alliance is one of the main university groups.

## What is the University Alliance?

The University Alliance is a group of the leading professional and technical universities. They specialise in working with industry and employers. Many of their courses are developed in partnership with employers and include practical elements. Their facilities are used by local businesses, so they tend to be industry standard (or better)!

Courses are likely to include work placements, practical assessments set by employers, and teaching from industry professionals. Examples include English students working on professional marketing projects, environmental sciences students delivering projects for Natural England, and media students working with the BBC.

Alliance universities usually rank highly for teaching and student satisfaction.

## Why study at an Alliance university?

- Alliance universities came top for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2023.
- 95% of graduates from Alliance universities were in work, or another activity like further study, just 15 months after graduating, and 93% of those described what they were doing as 'meaningful.'
- Alliance universities are more likely to be rated gold for teaching excellence than universities in other groups, according to the government's Teaching Excellence Framework.

## Who should study at an Alliance university?

An Alliance university could be your best option if you:

- prefer to learn by doing
- want to learn professional skills
- want to understand how your subject is applied outside of academia.

The above is true regardless of your grades or chosen subject.

## Will studying at an Alliance university help you get a job?

According to CBI Economics, only 8% of graduate employers said it was important where a graduate studied. However, those who said it did matter preferred graduates from professional and technical universities, and universities which specialise in relevant subjects, like those in the University Alliance.

This is because employers value graduates with practical experience as part of their degree, which is often offered as standard at an Alliance university.

## Applying to an Alliance university

Alliance universities accept qualifications including A levels, BTECs, and T-Levels. Their courses aren't purely academic, so their entry requirements are often mid-tariff. This means they don't require high academic grades. Often work experience, project work, or portfolios will be considered alongside grades (page 69).

## Which universities are in the University Alliance?

- Anglia Ruskin University
- Birmingham City University
- University of Brighton
- Coventry University
- University of Derby
- University of Greenwich
- University of Hertfordshire
- Kingston University London
- Leeds Beckett University
- Middlesex University
- Oxford Brookes University
- Robert Gordon University
- Teesside University
- University West London
- University of South Wales
- UWE Bristol

Hopefully this helps you narrow down your choices. Good luck with your application!

# My student experience by Leah Brooks



## Medical Student at 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.**

# 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 26). 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.**



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Elizabeth Conway

BBC Sport

*Elizabeth Conway*

# 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 your 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.



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(The Times and The Sunday  
Times Good University  
Guide 2025)

Office for  
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# 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 41), 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 courses

**By Suzie Loader, School and College Engagement Officer at the University of Exeter**

There are lots of things to consider when choosing your university course. Alongside the subject, it's also important to think about the type of course that will best suit you. This includes the way the course is taught, its length, how it is assessed, and the additional opportunities available during your studies and after you graduate.

## Academic courses

Academic courses tend to include traditional subject choices, such as English, Maths and History. These are more theoretical in their approach to learning. They involve lots of independent study and analysis of existing research across a broad range of topics within your chosen subjects. Academic courses are a popular choice for students who aren't sure about their future career. They allow you to pursue your passion for a particular subject, whilst providing the flexibility to explore other disciplines through optional module choices.

## Vocational courses

Unlike academic courses, vocational courses are usually more focused on specific job roles. These courses include Medicine, Event Management, Engineering, and Veterinary Science. Vocational courses are more practical in nature. They will likely involve more hands-on activities including project-based work, placements, working in laboratories, and developing a portfolio of evidence.

## Longer courses

Most full-time undergraduate courses last 3 years, but some courses last longer. This

enables you to access a range of additional opportunities as part of your studies. Examples include:

- **degree apprenticeships** – these usually take 4 to 5 years to complete because students study part-time alongside the 'on the job' training with their employer. Degree apprenticeships require excellent time management to balance work and study commitments. They are a brilliant option if you know which career you wish to pursue. They are a fantastic way to gain valuable work experience whilst you learn.
- **integrated master's courses** – these allow you to combine undergraduate and postgraduate-level study within a single four-year degree. They are a great option if you are looking to explore your chosen subject in more depth and at a higher level.
- **studying abroad** – lots of courses offer a study abroad option, which allows you to spend an additional year studying at an international partner university. This provides you with the opportunity to study all over the world. It enables you to immerse yourself in a completely different culture and learning environment, whilst still having the support and guidance from your host university (page 84).
- **industry placements** – universities offer lots of courses with a year in industry. This allows you to complete a year's paid work placement, usually after your second year. This is a great way to consolidate your learning, whilst also gaining valuable work experience, networking opportunities, and the chance to try a particular career path before you commit to it.

Visit university websites to find out more about the different types of courses available and contact their admissions teams if you require further information.

**“ Lots of courses offer a study abroad option, which allows you to spend an additional year studying at an international partner university. ”**



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

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

Gone are the days when you could travel to multiple universities to help narrow down your options. Due to cost, time, and location, you now need to adopt a hybrid approach when searching for your preferred universities. But where do you start?

## Start online

University websites are a great place to start. Think about what you want from your course. Use keyword searches to find information quickly. Most universities have introduction videos to offer you a flavour of what studying that course will be like. Use this to streamline your options to create a manageable list of universities to consider.

## Explore online events

Now you have a manageable list, explore the online events advertised on university websites and the [UniTasterDays website](#). There are a variety of formats, from online chats to information sessions. These offer a cheaper, less time-consuming way to explore multiple institutions. Live events allow you to ask questions (page 47).

However, if you can't attend, you can often access on-demand recordings of the sessions to view in your own time. You will still learn a lot from the recordings, and there will be alternative ways to ask follow-up questions.

## Attend campus events

Now you have narrowed down your choices, explore what events are taking place on campus. These should be at universities that you are strongly considering. If you are early in your journey, you could attend a taster session. These help you understand what it's like to study a particular subject. Sometimes you need your teacher to make a booking on your behalf.

Open days are big showcase events. Plan what you need to see. Websites are great at showing you lovely facilities and happy students... but take the opportunity to see everything yourself: facilities, accommodation, location. Speak to current students too. Check you are happy that the experience matches the promotional material.

All universities invite applicants back to campus for offer-holder events. If you didn't visit the university before applying, this is your second chance to see the university in person. If you did visit before, you should still engage in the offer holder activity, because this is often different to the open day activity. I personally made my final decision based on a conversation with a tutor at an offer-holder day.

## Return to virtual

Continue your research online, even after you have chosen your top five choices. Join community chat groups, follow university social media channels, and rewatch on-demand content to ensure you are happy with your final choices.

## Use every resource

Adopting a hybrid approach to your university research – online, on campus, on demand – means you can make an informed decision. The more you engage with universities, the stronger chance you will attend the best university for you.



# Understanding university league tables

**By Hannah Slack, Student Recruitment and Marketing Officer at the University of Sheffield**

With hundreds of universities vying for your attention, how do you decide which one is right for you?

University league tables are a common tool used by applicants. These rank institutions based on various criteria to provide a comparative overview.

## Understanding university league tables

University rankings are a system of assessing and comparing institutions based on a set of criteria. The criteria can vary significantly between publishers. However, some of the most common factors include:

- research quality
- teaching quality
- graduate prospects
- student experience.

Each league table uses its own methodology, so it's important to understand how each ranking is calculated. For instance, both The Guardian University Guide and The Complete University Guide place emphasis on student satisfaction. Others, such as The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide and The QS World University Rankings, focus more on research quality.

## Using university league tables

The overall rank of a university can be helpful, but it's important to consider the factors most relevant to your specific needs. Some of the key categories of interest to undergraduate students include:

- **career prospects** – does the university or faculty have a high graduate employment rate? Does the university offer career

support and CV-enhancing activities, such as internships and work placements?

- **student satisfaction** – a high satisfaction rating related to teaching quality, course content, and university life can indicate a positive learning environment both inside and outside the lecture theatre.
- **student-to-staff ratio** – a lower ratio suggests more personalised teaching and a greater access to academic support.

Other categories you may also want to consider include:

- **research** – universities with strong research environments often look for ways to incorporate the latest findings into undergraduate study.
- **international outlook** – institutions with strong international partnerships typically offer diverse opportunities to work or study abroad.

University league tables can provide a lot of information, but it's equally important to research course specific rankings. A university could rank high overall, yet rank low for your particular interest, or vice versa. For example, a specialist arts university might be recognised as a world-leading institution for art and design education. However, due to its specialised focus, it's unlikely to appear high in general university rankings.

## Remember...

League tables can be a valuable resource when researching universities, but they shouldn't be the sole reason for your decision. It's important to remember that your university experience will extend beyond an academic education. Make sure you consider the type of life you want to lead, and whether each university and its location can provide that for you.

If you do use university league tables then remember to consider your specific priorities, whether they're related to course content, career prospects, or student satisfaction. Ultimately, the best university for you is the one that fits your individual needs, aspirations, and interests.

# 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?

### 1. 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.

### 2. 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.

### 3. 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.

### 4. 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.

### 5. Interactivity

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



Are you getting confused by university acronyms and jargon?  
Visit our jargon buster where 100s of terms are explained!

[www.UniTasterDays.com/JargonBuster](http://www.UniTasterDays.com/JargonBuster)



# Studying a degree apprenticeship

**By Kim Dean, Student Recruitment Officer (Degree Apprenticeships) at the University of Salford**

Apprenticeships are a great opportunity to gain industry experience whilst you are studying. Many people are attracted to the idea that your course fees are fully funded by your employer whilst you receive a wage. Just like with university, you need to decide whether this is the right path for you.

## Considering a degree apprenticeship

Below are some of the key factors to consider before you apply for an apprenticeship opportunity.

### 1. Choose your career carefully

As an apprentice, you will spend most of your time in the workplace rather than studying. Whilst you will be allocated study time, this may be the equivalent to one day a week which means the other four days are spent doing your job. Therefore, make sure you know which career you want and that it's something you will enjoy!

### 2. Employee first, student second

As an employee, you will need to prioritise your work. This means your work responsibilities and commitments should always come ahead of being a student. Therefore, your "student lifestyle" may look different to that of a full-time student.

### 3. Apprenticeships can take longer

Your course will take longer to complete than if you were to study full-time because you are gaining industry experience at the same time. A typical degree apprenticeship can take anywhere from 3 to 6 years to complete, dependent upon the course.

## Applying for a degree apprenticeship

If you have decided to study an apprenticeship, here are some top tips to stand out. Apprenticeships can be very competitive due to their limited availability and increased popularity. Make sure your application is strong and varied to stand out and catch an employer's eye.

### 1. Work and volunteering experience

Applying for an apprenticeship is like applying for a job, so previous experience in a workplace looks good. By gaining experience (even outside of your specific job area) you can discuss your transferable skills and demonstrate that you are familiar with the demands of employment. Therefore, consider what skills working in a shop or a restaurant may develop - for instance communication, time management, or leadership skills.

### 2. Additional online courses

One benefit of the internet is free online courses that you can access to learn more about the role you are interested in. This allows you to broaden your knowledge and demonstrates a dedication to learning. This will also provide you with the opportunity to explore additional topics to see if they interest you.

### 3. Research the company

You can have apprentices in two different companies studying the same course but working very different jobs due to the nature of the company's speciality. Therefore, if there is a certain specialism you want to qualify in or gain experience in, ensure you have researched the companies and know what they are offering. This ensures the experience you gain on the job is in the correct area for your future career. Ultimately, the best route for you is the one that fits your individual needs, aspirations, and interests.

**“Apprenticeships can be very competitive due to their limited availability and increased popularity. Make sure your application is strong and varied to stand out and catch an employer's eye.”**

# Studying an online university course

**By Andy Ramsden, Director of Distance Learning at Arden University**

Online learning, also referred to as distance learning, offers many benefits over traditional face-to-face learning. You will:

- receive flexibility to balance your educational needs with requirements around your personal and professional commitments
- access diverse programmes of study or resources that aren't always available in your local area
- foster lifelong learning skills associated with self-discipline, resilience, and autonomy.

However, studying online can also present challenges. These unique challenges are often associated with staying motivated, avoiding distractions, managing your time, understanding the learning materials, and combating potential feelings of isolation.

The institution you join will have several initiatives to minimise these, enabling you to achieve successful outcomes and have an excellent student experience. Therefore, this article will focus on strategies you can adopt to thrive as an online learner.

There is growing academic research on the positive link between online learning success and the learner's growth mindset. A growth mindset proposes that nothing is set or fixed, meaning you can develop through dedication and hard work. This self-belief fosters your resilience by viewing obstacles as part of the learning process, a willingness to embrace challenges, and a love for learning.

Self-efficacy, closely linked to a growth mindset, is believing in your ability to succeed at specific tasks. As an online learner, self-efficacy is your personal coach, telling you, "You can do this!"

A growth mindset gives you the belief that you can grow, while self-efficacy gives you the confidence to take action to make growth happen.

Developing a long-term growth mindset and self-efficacy takes time and effort. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day! You can start developing your self-efficacy if you:

- set small, achievable weekly goals to build confidence with each success. Start with small wins.
- learn from your mistakes. Everyone stumbles, but what matters is how you respond. Learn from your mistakes. Reflection is key!
- spend time with people who encourage you and believe in your abilities.
- visualise success - this can help you feel more prepared and confident.
- celebrate your achievements.

Thriving in the online learning environment is not studying by yourself. A barrier to developing a growth mindset and self-efficacy is often the sense of isolation. We know an advantage of online learning is the flexibility to learn on your own time. However, learning is still collaborative as you discuss ideas with fellow learners.

Join discussion groups related to your course. Set yourself targets for interactions, such as messaging two students each week. Equally, don't hesitate to contact lecturers and advisers for guidance - they will be very supportive. Finally, don't forget to participate in broader (non-academic) groups to build friendships, and dedicate a set time per week to participate in forums and discussions.

In conclusion, developing a growth mindset, self-efficacy, and active participation in your learning community will contribute to a positive learning experience and good outcomes, and enable you to thrive as an online learner.

# Studying a creative subject at university

**By Leanne Punchard, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Suffolk**

If you're someone who is creatively minded, it can sometimes feel overwhelming to select a degree to study at university and, ultimately, decide your future career path.

However, there are a huge variety of creative roles these days. With expert teaching, ground-breaking facilities, and experienced visiting professionals packaged within your course, a creative degree could be your ticket into this rapidly evolving industry!

You might already specialise in a conventional field within the arts, giving you a focused outlook on degree selection. Or you might not have one specialism but recognise you are destined for the creative industry in some way.

In a few years' time, you could be working within the field of games design, e-sports, special effects, drama therapy, exhibition design, project management, architecture, web design, creative writing, printmaking, fashion design, and so much more.

According to a recent study by Forbes, 73% of organisations said that creative thinking skills were a top priority for them when considering talent. They further state that cognitive skills are "growing in importance most rapidly due to increasing complexities in the workplace."

My own creative degree, within Media and the Performing Arts, has opened many doors

by developing my skills in problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. On a personal level, I have found these skills to be highly regarded in the workplace. They have helped me to drive forward in my career.

It's such an exciting time to study. Universities are moving forward with their degree offerings. They are constantly developing new courses that complement the evolving world we live in. Before you know it, you could be writing scripts for prime time TV shows, creating games like Red Dead Redemption 2 for the gaming industry, or designing cutting-edge infrastructure solutions as an architect.

Universities really are creating the most exciting opportunities for students wanting work within the creative industry, but research is key:

1. Firstly, look at the Prospects website for information on the different types of creative jobs out there.
2. Narrow down specific job roles, then find out which degrees could lead you into those roles. You can do this by contacting relevant companies, reaching out to professionals on social media sites, or speaking to your career adviser at school.
3. Research universities that provide the degrees you have found. Remember to look at a variety of different universities (campus, city, northern, southern, coastal) to give you the greatest options.
4. Finally, visit your chosen selection of universities to check out their arts facilities.

The bonus of studying a creative degree at university is that you get to learn and develop your skills on industry-grade equipment, ensuring your move from graduation to employment is seamless.

At most universities, you'll be visited by industry professionals and go on specialised work placements. Some universities even include employability modules within the course, which helps you to work on your entrepreneurial skills.

All of this helps you build the experience, skills, and confidence you need to launch into your new and exciting career within the creative industry!



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# 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.

**“The journey of Medicine is long and hard, but there is no better way to make lifelong friends than on an extended road trip. ,,**



# Studying Graduate Entry Medicine at university

**By Nia Stokes, Student Recruitment Officer at Swansea University**

## Understanding Graduate Entry Medicine

Graduate Entry Medicine (GEM) is a 4-year accelerated medical degree, offered as a postgraduate route into medicine. Upon graduation, GEM students receive a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery degree (MBBS, MBChB or BMBS) which allows them to apply for their provisional registration and start their foundation years. This is what a traditional undergraduate medicine student would do after graduating.

GEM degrees consist of in-class teaching and placement experience. They cover the basic biomedical sciences in the context of a range of settings, such as clinical medicine, public health and pathology. Being an alternative to the traditional medicine route, a GEM degree offers you the chance to study medicine after you've completed a 3-year undergraduate degree.

## Applying to Graduate Entry Medicine

Most universities require you to study an undergraduate degree in a science-related subject, but some institutions also accept students from arts and humanities backgrounds. Some universities offer 3-year

undergraduate degrees with medical pathways, which are tailored to lead into a 4-year GEM degree, totalling 7 years of study.

When applying for a GEM degree, universities require you to sit a medical entry exam, like the GAMSAT or UCAT tests. They also have an interview process, usually in the form of an assessment day. Some universities offer incentives like lower medical entry exam scores and guaranteed interviews if you study both your undergraduate and GEM degree with them. Make sure to check the specific admissions requirements for the universities you're considering.

## Benefits of Graduate Entry Medicine

If you're prepared to take the extra time to study a GEM degree, there are many benefits to doing so. GEM students naturally have more time to build work experience and knowledge by the time they graduate. They can be seen as more mature by employers. Studying a 3-year science degree before your GEM degree also allows you to explore other career options before committing to medicine.

Furthermore, the UCAS application form allows you to apply to 4 undergraduate medicine courses, but stipulates that your fifth choice must be something different. As such, a science degree leading to Graduate Entry Medicine could be a reliable fall-back option. Due to the competitive nature of undergraduate medicine, having this pathway as an option on your UCAS form could relieve some pressure during your final year of sixth form and college.



# How location can enhance your university experience

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

The path to choosing a university is a long one, but it's just the first step on an exciting academic journey. You're not only picking an institution – you're choosing your home for the next few years. That's why finding a location that suits you is so important. The right place can offer the opportunities and environment you need to thrive. While location is sometimes overlooked, it can be the key to shaping an unforgettable university experience. Let us point you in the right direction.

## Academic opportunities

Your university's location will greatly influence the opportunities available to you. For example, universities in tech-driven areas, like major cities, often provide more internships and networking events. Meanwhile, smaller towns or coastal locations might offer unique opportunities in areas like cultural heritage, agriculture, or marine studies. Thinking about how the location aligns with your interests and goals can make a big difference in your experience.

## Comparing opportunities in diverse locations

Every location has its own advantages. Reflecting on the type of area you'd like to study in is key to making the right choice. For instance, cities like London offer access to global business hubs and cultural landmarks. Other cities, like Edinburgh or Bristol, provide vibrant student communities and thriving local industries. Rural campuses, such as Aberystwyth or those near the Scottish Highlands, offer peaceful settings perfect for focused study and outdoor exploration. Each location has something unique to offer, so think about what suits you best.

## Cultural and social life

Your university's location influences your academic experience, but also your social and cultural life. City universities often boast diverse populations, exciting events, and activities like concerts and festivals. Rural or coastal universities can foster close-knit communities and a nature-focused lifestyle. However, social opportunities can vary wildly. Smaller towns may surprise you with thriving social scenes, while some cities might not meet your expectations. That's why visiting and researching locations is so important.

## Campus or city

Campus universities are super convenient, with everything you need within walking distance. In contrast, city universities can feel a little too spread out. That being said, city universities might allow you to explore your surroundings more, whereas campus universities could feel a bit isolated. This is why it's essential to visit universities to check the distance between the campus and the places you'd want to visit most.

## Cost of living

Location impacts affordability. Living in central London will naturally come with higher expenses, while studying in smaller cities or rural areas can help stretch your budget further. Factoring in the cost of living is crucial when choosing where to study.

## Top tips



**Visit before you commit** – visit the town or city before committing. You won't know if you'll feel comfortable until you've seen the location for yourself.



**Think beyond academia** – consider how the location will shape your overall experience. Picture yourself living and thriving in each environment.

University is more than just lectures and libraries. It's about where you'll live, grow, and make lifelong memories. Choosing the right location means finding a place that inspires you, supports you, and sets the stage for an unforgettable experience.

# The benefits of studying in Scotland

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

Have you ever thought about studying in Scotland and wondered what the key differences are? If so, read on to find out all you need to know about studying at a Scottish University.

## Tradition of education excellence

With 600 years of excellence in education, Scotland boasts 4 out of the 6 oldest UK universities, as well as many modern institutions. The quality and structure of the education system in Scotland is renowned. It has been replicated by many countries around the world including the USA.

## Degree structure

Typically, a degree in Scotland is four years long, with options to complete your studies in three years if you'd prefer. However, the four-year degree structure is a very popular choice as it offers some advantages:

- **Flexibility** – the first two years of study can be more flexible, as you will often study your subject and the surrounding subjects as well. This enables you to gain a breadth of knowledge before specialising in your subject. It is also often the case that you can switch degrees after the first year if you find your interests have changed.
- **Skills** – The knowledge gained before specialising in your later years of study enables you to improve and develop study skills. This is highly valued by employers.

- **Time** – A four-year degree provides time to mature and develop as a young adult. You can get to grips with university life and make the most of your student experience.

## Tuition fees

Wondering about tuition fees? The application process for tuition fees and maintenance loans at a Scottish university is the same as elsewhere in the UK. You can apply for each year of your degree, even if you have chosen to study your degree over four years.

## Student life

Scottish universities are diverse and inclusive, offering a warm welcome to over 50,000 students from more than 180 countries each year. Scotland also boasts some of the safest cities in the UK to be a student. And it's not all haggis and ceilidhs!

There really is something for everyone with easy access to vibrant cities, music concerts, sporting events, beaches, and the great outdoors. Students aged under 22 years can also take advantage of free bus travel, so you can make the most of your free time. Equally, our cities are well connected by rail and cheap flights to the rest of the UK.

## Join us in Scotland

Hopefully, this article has started to answer some of your questions about the benefits of studying in Scotland, and demonstrated some of the many opportunities and unforgettable adventures you can have!

If you want to find out more, start to research the huge variety of courses, campuses, and cities on offer in Scotland. If you're able, try to visit the university or city where you're thinking of studying. This can help you get a sense of the environment and whether it would work for you.



# The benefits of studying in Wales

By Joshua Phillips, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of South Wales

One of the verses of the Welsh national anthem, Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau, translates into English as:

*"O land of the mountains, the bard's paradise,  
Whose valleys are fair to my eyes,  
Green murmuring forest, far echoing flood,  
Fire the fancy and quicken the blood."*

This description encapsulates Wales perfectly. If you have visited Wales, you will have witnessed this beauty for yourself with its plentiful rivers, awe-inspiring mountains, untouched forestry, and rugged coastline.

In amongst this natural beauty, Wales has eight higher education institutions, which all have unique characteristics. Studying in Wales comes with a variety of differences and advantages.

This article explores some of these to help you decide whether Wales is the right destination for you.

## Wales is adventurous

'There's something for everyone' can sometimes be seen as a bit of cliché. However, when it comes to studying in Wales, it's a term that is true in every sense. For those that love the outdoors, why not try some of the following activities:

- Surfing or kayaking at our world-renowned beaches in Barafundle, Rhossili, and Tenby
- Adventurous walks in Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) or Eryri National Park, where you'll find the highest peak in Wales: Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon)
- Taking a dive on the fastest zipline in the world over Penrhyn Quarry Lake

- Leisurely strolls along the 870-mile Wales Coastal Path
- Coaststeering near one of the world's smallest cities, St Davids in Pembrokeshire.

## Wales is bustling

If you are someone that enjoys the hustle and bustle of city life, our four larger cities - Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, and Wrexham - will most definitely have something in store for you. With a wide variety of music venues, restaurants, bars, and shops, there will be something that appeals to all tastes and interests. More ideas about what to do in Wales can be found at the Visit Wales website.

## Wales is affordable

Unfortunately, the cost-of-living crisis is having a detrimental impact on people's lives. However, studying in Wales could help. The cost of living in Wales is lower than the UK average. This will allow you to keep more of your student loan and hard-earned money to enjoy the positives that Wales has to offer.

## Wales is supportive

Research any additional funding which may be available to help you make those all-important and informed university decisions. For example, if you are successful in securing a place at a Welsh university to study an allied health care course, you could be eligible to apply for the Welsh NHS bursary. This covers university fees and maintenance costs. More information relating to this bursary can be found on the Welsh NHS Bursary webpage.

## Wales is welcoming

One of the biggest misconceptions about moving to Wales is that you need to learn Welsh. This isn't the case. However, you could take advantage of living in Wales by learning some basic phrases. Welsh is a language that has existed for over a thousand years, and many Welsh universities offer free language classes. This should make the road signs much easier to read, as you travel around this beautiful country! Pob lwc! Good luck!

# The benefits of studying in Northern Ireland

**By Damian Connor, Marketing and Insights Manager Queen's Global at Queen's University Belfast**

Thinking of where to spend your university years? Northern Ireland might not be the first destination that springs to mind, but it should be. A hidden gem of the UK, this corner of the world offers students a unique blend of affordability, culture, and natural beauty that's hard to beat. Here are just a few reasons why studying in Northern Ireland might be one of the best decisions you'll ever make.

## 1. Affordable living for students

Let's talk money. University is an investment, and managing finances is key. Luckily, Northern Ireland boasts the lowest cost of living in the UK (Mercer Cost of Living City Ranking 2023). Student housing in vibrant areas like Belfast's Queen's Quarter is significantly cheaper than other major UK cities, with average rents almost 70% less than in Dublin. Groceries and bills are also notably less expensive, making day-to-day living easier on your wallet.

## 2. Safety and security in Belfast

Belfast is one of the safest cities in Europe. This makes it an excellent choice for students seeking peace of mind while studying abroad. Whether you're enjoying a night out, or a sunny daytime stroll around the Queen's Quarter, you're bound to encounter a warm and welcoming environment that fosters a strong sense of community.

## 3. A gateway to adventure

Northern Ireland's size is one of its greatest assets. You can explore world-famous landmarks like the Giant's Causeway, the Mourne Mountains, and the rugged North Coast – all just a short journey from major cities. If you prefer city life, Belfast's vibrant streets are brimming with music, art, and culture.

## 4. Unique culture and energy

Belfast has a cultural scene like no other. A dynamic and forward-focused city, it hosts an incredible variety of festivals and events, from Belsonic and Belfast Vital to traditional music celebrations. Belfast's buzzing nightlife, packed with lively pubs, clubs, and music venues, offers endless entertainment. Whether you're wandering through the Cathedral Quarter or attending one of the city's many cultural festivals, you'll quickly feel Belfast's unmatched energy.

## 5. Academic excellence

Northern Ireland's universities, including Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, deliver world-class education and research opportunities. For example, Queen's offers innovative programmes, a supportive campus community, and career-focused opportunities like GoGlobal and QWork. It's no wonder students from across Great Britain are making the move.

## 6. Accessible and convenient

Travel to and from Northern Ireland is easy and affordable, with three airports and regular ferry crossings. Once here, public transport and compact cities make getting around a breeze. You can hop from a lecture to a scenic hiking trail or a lively gig in record time.

Choosing Northern Ireland for your studies isn't just about getting a degree. It's about embracing a lifestyle that's enriching, adventurous, and unique. So, why not take the leap? You might just find the experience of a lifetime.

**“ This corner of the world offers students a unique blend of affordability, culture, and natural beauty. ”**

# The different types of university events

**By Jade Matthews, Schools and Colleges Development Officer at Anglia Ruskin University**

When deciding which route to take into higher education, attending events is a great way to gather information. Universities deliver various events throughout the academic year, which allow you to visit a university campus, take part in tasters, and ask any questions you have directly. Larger events, such as summer schools, run less regularly, but give you a real hands-on experience of student life.

Generally, any university event you attend will look fantastic in your personal statement. It shows you've thoroughly researched universities before deciding on your final 5 choices. In this article, I will introduce you to some of the major events to look out for.

## Open days

Open days are arguably the most common type of university event. Take the chance to tour the campus, view student accommodation, attend talks on your chosen subject area, and much more. Academics and support staff are present to answer questions, whilst current students provide insights into what student life is really like.

Another bonus is getting to experience the town or city you will be studying in. Make sure you save plenty of time to explore the area after the open day. You could be living there for a minimum of 3 years, so it's good to get a feel for the place!

Many universities offer an open day travel bursary or travel discounts to help you attend. You can search for these using the new [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#). At ARU, we are keen to promote the use of public transport as much as possible. Therefore, we have partnered with local companies to provide free bus and train tickets to students who have registered to attend an open day.

## Subject taster days

Taster days are the ideal way to experience a university course or subject area before making your final choice. They generally include lectures from academics, hands-on workshops, campus tours, and the opportunity to use specialist subject-specific equipment. These tend to run throughout the year in various subject areas. It's always worth speaking to your careers advisers about any taster days you are interested in.

Some universities, such as ARU, will allow you to book directly on their website, provided the relevant permissions are in place from your school or college.

## Summer schools

Summer schools run throughout June and July and are generally aimed at Year 12 students. ARU Summer Schools, for example, are held in July, in subjects such as Medicine, Character Design, and Business and Law. Like others, these are week-long residential experiences. They allow you to dive headfirst into university life to find out what being a university student is all about. You stay in student accommodation, cook some of your own meals, take part in lectures and workshops, and enjoy social activities. You may even meet some new friends who go on to study at the same university!



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

- Explore 100s of university events
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- Use our keyword search to find your specific interests
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# The benefits of attending a university event

**By Anne Gallacher, Schools and Colleges Regional Assistant at the University of Derby**

University events are specifically designed to help you navigate your options, provide key information, support you through the higher education process, and aid you in making the right choice. Your next steps are important, and university events will prove to be a vital part of your research process and the decision you will eventually make.

## Open days

The most popular form of university events are open days (page 43), where institutions welcome prospective students on-campus to experience what they have to offer. Open days allow students to explore their courses of interest, meet academics, speak to current students, and see the university's facilities.

It is also a valuable opportunity to get a taste of student life, tour accommodation, and explore the place you may one day call home. At our University of Derby open days, we have a range of teams on hand to assist you. Whether you require support with the admissions process, want to find out about degree apprenticeships, or wish to meet your future students' union, we are here to help.

Your university experience is yours to shape. Attending events, like open days, enables you to form an impression of an institution and draw comparisons between the different options you are considering. By experiencing a place first-hand, you can establish whether it feels right for you and determine whether it suits what you want from your experience at university.

## Alternative events

Attending university open days is not always possible. However, there are alternative options to visit a university and source the answers to your questions. At the University of Derby, we provide regular opportunities to attend open house events and book onto mid-week campus tours. Much like open days, these provide the chance to see the university and have the conversations you need to help with the decision-making process.

You may also find that your school, sixth form, or college organise university-related events for you, such as careers fairs, university visits, or trips to recruitment exhibitions (page 41). These are perfect opportunities for you to engage with universities and get a better sense of what might suit you.

## Online events

In recent years, universities have begun to offer online events such as virtual tours, webinars, and Q&A sessions. These provide an accessible opportunity to build your understanding of the university's offering. At Derby, we host a series of webinars that focus on specific topics, often surrounding the application process. However, whilst these can be a helpful part of your research, the online events do not replace the importance of attending in-person events and seeing the university for yourself.

## Public events

In addition, universities often host public professorial lectures. These offer a taste of the academic environment, insights into the research being completed by the institution, and an understanding of what university-level study might entail. It is also a chance to explore a subject you are interested in and may inspire content for your personal statement (page 67).

As discussed, there are a range of events to get involved in, all designed to help you. Embrace these events and attend with an open mind. Now is the moment to invest your time, consider your options, broaden your horizons, and make your choice.

**“University events will prove to be a vital part of your research process. „**



# 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!



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[www.solent.ac.uk/opendays](http://www.solent.ac.uk/opendays)

# What to expect at a university open day

**By Gavin Spoons, Regional Student Recruitment Officer at Norwich University of the Arts**

Open days are the perfect way to experience first-hand what being a student at a particular university is really like. You can gather lots of useful information online and in prospectuses, but nothing beats being in the university environment and having the opportunity to speak to academics and current students. Open days are packed with scheduled activities to help you get a feel for a university and see if it's somewhere you might want to study.

## Campus tours

Arguably the central event of the day, these guided tours are typically led by current students who show you around the campus. You'll explore the university environment, see communal areas such as cafes and libraries, and have a chance to visit facilities related to your course. This gives you insights into your day-to-day life as a student, and you might see work and projects you could do yourself.

## Course talks

Throughout the day, there will be a range of informative talks offering information about the university, specific courses, and student support. Most universities host a welcome talk at the start of the day to highlight the unique aspects of that university.

Course-specific talks hosted by academic staff are also very valuable. These talks share detailed information about the courses you're

considering. They allow you to talk directly to the course leader, their fellow lecturers, and current students. These course talks give you a more detailed look into course content than you will find outside of an open day. They cover the work you will do, and the careers you could progress into.

## Support talks

Finally, there are additional talks and sessions throughout the day to introduce you to other university departments and offer support. You could find yourself in talks about accommodation options, what student support is available, student experiences, and even receive advice for applications and interviews.

## Accommodation tours

If you're looking to move away from home to study at university, you'll want to see what accommodation options are available to you. Similar to campus tours, there'll be an opportunity to look around different accommodation sites with helpful staff and students there to answer any questions. You can see the types of rooms available, and the facilities offered in different accommodation sites. Imagining yourself living comfortably as a student is just as important as considering the course you'll be studying.

## Plan your day

Open days can be quite intense, with lots of talks and sessions, but there's so much insight to gain from them. Universities typically send the open day programme after you've registered for an open day. This contains the times for each talk and tour, so you can map out your open day. Try to experience as much as you can. It'll help you make informed decisions about your university journey.



# Making the most of your university open day

**By Chantelle Lee, Higher Education Adviser at the University of East Anglia**

Attending an open day is a fantastic opportunity to get a feel for a university. Online research and virtual sessions will help you narrow down your choices, but nothing beats visiting the university in person to get a sense of if it's right for you. This article offers advice for making the most of your visit to help you take a step closer to making a decision about your future.

## Do your research

Open days are busy events. Doing some preparation beforehand will help you make the most of your day. Most universities have an open day programme that you can access beforehand. This allows you to plan your time effectively, and prioritise the talks and tours you're most interested in.

You should think about some questions you want answered. Make a list so you don't forget them. Planning your travel and accommodation in advance, if needed, will also make the day run more smoothly. Some universities even offer free or discounted train or bus travel during open days. You can search for these using the new [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#). Make sure to check if this applies to you!

## Chat to everyone

Talk to as many people as possible. Get answers to those questions you prepared. Student ambassadors are great people to chat to. They are current students, so they have plenty of information about student life, and they were in your position not so long ago.

Equally, take this opportunity to speak to academic staff about their courses. They may be your future lecturers! They'll give you insights into their subject, and maybe even some ideas for strengthening your application. There will also be people staffing information stands, such as accommodation, student finance, and the students' union, who can provide useful guidance too. There are no silly questions, so ask away!

## Explore the local area

Finally, I recommended that you save time to explore the university's local area. After all, you'll be living in that town or city for three or more years, and you may live off campus in private accommodation after your first year. You'll want to make sure you can picture yourself there!

Spend time getting a feel for the location and seeing what it has to offer. Check out what's important to you, whether it be the sporting scene, bars and restaurants, or shopping centres. The location of your university can have a big impact on your experience (page 34), so it's a great idea to get a glimpse of it at your open day.

With a bit of planning, your open day should be an informative, interesting, and enjoyable chance to get to know your potential university.



## 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)



# Accessing university events on a budget

**By Sarah Wiltshire, Student Recruitment and Events Officer at the University of South Wales**

University events are an important aspect when deciding which institution you want to attend. They provide the information and feeling that you can't get from a website or prospectus. A visit to a university and its facilities might change the order of your initial Top 5 choices.

However, with lots of university events across the UK, the cost of travel (and other necessities) can soon add up. Fortunately, there are ways to stretch your budget to gain important university information, which can come from the university itself.

Travel bursaries are a valuable way of accessing events on a budget. These can be found at multiple universities. The bursaries usually apply to those attending an open day or applicant day. They can be used on various aspects of travel, such as train tickets, overnight accommodation, and car mileage. Depending on the institution, this bursary could also apply to those travelling with you.

You can search for which universities offer financial support for their events by using the new [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#). This helpfully lists all travel bursaries and similar discounts in one place. Alternatively, you can visit each university's website. Reimbursing your trip costs will greatly decrease the total overall cost of your day, whilst you gain valuable insights into your chosen university.

Sometimes, it is the smaller costs that add up to an expensive day, such as food, drinks, and parking. Universities may offer these for free at certain events, such as open days. Take advantage of any available free items during the event. A coffee, cake, or water bottle stretches a long way.

Certain universities may offer discounted food, drink, or parking depending on the location. You can find this information on the UniTasterDays platform, or by contacting the university directly. We also suggest you bring your own food and drink. By cutting the cost of these items (perhaps alongside your travel bursary) for yourself and your guests, you may save more money than you think. Also, don't forget about the free university merchandise, such as pens and tote bags. These can help you later in the year with exams and coursework!

At times, attending university open days can be difficult due to existing commitments. Therefore, make sure you take advantage of what your school or college is offering in relation to visiting a university. University taster days usually happen during academic teaching hours, and transport may be provided through your school or college. This provides you with a chance to get a taste of the university without having to spend a lot of money.

In addition, certain schools and colleges may offer time or money to visiting universities, so make sure you ask your careers adviser or Head of Sixth Form.

Universities want to make it easy for you to attend their events, which ultimately benefits your academic future. It's important to remember that attending in-person events will guide your decision-making on where you want to study and live for the next 3 years. They're a positive and worthwhile investment.

**“Travel bursaries are a valuable way of accessing events on a budget. These can be found at multiple universities.”**

University of  
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@UniSouthWales

# Advice for attending an online event

**By Lewis Clarke, Student Recruitment Account Officer at the University of Lincoln**

Universities offer an array of online events, such as virtual open days, subject webinars, and live lounges that focus on topics including accommodation and personal statements.

One of the greatest advantages is that these accessible sessions are free and may be recorded, so they fit into most schedules whilst expanding your knowledge about university. They provide an excellent opportunity to get expert answers to your questions, and help you proceed through the application process with more confidence. This article offers several ways to gain value from online university events.

## Plan your questions

Research what a particular event will cover to ensure you only sign up to sessions pertinent to you. Prepare questions in advance to help you seek advice about the specific areas that you want information about. Remember, you can usually type your questions into a chat if you would rather not use your camera or microphone. It's also useful to read the questions asked by other prospective students. These might cover topics that you haven't considered before.

## Read the joining instructions

Once you have registered for an event, it's crucial that you carefully read the instructions on how to join the session. For example, the event may be on Zoom. If you haven't used this software before, then you will be prompted to download it, create an account, and log on before joining the session. As a result, if you simply click the link at the start time, you will miss the introductions and information at the beginning. Visit the joining links 10 to 15 minutes before an event is due to start to address any technical problems that may crop up.

## Take notes

Some online events may share presentation slides afterwards, though it is good practice to make your own notes. These can include any additional questions as they come to you. If you don't get time to ask your questions, you are welcome to follow up with the university using their enquiries email address or phonelines. A member of staff will be happy to speak with you.

## Remember...

These events can act as portals into a deeper dialogue with an institution. Registering your attendance means you can receive relevant follow-up communications to support you further. If you are thinking about university, learning more from specialised support staff or academics in this easily accessible format is a wonderful way to get started and continue exploring your options.



# Top questions to ask at university fairs

**By Emma Bowman, Student Recruitment and Outreach Assistant at the University of Chichester**

University fairs are a valuable opportunity to focus on aspects of university life that are most important to you. This will help you make your final choices. Of course, you must love your course, but also where you will be living, the facilities, and other aspects of a university that can vary from one to another.

This article offers questions to take to careers fairs and university exhibitions to help you find universities that stand out to you. As part of the University of Chichester Outreach Team, I talk to countless students about what they want from their higher education. The following topics crop up the most.

## 1. Studying at university

Consider what you want from your university course. This could be the opposite to your best friend. It's important that you worry about what *you* want from the experience. Try asking:

- What makes your course unique?
- Why type of people are suitable for this course?
- What are the highlights of this course?

These questions help you discover if the course aligns with your way of learning and your desired focus.

## 2. Living at university

The course is just one part of the university experience. It is also important to ask

questions about the area and what life is like living there as a 'local.' Try asking:

- What are the highlights of the city, town, and local area?
- What is the public transport like?
- What is the 'feel' of the local area?

Questions on crime rate are also common. Remember that all places have 'some' crime. A better question is, "Is crime a prominent issue in this area?" This will let you know if crime is a noticeable issue in the community.

## 3. Socialising at university

Reflect on the sort of things you would like to do when you aren't studying. Seek to understand how the university will support your social interests. Try asking:

- Do you have different sport societies?
- Are there opportunities to find part-time work close to the university?
- Where do students typically hang out when they aren't studying?

This helps you see what capacity the university has for events, and how involved they are with the student experience. Socialising spaces are important, so you aren't sat alone in your room.

The above questions could lead to a deeper conversation about each topic, which could be incredibly revealing. Try to ask each university at least one thing about studying, living, and socialising to grow your knowledge. This might also sway you into attending their next open day. These are fantastic events to see the universities up close and can make or break a choice.

Finally, remember to have fun at university fairs. Everyone is there to help you. Ask away, don't be shy, and get excited about becoming a university student very soon.



**Learn more about attending university fairs, careers events, and exhibitions on Episode 12 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**



# How you can help universities evaluate their events

**By Charlotte Atherton, Senior Recruitment Officer: Events at the University of Salford**

Universities are always looking for ways to improve their events. As prospective students, your feedback can make such a difference. We collect data before you visit, and feedback after you visit, to help us evaluate our events.

## Before an event

When you register for an open day, universities start to put plans in place to ensure you can access and enjoy the day. Each university will typically ask for the same information when completing your booking:

- What course are you interested in?
- Will you be bringing any additional guests?
- Do you have any support requirements?
- What stage of the application process are you at?

It can be frustrating to provide the same information multiple times, but this information goes a long way in helping universities offer an event tailored to the right people.

We look at this data to make sure we have capacity for you, and your guests, in course sessions, and make sure general sessions are relevant to you. If you have any access requirements, we do everything we can to put plans in place ahead of your visit. This allows you to access the event, have a fun day, and experience everything the university has to offer.

## After an event

Your feedback after attending an open day helps us evaluate our events. Feedback helps us to improve our events for future students, so don't be afraid to let us know what you thought of your visit.

After you have attended an open day, universities will ask you to complete a visitor survey. This survey will focus on various stages of the event:

- Information received before you attended
- Your expectations for the open day
- Your experience at the open day.

We fully understand that filling out a survey can be a tedious task that gets added to the bottom of your to-do list, but please do your best to share your feedback. Some universities might even offer a prize draw for completing post-event surveys, so everyone benefits!



**Top tip:** fill out the survey as soon as possible while feedback is fresh in your mind.

Best of all, your feedback will benefit future visitors. It could even benefit yourself, because we often use open day feedback to improve our offer-holder events, which you might attend later in the application process!

For instance, our survey results showed a demand for a bigger welcome when you arrived on campus. In response, we created detailed signage plans, and lots of activities to make you feel at home straight away.

We do hope you enjoy any events you attend. Don't forget, positive feedback is encouraged too!



# 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.

So, whatever path you choose – own it!



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# The five things everyone needs to know about student finance 2025/26

By **Martin Lewis, Founder of MoneySavingExpert.com**

**Be careful who you listen to on student finance. There's a lot of nonsense spoken. And even when you're getting facts, be wary, it has changed so often, the way it works is different even for some still at uni now, never mind those who graduated a decade ago. So I want to explain the practical impact on your pocket – which is radically different to the more political spin you will usually hear.**

What is true is that for new starters now, the amount you'll repay for going to university is more than previous generations. My aim isn't to put you off going... I still believe if university is right for you, grab the opportunity. It can be life enhancing and often lead to increased earning potential – but the fact the cost is higher for many (though as you'll discover some won't pay anything) means it's worth a deep breath and a serious, practical look at whether it is right or not, or if there are other, better options.

So on to my five need-to-knows. They are written for new starters who are first-time undergraduate English residents. Those from elsewhere in the UK or on earlier plans can go to [www.moneysavingexpert.com/students](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students) where we have specific info for you.

## 1. The student loan price tag can be £60,000, but that's not what you pay

Students don't need to pay the university or other higher education institutions directly. Tuition fees, which will be up to £9,535 when you start, are paid for you by the Student Loans Company. Over a three year course, the combined loan for tuition and maintenance can be over £60,000, but don't get overly hung up on that, as what counts is what you repay...

- You should only start repaying after you leave university (which for you is defined as April 2027 at the earliest).



- Then you only repay if you earn over £25,000 a year. Earn less and you don't pay anything back.
- You repay 9% of everything earned above that amount, so earn more and you repay more each month.
- The loan is wiped after 40 years whether you've paid a penny or not. This means many people will be repaying their student loans for most of their working lives.
- There's no worry of debt collectors as it's repaid via the payroll. In other words, it's taken off what you earn before you get the money, just like income tax is. And the debt doesn't go on your credit file.

## 2. There is an implied amount most parents are meant to contribute

You are eligible for a loan to help with living costs – known as the maintenance loan. Yet for most under-25s, even though you are old enough to vote, get married and fight for our country, your living loan is dependent on household residual income, which for most people is a proxy for 'parental income' (if your parents are no longer together, it is assessed on the income of the household you spend most time in – including, justly or not, your parent's partner).

The loan received starts to be reduced from a family income of just £25,000 upwards, until around £65,000ish (it depends whether you live at or away from home and whether in London) where it's roughly halved. This missing amount is effectively an unpaid parental contribution – as the only reason you get less is because your family earns more.

For 2025 starters, the FULL annual loan is:

- £8,877 if living at home.
- £10,544 away from home.
- £13,762 away from home in London.

To work out the parental contribution, just subtract the loan you're being given from that. Or far easier, use the calculator from [www.moneysavingexpert.com/ParentalContributionCalc](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/ParentalContributionCalc) which does it all for you.

Of course, some parents won't be able to afford to fill that gap – and you can't force them to pay. But at least knowing there is a gap helps you understand what level of funds are needed. And it's important students and parents have this conversation sooner so you can discuss options to plug the hole.

While the media often focuses on tuition fees, I hear more practical complaints from students about the living loan – many find even the maximum loan isn't big enough. And this has got worse as the living loan has not kept up with inflation in recent years (something I wrote to the last Tory and current Labour Chancellors about to try to get change on – so far I've failed).

So when deciding where to study, look at all the costs, transport, and accommodation (will you get into halls?), as that's a key part of your decision.

### 3. The amount you borrow is mostly irrelevant day to day – it works more like a tax

This bit is really important to understand, as frankly it turns the way you think about student loans on its head. So, take your time to think about it and understand it...

What you repay each month after university depends solely on what you earn as it's set at 9% of everything earned above £25,000. To emphasise this point, for a graduate who earns (for the sake of easy numbers) £35,000:

- Owe £20,000 and you repay £900 a year.
- Owe £60,000 and you repay £900 a year.
- In fact, let's be ridiculous and pretend tuition fees have been upped to £1m a year, so you owe £3m+, you still ONLY repay £900 a year.

So how much you borrow DOESN'T impact what you repay each month or each year. The only difference it makes is whether you'll clear the borrowing within the 40 years before it wipes.

It's predicted that 52% on the current loan system will clear their debt in full within 40 years, and 48% will be paying off their loan for the full 40 years. So, unless you're likely to be a mid to high earner (or don't take the full loan or have access to large amounts of spare cash), don't overly focus on the amount you 'owe'.

Instead, in practice what happens is you effectively pay an extra 9% tax on your income for 40 years. In simple terms (ignoring national insurance and personal allowance withdrawal), it works like this:

Earnings	Uni goers	Non-uni goers
Up to £12,570	No tax	No tax
From £12,751 - £25,000	20%	20%
From £25,001 - £50,270	29%	20%
From £50,271 - £125,140	49%	40%
£125,140+	54%	45%

This doesn't make it cheap, far from it, but it does mean that all the talk of burdening students with debt may feel misleading. Instead, we're burdening graduates with something closer to a 9% extra tax. Frankly it shouldn't be called a debt, it really doesn't work like one (I argue it should be renamed a graduate contribution system).

Another way to look at it though is the more you earn, the more you repay each month. So, financially at least, this is a 'no win, no fee' education.

### 4. Interest is added, but there's no 'real' cost to it, and not everyone pays it

Student loan interest is set based on the Retail Prices Index (RPI) rate of inflation – a measure of how quickly prices of all things are rising. It changes annually each September based on the prior March's RPI – it's currently at 4.3%,

but that will change in September 2025 and hopefully (no promises) will be substantially lower.

However, as your interest is set at just RPI inflation, in economic terms it means there's no real cost of the interest added to your loan.

To explain this, imagine if you borrowed enough to pay for 100 shopping trolleys' worth of goods at today's prices. You'll only ever at most repay whatever it costs to pay for the same 100 shopping trolleys' worth of goods in the future – not more.

Yet the interest added isn't the same as what everyone repays. While many graduates may be charged interest, some won't actually PAY any interest at all.

That's because the interest only has an impact if you'd clear your initial borrowing in full over the 40 years before it's wiped. Many won't. And even of those who will, all but those who clear the loan in full over that time won't repay all the interest added. So don't panic too much at the 'interest' accruing on your student loan statement.

## 5. The system can and has changed

Student loan terms should be locked into law, so only an Act of Parliament can negatively change them once you've started uni – but they're not. And a few years ago we saw a very bad change imposed, though thankfully after much campaigning it was overturned.

Most of the past changes were about the repayment threshold (the £25,000) rather than bigger structural issues, and indeed I would view the repayment threshold as 'variable' – meaning it can be changed at the whim of administrations.

You can take some reassurance from the fact the latest 'new system', like the previous ones, only changed things for those who started after it was introduced, as that means that governments are wary of major systemic retrospective negative changes. So big, bad changes for individuals once they've started are unlikely (though not impossible). Even so, the last of my need-to-knows has to be the caveat of 'unless things change'.

So those are my five need-to-knows, for a much more detailed guide to your loans, known as Plan 5 loans, go to [www.moneysavingexpert.com/Plan5](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/Plan5).

Other important student guides to read:

- How to budget as a student: [www.moneysavingexpert.com/StudentBudgeting](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/StudentBudgeting)
- Best student bank accounts: [www.moneysavingexpert.com/StudentBankAccounts](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/StudentBankAccounts)
- Student checklist: [www.moneysavingexpert.com/StudentChecklist](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/StudentChecklist)



# The benefits of university bursaries and scholarships

**By Jemima McNally, Marketing Conversion Support Officer at Aberystwyth University**

Do you like free money?

If so, it's worth your while to research and apply for university scholarships and bursaries. This article explains what they are, how to find out more, and why you should consider applying for at least one!

## Understanding scholarships and bursaries

Scholarships and bursaries are forms of financial support offered by universities:

- **Scholarships** – often merit-based, they reward academic excellence, athletic achievements, artistic talent, or other qualities. Some scholarships are tailored to specific groups, such as underrepresented students or those studying particular fields.
- **Bursaries** – typically needs-based, they help students facing barriers to higher education, such as financial challenges. Bursaries assist with tuition fees, accommodation costs, and other essential expenses.

Both provide successful applicants with money to support their studies. Every university offers scholarships and bursaries, so there's likely one out there that suits you.

## Benefits of scholarships and bursaries

The biggest benefit is financial relief. Higher education is expensive, and financial aid can help ease the burden of textbooks, accommodation, and living costs. This allows you to focus on your studies without the added stress of money worries.

Some scholarships also come with extra perks like mentorship programmes, networking opportunities, internships, or workshops, enhancing your university experience, and boosting your career prospects.

Many students don't apply because they assume they're not eligible, but with the wide range of scholarships and bursaries available, there's likely something for you. Plus, UCAS say that 75% of applications are successful, so it's worth a shot!

## Researching scholarships and bursaries

Don't pick a university solely for its scholarships but see what each offers when narrowing down your options. University websites provide loads of information on their unique scholarships and bursaries. For example, if you're struggling to choose between University A and University B, but you're eligible for a £2,000 scholarship from University B, it might tip the scales in its favour.

The website 'The Scholarship Hub' is a great resource for finding financial awards across multiple universities. Plus, scholarships aren't just offered by universities. Companies and organisations, like Amazon's Future Engineer Scholarship, provide financial incentives. Even niche options exist, like The Vegetarian Charity, which supports vegetarian or vegan students facing financial difficulties.

## Applying for scholarships and bursaries

Most applications are straightforward, often requiring a short personal statement, essay, references, or proof of eligibility. You usually apply through the university's website or by email. Once submitted, your application will be reviewed, and you'll be notified of the result.

Many scholarships and bursaries go unclaimed because students don't apply. Even if you think you might not meet all the criteria, it's worth trying. Programmes often have broader eligibility requirements than you might realise. There's nothing to lose and everything to gain. Take the initiative, apply, and unlock the opportunities on offer.

**“Some scholarships come with extra perks like mentoring programmes.”**

# Scholarships: finding financial opportunities and standing out in applications

**By Jon Hering, Head of Commercial at Blackbullion**

## Introduction

We get it: studying is expensive.

Tuition fees are going up in September 2025, there is an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and rising inflation affects how much your maintenance loan can help. Heading to university can seem like a pricey way to kickstart your adult life.

That's where we come in.

To date, Blackbullion has released over £25 million in additional funding - grants, bursaries, hardship funds, and scholarships - through our Funding Hub. Our first corporate scholarship launched in April 2023. Since then, we've continued to work with brands like Amazon, Nationwide, and Accenture to help students cover the costs of university.

Even though there are more opportunities out there, the market for scholarships is still small and highly competitive. That's why this article is here to help you find the right opportunities. It will give you the tools to stand out and smash your applications, so you have the best chance to secure additional funding for your degree.

## When to expect scholarships to launch

You should be aware of the main funding windows:

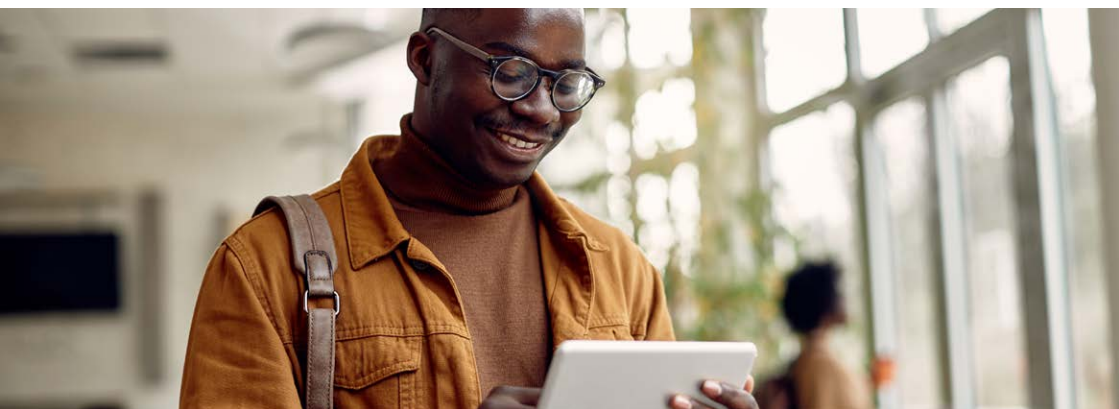
- National Scholarships Week 2025 - running 31 March to 4 April 2025, in partnership with Amazon. Last year, NSW 2024 launched over £800,000 worth of scholarship funding through corporate partners.
- April 2025 - a key period when many scholarships open. Make sure to prepare applications in the spring.
- September 2025 - another wave of scholarships launches in early autumn, giving you a second chance.

## Scholarships as a gateway to careers

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



**Learn more about bursaries, scholarships, and free money on Episode 22 of The Uni Guide Podcast, featuring the author of this article, Jon Hering from Blackbullion.**





## Finding scholarships

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

However, you can also consult additional channels where scholarship information is shared, like social media. Platforms like TikTok, LinkedIn, and Instagram are increasingly being used by scholarship providers to promote their programmes.



**Top tip:** sign up for newsletters from scholarship websites or follow key scholarship influencers on social media to receive regular updates on new opportunities.

## Securing a scholarship

We work with providers from the higher education and private sectors. Both sides give us the same answer when it comes to what makes an application stand out: sharing your story. With corporate scholarships, the funders want to know why you're applying and, more importantly, what the scholarship will mean for your ability to achieve your goals.

When writing your application, try to share experiences about your family, personal achievements, and aspirations. Be as genuine as possible! Connecting your future goals to the subject you've chosen shows your dedication to your education and your future, which funders really value.

Another great way to stand out is by highlighting the research you've done about the funder. Each scholarship application is unique. Showing the funder that your application is specifically tailored to them can help you get noticed. You'd be surprised how many students forget to do this!

And remember to provide evidence. Many scholarships are 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. You should have bank statements, Student Finance Entitlement letters, and photo IDs ready to go, if you want 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.

Good luck!



**CAUTION:** Reviewers can tell when students use AI on their scholarship applications! That doesn't mean that students shouldn't use Chat GPT to assist with their applications, but it does mean that they need to be careful. [Read our AI guidance.](#)



\* **blackbullion**

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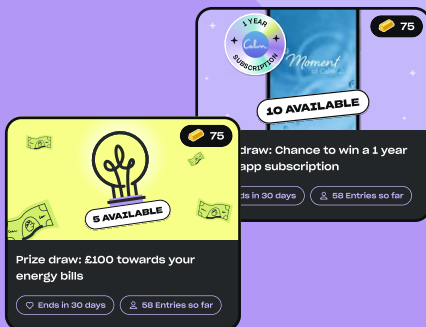
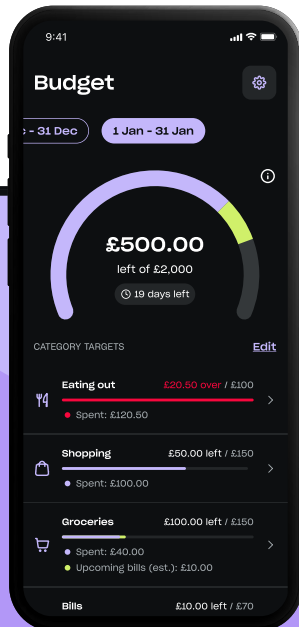
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# The NHS Learning Support Fund

**By Emily Birkett, Outreach and Widening Participation Operations Manager for the College of Medicine and Health at the University of Birmingham**

If you're thinking of studying Midwifery, Nursing, or one of the allied healthcare professions, then you might be able to access financial support through the NHS Learning Support Fund (LSF).

The LSF is there to help students studying the subjects listed below to complete their course and gain professional registration. You can receive the LSF on top of a student loan, or other grants and scholarships, and it doesn't need to be paid back. The LSF is open to undergraduate and postgraduate students, but it doesn't cover foundation years.

## Eligible courses

- Dental therapy or dental hygiene - level 5 and 6
- Dietetics
- Midwifery
- Nursing - adult, child, mental health, learning disability, joint nursing, or social work
- Occupational therapy
- Operating department practitioner
- Orthotics
- Orthotics and prosthetics
- Paramedics - except DipHE and FD courses
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry or chiropody
- Radiography - diagnostic and therapeutic
- Speech and language therapy

You can apply for several pots of money. Your personal circumstances will determine how much you can access. You can check the eligibility requirements for these funds on the NHS website.

**1. Training grant** – £5000 each year. This is available pro-rata if you are studying part-time. This is paid in semesterly instalments once your attendance has been confirmed by your university

**2. Specialist Subject Payments (SSPs)** – £1,000 each year. This is an extra payment to encourage students to qualify in one of the following subject areas, which currently have a shortage of registered staff.

- Mental health nursing
- Learning disability nursing
- Radiography - diagnostic and therapeutic
- Prosthetics and orthotics,
- Orthotics and podiatry

You might also be eligible for the SSP if your course will make you dual-registered in one of these areas, for example, 'Child and mental health nursing.'

**3. Travel and Dual Accommodation Expenses** – the amount you receive will vary depending on what you use. It covers things like additional parking costs, train and bus fares, car mileage, cycling mileage, and accommodation needed for your course placements. You submit your expenses directly onto your LSF portal, where they are verified by the university before being sent to NHS LSF for processing.



Top tip: keep a clear log of all your travel expenses during your placement(s) and any receipts.

**4. Parental Support** – £2,000 each year. This is available if you're responsible for a child under 15 years old.

**5. The Exceptional Support Fund (ESF)** – £3,000 each year. This grant helps eligible healthcare students who come into financial hardship and have explored all other options.

## How to apply

You must apply for the NHS LSF within 6 months of starting your course, and you'll need to reapply each academic year. You apply through your NHS LSF account, which takes around 5 minutes to set-up. Your university will give you guidance on this.

In addition, there are lots of scholarships, bursaries, and money management tips out there. Research what each university has to offer and see what else you might be eligible for.

# The Disabled Students' Allowance

**By Olympia Richards, Undergraduate Outreach Assistant at Keele University**

The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is available to university students who have learning difficulties, health problems, and physical and mental disabilities. It covers the costs of any extra support needed to complete their chosen degree if their disabilities create hurdles that require assistive technology.

## DSA application

On the Student Finance website, after you apply for your student loan, there is a tick box if you wish to disclose a disability (physical or mental), long-term health condition, or specific learning difficulty. Ticking this box will give you the option to apply for the DSA.

You are assigned a supplier after you apply. They will provide you with a needs assessment, any assistive technology you might need, training for that technology, and counselling services, if applicable.

## DSA assessment

Firstly, you'll need to contact your assessment centre. Their details are in the letter you'll be sent after applying. You can choose when and where you'd like to be assessed, such as over the phone or in person. The assessment is free. It will discuss all areas of university life that might be affected by your disability, such

as assessments, taking notes in lectures, time management, and travel.

They'll request the DSA confirmation letter, any medical evidence you have, and information about your computer, if you have one. This is the conversation where you can talk about any challenges you face in academic life. It is the best place to ask about support and voice any concerns you have about completing your course.

## DSA support

You can receive up to £26,948, depending on how much you qualify for. This can go towards:

- specialist equipment and technology
- non-medical helpers, such as a sign-language interpreter
- extra travel to attend classes
- any other disability-related support to help you study at university.

The fund won't cover anything that non-disabled students will also face, any costs the university is responsible for, and any costs not associated with university life. Currently, apprenticeship students aren't eligible for this grant.

## DSA laptop

Furthermore, you can get a laptop through the DSA. You have to pay a fee of £200 but the rest is covered by the DSA fund. They also offer a repair and replace warranty system. This typically covers repairs for manufacturing faults and may also cover accidental damage in certain cases. This means money won't be deducted from your DSA fund to make these repairs.



# Managing your money at university

**By Maya Patel, Recruitment Officer (Schools & Colleges) at Brunel University**

University might be the first time you have complete and independent control over your finances. The maintenance loan might seem daunting, but if you create a plan to manage your money, then you'll be able to cover everything, socially and academically.

## Creating a budget

Creating a budget for yourself is the best place to start. This means weighing up your essential spends with your non-essential spends. For example, essential spends might include rent, bills, groceries, transport, and textbooks. These are costs that must be covered by your maintenance loan as they cover your accommodation, nutrition, and journeys to campus.

Alternatively, examples of non-essential spends include nightclub entry, clothing, cosmetics, and takeaways. These are costs that might be spent if there is enough money left after the essential spends.

## Navigating student discounts

As a university student, you have access to endless student discounts. There are plenty of free apps that can be accessed using your student email address, including Student Beans, TOTUM, and UNiDAYS. They offer discounts for groceries, clothing, gym memberships, concerts, experience days, and social activities.

It's always worth checking the app before making a purchase to see if you can get a student discount. Every little saving helps. You might save hundreds of pounds each year.

## Staying on track

One thing that helps me keep track of my finances is a simple spreadsheet. It means there is only one centralised document to check before I spend money. One sheet tracks the budgets I gave myself for my essential vs non-essential spending on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

Another sheet contains notes about my daily spending to make sure I stick to my budget limit. This keeps me on track and avoids any accidental overspending. This practice ensures I have enough money for my savings and prevents a lot of stress in the long term.

## Saving and earning

Many students work alongside their studies to earn extra pocket money. For more structured and frequent income, you might decide to work in a supermarket, charity shop, or warehouse. These have options for full-time or part-time shift work.

However, if you want more flexible hours, you could work as a freelancer or student ambassador at your university. These usually come with a zero-hour contract. It's wise to use part of your wages to supplement your maintenance loan, whilst saving the other part in a separate account. You can automate this process with a standing order through the bank.

Whatever you decide, check your student bank account is earning interest and change between banks if necessary. Take time to research what freebies are offered by each bank when opening a student account, as some may benefit you more than others.

**“Creating a budget for yourself is the best place to start. This means weighing up your essential spends with your non-essential spends.”**

# Part-time work opportunities at university

**By Ross Pickering, UK Student Recruitment and Schools Liaison Assistant 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.



# Saving money with student discount cards

**By Lucy Pickering, Student Recruitment Intern at the University of Sheffield**

Going to university is an opportunity to make numerous memories, meet new friends, and experience new things. However, the busy lifestyle can be financially demanding, especially when trying to do this on a student budget.

Student discounts can help you alleviate some of this financial pressure. They provide exclusive savings on products and services, which allows you to make the most of what student life has to offer without breaking the bank!

## Online student discounts

Online apps such as Student Beans and UNiDAYS provide a wide range of discounts on a variety of brands including fashion, technology, travel, food, and more. Discounts are available all year-round. Early morning study sessions can be fuelled with discounted coffee, or you can update your university wardrobe with money off big brands such as Nike, H&M, and ASOS, just to name a few!

Signing up to the apps is super easy to do, so there is no reason not to! The main part of registering involves entering your university institution to verify you student status alongside your personal information, allowing you access to hundreds of offers.

## Physical student discounts

TOTUM (previously named NUS Extra) is a physical card that allows you to redeem student discounts instore for a small annual fee. This card also comes with a free coffee club membership and “tastecard” to make savings when eating out - perfect if you have a friend’s birthday or want to celebrate after submitting a big assignment.

## Accessing student discounts

Student discount offers aren’t always clearly indicated. There is no harm in asking if a discount is available. For example, many bus services offer discounted rates when you show your university student card – these small savings quickly add up!

This is also true for online platforms. Apps such as Spotify provide student discounts. Music is most definitely needed during those long library sessions!

Here are some other ways to ensure you’re getting the most out of your student discounts:

- Keep discount apps updated on your phone, such as Student Beans and UNiDAYS
- Carry physical cards with you, such as your student ID or TOTUM card, so you never miss an in-store discount
- Register for exclusive student deals to stay informed about new discounts and offers

Signing up for multiple student discount platforms is beneficial, including the three mentioned in this article. Each platform may offer discounts that aren’t available on others, maximising your saving opportunities!

**“ Early morning study sessions can be fuelled with discounted coffee, or you can update your university wardrobe with money off big brands such as Nike, H&M, and ASOS, just to name a few! „**

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

**By James Bryan, Student Recruitment and Widening Participation Senior Officer at Queen Mary University of London**

You may not have known it at the time, but you've probably already made a decision that has influenced your university application. This will continue to shape your future for years to come.

The most common question you'll hear asked at a university fair is, "What grades do I need?" But some courses also require you to have specific subjects and certain levels. This is where the choices you've made for your GCSEs or post-school qualifications can determine what you can apply for and where.

Aside from entry requirements, these choices may influence your application in other ways. One of the most exciting things about post-16 study is there are many more subjects open to you than the standard range of GCSEs you get in most schools. You may discover a whole new subject that you never even knew existed.

When you enrolled at sixth form or college, you'll have noticed that some courses required you to have studied specific GCSEs or achieved certain grades. It's much like that with university, with some degrees requiring you to have studied certain subjects before you can

be accepted. Your GCSE results will influence your post-16 choices, whether you do A levels, BTEC, IB, or some other qualification. In turn, these influence what university courses you can apply for. Your choices open opportunities in your future, but they may close some doors too.

University entry requirements range from the broad to the very specific, both in terms of grade requirements and subjects studied. If you're dreaming of becoming a doctor, then subject choices become critical for getting on a course. With very few exceptions, this route will be closed to you if you're studying vocational courses. You need to be studying A level science subjects and have high grade GCSEs.

At Queen Mary, our current entry requirements for our five-year Medicine degree programme (page 32) expects you to have Biology or Chemistry A level, and a second science. You'll also need certain GCSEs, including English Literature, which isn't always compulsory at school. You can see how a decision to take an optional English Literature GCSE made at the age of 14, and then science A levels at age 16, could determine whether you can study Medicine at age 18.

However, some courses don't require particular GCSEs or A levels. You may think that to study History you'll have to have done History at A level. That's not often the case! Instead, universities judge your suitability through things like your exam results, personal statement, and whether you demonstrate the academic skills needed to succeed in that subject.

Research the subject areas you're interested in. Remember that entry requirements aren't always just about what grade you have. Think a few steps ahead. Ask yourself what you need to do to get where you want to go.





# The 2026 changes to personal statements

**By Milena Bittmar, Education Liaison Assistant at Edge Hill University**

Currently, a personal statement is a short piece of writing - 4000 characters or 47 lines - which everyone must submit upon applying to university. It gives you the chance to stand out from the crowd and showcase your skills and experiences.

## What changes are being made?

If you wish to start university in 2026 or onwards, your personal statement will look slightly different. You will still have to submit a personal statement that goes to all five of your choices. However, instead of one long piece of writing, you will have to answer three separate questions. You will have a minimum of 350 characters to answer each question. All three will be looked at collectively by your chosen universities.

## Why has it changed?

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) is a company that supports UK universities. You will submit your application and personal statement to UCAS, who then share this with your chosen universities. UCAS wanted to create a more accessible approach to writing and submitting personal statements. These changes will make the whole process easier for everyone.

## What are the new questions?

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

For this question, you should talk about your motivation to study that course, any knowledge

you have about the subject, your future plans after studying, and why you think that you'd be a good fit for the university.






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

In this section, you can write down information on how your current studies have helped you prepare for your chosen course. Mention any transferable skills you have, and how you gained them. Also, discuss any additional academic experiences you have that make you stand out from the crowd.

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

Finally, for the last question, you can write about anything you have completed outside of your education that demonstrates your enthusiasm for the course or subject area. You can include any volunteering, personal life experiences, responsibilities, hobbies, or activities that have prepared you for higher education.

## Writing a strong personal statement

-  Keep it relevant – you only have a limited amount of characters to answer the questions, so stick to short sentences and be precise.
-  Give examples – you should detail each of your experiences by giving examples of the skills you mention.
-  Read aloud – you should take time after completing your personal statement to read it out loud and see how it sounds. This will help you spot any mistakes.
-  Check and double-check – check your work thoroughly to avoid missing spelling, grammar, and punctuation mistakes. You could also pass your work to a teacher or a parent/supporter to read with a fresh pair of eyes.
-  Be positive!

**“Instead of one long piece of writing, you will have to answer three separate questions. ,,**



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Student experience: **Gold**

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Teaching Excellence Framework

# 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 65) 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.**

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# Preparing a portfolio for a creative course

**By Simon Lovell-Jones, Student Recruitment and Widening Participation Officer at Aberystwyth University**

There are some amazing creative courses you can study, often with leading artists and writers. You'll be working in inspirational surroundings where you'll see your skills develop and improve, whilst learning how to build a career.

For courses like Fine Art, Fashion, or Photography, you're usually asked to prepare a portfolio. A portfolio is a collection of your work to showcase your talents. Many other courses such as Creative Writing or Media and Journalism may also want to see what you can do.






It's natural to feel 'portfolio panic' at first. Which pieces should you choose? What order should you put them? What are they looking for?

But please don't panic. Here are some steps to help.

## Step 1 - contact the university or college

This is the most important step. Different courses may focus on different things. Some prefer observational drawings and sketches, others value fully finished pieces, and a Creative Writing course might want to read stories, reviews, and essays. You can email or phone.

Here are some questions to ask:

-  What do you most want to see in a portfolio?
-  How much work should I send?
-  Will I bring my portfolio with me to interview, or should I upload it?
-  What format should I use?
-  Is there a special online platform for uploading?

If in any doubt, ask them. They'll always try their best to help.

## Step 2 - choose your work

It's usually best to choose work from the past year or so. Choose pieces you can talk about. Sometimes you can say more about something that didn't quite work!

Sketches and drafts can also help, so don't throw them away. They show how your ideas develop and how your practice improves.

One tutor said a portfolio was like a DJ set – the whole session shouldn't sound the same. Aim to show your range, perhaps using different media, genres, or subjects. This also shows you enjoy exploring and experimenting.

## Step 3 – write notes

As you choose pieces for your portfolio, remember to write brief notes about each piece. Your notes could be descriptions, what inspired you, the process you followed, and even what you learned from creating it. This can really help if you're asked about them at interview, and it shows your critical skills.

## Step 4 – refine your portfolio

You will probably have far too much after your first attempt. Be careful not to overwhelm the admissions panel. Instead, refine your portfolio. Keep the pieces that tell a story about your creativity, growth, and passion for the subject.

## Step 5 – seek feedback

Find people you trust. Teachers, friends, or relatives can offer a fresh pair of eyes to help you find gaps or see where you might lose your audience!

Remember, tutors look for potential, not perfection. They want to see enthusiasm and dedication. They have worked with loads of applicants, and they will help you if you get stuck. Just reach out!

Don't panic – and good luck!



# Accessing admissions support through fair access programmes

**By Alexandra Roberts, Senior Student Recruitment Officer (Welsh Medium and Widening Participation) and Michelle Thorne, Admissions Manager, at the University of South Wales**

When applying to university, students face a variety of important considerations and priorities. For some, the choice of course may be paramount. For others, the location, campus life, or the sense of belonging take precedence.

Whatever your priority, university admissions teams are available to help you make an informed decision. Admissions teams can be reached through a central phone line, email, or live chat on most university websites. Many institutions also offer in-person consultations during open days. Additionally, UCAS provides free, impartial advice and guidance, helping you navigate the process.

In 2021 to 2022, UCAS launched its Fair Access Programme. The programme is designed to help universities understand and support students through new data and insights, ensuring that more students can access and succeed in higher education. To address the differences in rates of progression across certain groups, universities and other organisations offer widening participation (WP) initiatives designed to support these applicants. These initiatives provide targeted guidance and tailored support to help them apply and succeed in higher education.

Many universities have implemented contextual admissions policies (page 71). These consider the individual circumstances of applicants, offering greater flexibility for

students who have faced challenges that affected their academic performance or opportunities. These policies can result in revised offers for certain groups, providing them with a fairer opportunity to access higher education.

## Types of contextual offers:

- **Reduced offers** – a grade or two lower than the standard entry requirements for the course.
- **Offers for foundation years** – a place on a course with an additional foundation year to support students in bridging gaps before beginning their degree.
- **Guaranteed interviews** – ensuring students are given a fair chance to present themselves in interviews.
- **Unconditional offers** – in some cases, students may receive an unconditional offer, recognising their potential beyond just academic grades.
- **Additional support** – some courses may offer additional academic or pastoral support to help students reach their full potential.
- **Extra consideration** – in some cases, universities may make adjustments for applications from students who have faced significant challenges.

Widening participation projects, such as summer schools, taster lectures, and workshops play a pivotal role. They ensure all students, regardless of background, have equal access to the information, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed in higher education.

By offering contextual advice, outreach programmes, and targeted support, UCAS and universities are working to remove barriers that may prevent students from disadvantaged backgrounds from entering or thriving in higher education.

If you think you may be eligible for additional support, it's essential to research your chosen universities to understand their specific policies around contextual offers and support initiatives.

# 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 75).

## 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 56), and specialist support, such as the Disabled Students' Allowance (page 60).
- **Accommodation** – if you plan to live in university accommodation (page 74), 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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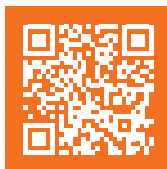
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# How to choose your university accommodation

**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 19). 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.

 UniTasterDays.com

**Prepare for Clearing with our helpful Clearing Guide!**

- Listen to 3 mock Clearing calls so you know what to expect
- Complete our worksheet to prepare for your own Clearing call

- Understand the importance of "knowing your why"
- 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. Select 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 81).

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 in 2025.**

# 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 61).

## 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.**



# An introduction to student life

**By Evie Podmore, Undergraduate Outreach Assistant at Keele University**

## “ What is student life like? ”

This was my biggest question before starting university. It can be difficult to decipher. As a current student, I've written this short article to try and answer the question for you.

The work-life balance is often different to what students expect. This depends on your course. Medical and healthcare courses have a heavier workload, but often less classroom time. This means you have more time to socialise, go out, and participate in societies than you expect.

Societies are an easy way to find your people and have fun outside of your learning. Many universities have over 100 societies. If there's something you like, you can most likely find a society for it. My university even had a Quidditch society!

Societies help you find like-minded people you might not ordinarily meet in halls or on your course. They also let you do something you enjoy or try something new. There are so many newcomers to societies that being a novice is completely fine!

Similarly, sports societies at university (page 82) are like close-knit families, where you develop your skills and have fun playing whatever you're interested in. Sports teams are an amazing way to have fun and find your university family.

You can participate in the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) matches to compete against other universities. You might

also take part in charity matches, attend socials with fancy dress themes, and enjoy reduced entry to your students' union.

Students' unions (SUs) offer weekly nights out, including themed nights based on costumes, music genres, other societies, or sometimes even special guests. For example, I got to see Dick and Dom! But there are lots of sober events available too, such as bingo, crafts, thrift fairs, pub quizzes, and movie nights.

However, SUs offer more than just events. You automatically become a member of your SU when arriving at university. The SU works entirely for student interests. It's independently funded and separate to the university. They offer a wealth of support to help you with academic challenges, careers assistance, financial advice, and wellbeing and experience support.

Rest assured, there is no step-by-step guide for a great university experience, because there is no one student experience. It's entirely individual. There is no pressure to go clubbing if that's not your thing. There are plenty of other opportunities available. You can choose the experience which is right for you.

For example, these are just some of the opportunities open to you as a student: studying abroad, learning a language, work placements, volunteer experiences, internships, competitions, concerts, and screenings.

My top tip about student life is to throw yourself into everything, even if you are nervous. Like most, I was nervous about coming to university. Change is scary, but nothing changes if nothing changes.

University could be one of the most brilliant changes of your life. There is so much ready for you to experience, and everyone is in the same boat when starting university, so go for it!



# 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 83). 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 84). 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.

**“University is the perfect place to unleash your creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. „**

# How to shape the university experience that's right for you

**By Dr Marie Clifford, Head of Teaching, Learning and Student Experience at the University of South Wales**

You turn up to your lectures, read a few chapters, and pass everything with flying colours. You get your degree and secure a great job after graduation... If only studying at university was that easy!

Working out what's important to you is essential if you're going to have an incredible experience. This article offers advice to help you shape your time at university into the best experience for you.

## Be sociable

The people you meet are going to have a huge impact at university. Friends are going to be your lifeline. You'll need someone to listen as you vent over coffee and answer your questions on WhatsApp.

With online modes of learning becoming more common, make sure you still physically attend your lectures too. There is lots of evidence that having a sense of belonging will make university more fun, and help you get better grades. Most lecturers want you to reach out, ask questions, and get to know them. They will give you back what you put in.

## Be present

Attending is important, but that means being engaged while there. There's no point sitting in a workshop if you're watching TikTok. Take notes and limit distractions while in lectures. This helps you really listen and actively learn. There are apps to disable social media during teaching if you can't resist!

You'll have additional research to do outside of lectures. This makes sure you have background knowledge, so your sessions with lecturers can be more productive. As such, make sure you do these tasks. You've paid a lot to be there, so get your money's worth by engaging.

## Be independent

The big difference between school or college and university is that you need to show more independent thinking and self-motivation. This means you'll have more freedom and choice. But with great power comes great responsibility. You'll need to work on your organisation and time management skills.

You'll need to read the feedback you get from lecturers if you're going to keep improving. When you receive comments on a piece of work, think about areas of strength that you can repeat. Also, consider skills that you need to work on for future assessments - not just in that module but in others too.

## Be ambitious

It's never too early to think about careers (page 85). What experience do you already have? How can you get more? All universities have a careers service that can find volunteering and paid positions to broaden your CV. The time to think about graduate jobs will come quicker than you think. All work and no play isn't much fun though, so factor in socialising, hobbies, and 'me time' to recharge.

## Be supported

We've already mentioned the importance of your lecturers, but don't forget other people like librarians and study advice tutors for academic support. Never hesitate to seek help if you are feeling overwhelmed. There will be some form of wellbeing service at all universities.

**“There's no point sitting in a workshop if you're watching TikTok. Take notes and limit distractions while in lectures.”**



# The benefits of joining a student society

**By Claire Owen, Regional (Midlands) Student Recruitment Officer at Lancaster University**

Choosing where and what to study is a big decision. If you're considering going to university, I'd encourage you to find out which clubs and societies are on offer to enhance your wider university experience. You'll soon learn that universities offer a whole host of societies, so I'm sure you'll find something that appeals to you.

This important research into societies may even influence your decision making. Getting involved in student-led activities has enormous benefits. It's just as rewarding as the studying itself, ensuring an all-round positive university experience.

## Friends

The transition from school or college to university can be daunting, especially if you're moving to a new town or city. You'll be keen to make new friends and settle into university life quickly. Joining a student society is an effective way to meet people. It also gives you the opportunity to follow your interests, try new things, and feel connected to a community of likeminded people.

## Opportunities

Aside from making friends, getting involved in a society may provide the opportunity to travel, discover a new talent, or make a positive impact in your community. Some societies may be linked to your course, whilst joining others will help you to grow your network across the university.

## Societies

All universities offer a range of different societies. These bring together people with shared interests beyond sports, such as cultural, religious, and political interests. You'll also find more niche societies devoted to hobbies such as baking, crochet, board games, and Harry Potter!

## Sports

Playing sport is important for many students. It's fabulous for your fitness, health, and wellbeing. You might play a team sport like football, netball, and rugby. Or you could try something new like underwater hockey, korfbal, or ultimate frisbee. There will be something for everyone!

## Skills

Don't worry if you can't find a society that floats your boat. Universities typically provide funding to help you set up your own society. Each society is led by a committee of students. Society committees organise events, campaigns, trips, and fundraisers. These often include opportunities to gain experience in managing a budget and event planning. Just think how good those skills and experiences would look on your CV!

## Experiences

In today's ever-changing job market, employers are no longer just interested in your academic achievements. They're sure to ask, "What else have you done?" Getting involved in a society provides you with skills, experiences, and stories to share that will truly set you apart when entering the world of work.

For example, speaking at an event or attending a conference is a powerful way to showcase your communication and presentation skills. Some societies may even run professional networking events. For instance, a law society event can help you find support when applying for a training contract.

Remember, there is no one way of doing university, or doing university societies. Just be yourself, follow your interests, and make the most of the opportunities on offer!



**Learn more about the student experience on Episode 18 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**

# The benefits of joining a sports team

**By Ellie Cook, Student Recruitment and Widening Participation Officer at Aberystwyth University**

There are many benefits to joining a sports team at university. The sense of togetherness and morale can define your university experience. If you play a sport currently, it may inform your decision about which university you attend. Some students even choose their university based on their sports clubs.

On the other hand, maybe you don't currently play any sports, but would love to experience something new. University provides the perfect opportunity to try new things and find others with shared interests or motivations.

Ultimately, it's a personal choice, and whether you join a sports team is completely up to you, but here are a few reasons why you might like to join one.

## Physical benefits

Whether you exercise regularly or not, you will find that your fitness will improve whilst you are part of a sports team. Plus, exercising as a team can be a lot more motivating than doing it by yourself. Regardless of the sport, you can build muscle, improve cardiovascular fitness, and boost your overall health.

## Mental benefits

Taking part in sport and exercise is a fantastic way to support your mental health and wellbeing. It can enhance focus and concentration, allowing you to get those university assignments done, so you can have a healthy work-life balance. Trying something new and being part of a team environment can boost your confidence and your overall self-esteem.

Playing a sport can be particularly beneficial for neurodiverse individuals to fulfil their social, sensory, and cognitive needs. Starting a new sport can be daunting, but you won't be alone. University is the prime time to begin new hobbies and interests.

## Social benefits

It can be challenging to make friends in lectures and seminars, but joining a sports team offers a fantastic opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals who share your passion or hobby. The camaraderie you build with teammates is unparalleled, and there are often plenty of social activities to enjoy together off the field.

## Employability benefits

Being part of a sports team offers you a whole host of skills and opportunities. You can develop skills related to:

- communication
- teamwork
- leadership
- time management
- reliability
- adaptability
- administration - if you join the committee of a sports club

These skills can increase your employability once you leave university.

## Choose what suits you

Remember, each university will have a whole host of different sports teams you can join. The level of competition will depend on what you want to get out of it. Some universities will have social sports teams, where there is less focus on becoming a high-performance athlete and more on the sociable, team-building side.

You might try a sport that's new to you or continue one you've played for years. Either way, sport will make a positive mark on your whole university experience.



# 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 62) 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 study abroad placement

**By Emily Doras, Projects Coordinator at ThinkHigher, Uni Connect Partner**

A study abroad placement is an opportunity for students to study at a university in a different country as part of their degree. Typically speaking, students who choose to study abroad will do their placement in their third year. This means that their degree will take an extra year to complete because they return to their home university for their final year.

## Study abroad availability

The opportunity to study abroad is dependent on your course. If this is something you would like to do whilst at university, I recommend researching whether it's available on your course. If study abroad placements aren't possible on your course, universities often have short-term student mobility opportunities available to anyone.

I studied a languages degree, so I was lucky to have two study abroad placements during my degree. I spent six months studying at a university in Malaga in sunny Spain, and four months studying in Italy's food capital, Bologna. Personally, my time abroad was truly life changing. It provided me with numerous benefits that have massively shaped who I am.

## Travel opportunities

Whilst studying abroad, you will have to sit exams and assessments like at home, but you can do plenty of travelling during your free time. This could be travelling within the country where you are studying, or travelling to neighbouring countries for a long weekend.

During my year abroad, I took advantage of the vast transport links in both Italy and Spain. I visited cities like Seville, Madrid, Rome, and Palermo. If organising travel is something that worries you, many overseas universities have student networks set up specifically for international students. These networks organise lots of trips throughout the year, and they're a fantastic way to make friends.

## Personal and professional development

Many employers value study abroad placements due to the skills that you acquire whilst undertaking one. You gain problem-solving skills by overcoming challenges you may encounter. You gain independence by making the big move abroad to begin with. You may have moved to a country and learnt the local language as a complete novice!

## New modules, new perspectives

Overseas universities are very different to UK universities. Studying abroad allows you to study modules that aren't available at your home university. This means that if you have a particular passion or interest, you may have the opportunity to pursue it whilst studying abroad.

However, not all your learning is contained within the classroom. Your day-to-day life living abroad will teach you about different cultures. Often, your cultural discoveries may eventually become embedded within your own identity.

“ Studying abroad is designed for you to go above and beyond just studying. It will broaden your perspective of the world and of yourself. ”



**Learn more about studying abroad on Episode 24 of The Uni Guide Podcast.**

# Accessing careers support at university

**By Bethan Peace, Schools and Colleges Coordinator at The University of Law**

Going to university is an exciting chapter in your life. It offers the opportunity to delve deeply into your chosen subject and prepare for your future career.

It can also be a busy and hectic time, leaving you unsure about where to start on your career journey, especially if you haven't made a final decision yet. Remember, everyone's path is unique, and the Careers Service is there to support you, no matter where you are on your employability journey.

Careers Services offer a variety of support options, including:

- job portals
- workshops
- events
- mentoring programmes
- volunteering opportunities
- drop-in sessions
- one-to-one appointments

These resources enable advisers to provide a personalised approach tailored to your goals, availability, and skills development. Attending workshops can give you a foundational understanding and address initial questions you might be hesitant to ask, which you can explore further in a one-on-one session.

Additionally, mentoring programmes, if available, connect you with professionals who have navigated similar paths, offering valuable insights and guidance.

Many second and third year students I've spoken with often reflect on how they wish they had started developing their employability skills earlier. In hindsight, they realise the time available in their first year provided a valuable opportunity to gain work experience, build their

CV, refine their application skills, and enhance their interview techniques.

While these topics may be covered during first-year inductions by Careers Services, they're often overlooked as students focus on adjusting to university life, neglecting the fact that advisers can work around this in a personalised way.

To ensure you're on the right track to enhancing your employability, you should schedule an appointment with your Careers Service early into your university journey. Careers advisers are there to help you secure a job after graduation, but they can also guide you throughout your entire academic journey. They can even help you find part-time work around your studies.

By meeting with an adviser early, you can assess where you currently stand, set clear goals, and create a personalised plan. Whether you are already confident in your career path or still exploring different options, having a clear roadmap for developing your employability skills can make the process feel more manageable.

Careers advisers are skilled at helping students identify areas to focus on and develop throughout their degree. They can also help to pinpoint skills gaps and suggest actions to build your CV, improve your networking abilities, and enhance your overall employability.

I recommend that you attend your careers service inductions or visit them during freshers events to learn about the support they offer. They're very friendly, and on hand to help. Each university's services may vary, so it's essential to familiarise yourself with what's available at your chosen university and make the most of it.

You're not expected to have a perfect CV, extensive work experience, or polished interview skills at the start of your university journey. The careers team is there to guide and support you, ensuring you graduate feeling confident and prepared for your future.

**“Remember, everyone's path is unique.”**

# How your degree opens up your employability

**By Sara Pittman, School and College Engagement Officer, University of Exeter**

For many students, going to university is not just about getting an education and an impressive degree. Career prospects are a huge consideration and motivation as well.

Throughout your time at university, you will develop in both a personal and professional capacity. With considered planning and investment in your experiences and skills, you could be on the right track for a successful graduate career.

Regardless of the discipline - academic or vocational - you will develop a range of skills that will be considered invaluable in the workplace. Potential recruiters will value your ability to work flexibly, autonomously, and to a deadline in a fast-paced environment.

For those studying humanities, developing a flexible approach to change, understanding the complexities of a social situation, and responding efficiently are all valued skills. A science or mathematical degree could provide you with essential quantitative research skills, and a competitive edge vital for the graduate scene. Whatever you decide to study at university, you will develop confidence in giving presentations and improve your communication skills.

According to the Future of Jobs Report 2025, the Top 10 core skills desired by global employers are:

- analytical thinking
- resilience, flexibility and agility
- leadership and social influence
- creative thinking
- motivation and self-awareness
- technological literacy
- empathy and active listening
- curiosity and lifelong learning
- talent management
- service orientation and customer service.

Throughout your studies, there are three key steps you can focus on to help you secure a position and enhance your employability:

1. Identify the skills you are developing through your degree
2. Highlight the skills required by the recruiter to match your skills to their requirements
3. Personalise and 'market' your skills by qualifying with examples

## How can you help prepare yourself for a competitive job marketplace?

Universities are replete with many activities, societies, sports, clubs, and research projects to get involved in. You also have the opportunity to make new friends and form connections. Potential employers look for well-rounded people with a diverse range of experiences and skills, not just those who have graduated with a top degree.

Here are our top tips for making the most of your degree in terms of future employability:

- **Get involved** – being part of a society can help you develop skills such as teamwork, leadership, problem solving, and resilience (page 81).
- **Find work experience** – even a part-time job can help develop your customer service skills, your ability to work under pressure, and your capacity to use your initiative.
- **Network** – nurturing your personal and professional network could help your career prospects, alongside increasing your visibility on networking platforms like LinkedIn.
- **Attend career events** – meet employers and recruiters through events and activities at your university. At the University of Exeter, we offer a large range of employer and alumni events, plus opportunities alongside a dedicated team to support your postgraduate needs.
- **Use your careers service** – finally, remember to access your careers team to support your graduate aspirations and training needs.

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