



**Featuring expert articles written
by over 75 education practitioners**



Parents' Guide to University 2025

The key higher education facts for parents and supporters

Produced in collaboration with **HELOA**

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Welcome to the UniTasterDays Parents' Guide to University 2025

University is a big decision. Right now, the young people in your life probably have lots of questions. Is university right for them? What should they study? Where should they study? How do they pay for it?

This is understandable. University is a significant change. It introduces your young people to new ways of studying, living, and socialising. Spoiler alert: university is worth the disruption. It offers an unrivalled opportunity for them to secure the skills, relationships, and career they'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 support your young people in making the best possible decision for their future. These pages are packed with articles. They are written by over 75 university practitioners, including contributors from all four countries in the UK. You'll discover personal "My parent story" articles written by parents and supporters who have helped their loved ones navigate the university journey. You'll also find advice from students who reflect on the support they received.

We're forever thankful for their words of wisdom, now more than ever, because this is our most important Parents' Guide yet. Change is afoot in the higher education sector. Tuition fees have risen for the first time since 2017 (page 58), alternatives to traditional study

continue to grow (page 30), and UCAS is changing the personal statement (page 75).

And let's address the elephant in the room, the Zoom, and the classroom. The UK is facing a cost-of-living crisis. 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. Several of the articles are designed to help your young people overcome financial difficulty. They'll learn how to secure "free money" to fund their student experience (page 63), manage their money at university (page 69), and secure a part-time job (70).

And we'll continue to support you at UniTasterDays. We began as an event platform back in 2012 where you could search for university events. Over the years, we have created new ways to share university insights with you, such as our jargon buster (page 8), leading podcast (page 19), and this handy guide.

Last year, the cost-of-living crisis inspired us to create an events incentive search tool (page 54). This allows you to find every university offering financial support to attend their open days. Next year, and every other year, we'll continue to support you, your young people, their teachers, and their career advisers throughout the university application journey.

Yes, it's a difficult time of change and challenge and crisis. But we know your young people will have your support. And you will have our support.

Simon Fairbanks,
Head of Community
Engagement, UniTasterDays



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Helping you support your children with university



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Watch subject guide videos:
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www.UniTasterDays.com/ParentBlog



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Reasons to consider university

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

In today's world, there are numerous paths your young person can choose when it comes to their future. Take a gap year to explore the world and themselves? Undertake an apprenticeship to earn and learn? Or dive straight into work?

These are all valid routes. Your young person needs to choose the best option for themselves. However, going to university could provide opportunities for all of the above, and more.

Industry skills

The course experience isn't just about doing exams and coursework to get a fancy piece of paper. It's about undertaking research and completing projects that will prepare your young person for going into professional work. Their degree certificate will prove to employers and clients that they can do the job. Depending on the degree, they might also have examples of real-world projects that employers and clients like to see.

Your young person will be taught by veterans in their field of study. Many lecturers are still active in their industry. This means students gain tangible, up-to-date skills, so they can dive straight into professional work after graduating. Some courses will lean towards academia and research, whilst others are hands-on and practical. Even in theoretical courses, the skills and knowledge developed are transferable to different jobs and careers.

Personal and social development

University isn't all about studying and preparing for work. Your young person will develop integral life skills and establish key connections and relationships. They'll learn how to live independently, navigate finances, and find their place in the world. There'll be events, activities, societies, and trips to help with their personal development.

University is also an amazing opportunity to broaden horizons. Your young person will become more empathetic after spending time with other people and discovering their lived experiences. Studying and living with a diverse group of people will lead to new friendships, and even professional opportunities as they work together.

Self-development in a university environment also offers a safety net. Making mistakes and facing hardship is part of life. However, universities provide student support and finance teams to assist with (and prevent) issues related to mental health, physical health, and finance.

Employment potential

Universities are often well connected with international businesses, companies, and brands. This opens the door for students to access the professional world (page 105). Your young person may have the opportunity to learn directly from employers in a lecture and even work with them on a client project.

If your young person is proactive, they could establish a professional relationship with an industry expert whilst at university. It could lead to work placements, internships, and even full-time job offers. There are even universities that help students secure paid client work alongside their studies.



Understanding fair access and widening participation

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

Universities can often seem elite and hard-to-reach for many of us. The concept of the ivory tower, academic gowns, and formal dinners can conjure an image of privilege from a bygone age or a magically remote Hogwarts-like boarding school.

These days, many more people go to university than they did in the past, but it's still only a minority of the general population. Even with more places to study, the big question for me and people in my profession isn't how many will go to university, but who goes to university? Fair access and widening participation teams aim to answer that question and ensure that universities work towards equity of access and success.

Being a graduate can unlock a lot of opportunity. Entry to many professions depends on getting a degree, like becoming a doctor, lawyer, or teacher. How much money you earn, and even your life expectancy, can correlate with whether you went to university or not. To ensure that people can meet their potential, it's important to ask if there's anything in the application process that inadvertently disadvantages one applicant over another, and whether this could be addressed by our universities.

For example, people whose parents went to university are a lot more likely to go to university themselves. Therefore, people

whose parents didn't go to university tend to be underrepresented. Other criteria can include the postcode where you grew up, your family background, ethnicity, disability, experience of homelessness, time in care, caring responsibilities, or being a forced migrant.

The Office for Students regulates universities to ensure they address these inequalities. Each university is legally obliged to provide widening participation activities outlined in an Access and Participation Plan. This is a strategic document that explains how the institution will address the underrepresentation of certain backgrounds and work to ensure equity of access and ultimately success at university.

This work can take many forms. It could be a one-off intervention, such as a campus visit, or a taster lecture tailored for an underrepresented group. Equally, it could be a long-term project lasting months or even years that aims to boost grades, develop skills, or provide experiences to successfully transition to university. Universities may provide financial support and scholarships to certain students or make them a contextual offer (page 84).

However, fair access and widening participation isn't just about getting into university. It's also about supporting people when they get there. Some institutions may provide additional academic support, peer mentoring, networking opportunities, and careers guidance.

As you're researching degrees and thinking about your next steps, reflect on your own experience and background. Consider what different universities offer. Fair access and widening participation exists to open opportunity for all. It ensures that universities strive to help people reach their potential, access higher education, and ultimately live the lives they desire.



Support for first-in-family students

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

If your child is considering university, and neither you nor their carers have attended university or completed a degree, they may be identified as a first-in-family (or first-generation) student. This is true even if a sibling or extended family member has gone to university.

Many young people entering higher education are in this position. In fact, research by HEPI shows that two-thirds of young graduates in the UK are first-in-family students. As parents, you may wonder what resources and support systems are available to help your child succeed in higher education, and how you can help.

Understanding the journey

Begin by explaining the challenges of first-in-family students: adjusting to academic demands, navigating unfamiliar systems, and feeling the weight of breaking new ground in your family's educational history. Acknowledge this transition might feel overwhelming for them, but it's also an opportunity for growth.

Financial challenges

Explore the financial considerations with your child. Discuss budgeting and student loans (page 58). Additionally, practical advice like helping with housing arrangements or commuting can be invaluable.

Taster days

Taster days offer your child the opportunity to explore different universities and the range of courses available. Some of these events are designed specifically for first-in-family students. These sessions, held both in-person and online, provide valuable insights to help your child make informed decisions.

Outreach programmes

Many universities run outreach programmes aimed at supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds. These include year-round events, summer schools, and even long-term support that continues throughout the university experience, from application through to graduation. Encourage your child to apply early, as places on these programmes often fill up quickly.

Careers advisers

Your child's school or college careers advisers can be an excellent resource. They can assist with application forms and CVs. They can also offer advice on career paths, networking opportunities, work experience, and financial planning. Don't hesitate to encourage your child to make use of these services.

Networking

Help your child build connections within their extended network, including family members, friends, and school contacts. You might discover someone who has studied a similar course or attended the university your child is considering. These connections can provide first-hand insights and valuable advice.

Emotional support

Remember to provide emotional reassurance. Your child might face self-doubt, anxiety, or pressure to succeed. Listen, validate their feelings, and celebrate even the smallest of achievements.

Encourage your child to make the most of campus life. Clubs, societies, and peer networks can help them feel less isolated and more supported. You can cheerlead for these activities while respecting your child's independence.

As a parent, your encouragement and support are key to helping your child navigate the world of higher education. By following this guidance, you can set them on a path towards a successful university experience.

“Listen, validate their feelings, and celebrate even the smallest of achievements.”

Support for males on Free School Meals

By Tahera Mayat, Collaborative Outreach Officer at Go Higher West Yorkshire

This article explores the support available for males on Free School Meals (FSM), an underrepresented group within higher education. It draws upon my role working to reduce inequity in access to university.

UCAS fee waiver

UCAS have waived their application fee for those in receipt of UK government-funded FSM. This is in response to the cost-of-living crisis. To access this waiver option, your young person must indicate 'yes' when asked about FSM in the 'More about you' section when completing their UCAS application. Some people worry about the perceived stigma of FSM, but this won't affect their application.

Different perspectives

There is value in obtaining different perspectives about higher education. Lots of myths exist, such as you can't benefit from the full student experience if you live at home to save money. In this example, you could overcome this myth by gaining insights from current students, such as commuter students and those living in halls. They will have the most recent and honest experience of studying at university.

Attending open days

Open days can feel intimidating for males on FSM. Instead, your young person could start with a virtual tour from the comfort of your home. This will give them the confidence to ultimately attend an open day in person. It can also help them think of questions to ask when they do visit a university (page 56).

For instance, your young person could ask questions about the support available:

- Who are the personal tutors for the course?
- Where can I find support with my study skills?
- Can you provide information on job opportunities for students?

Remember, open days provide a snapshot of university life. They don't accurately represent an entire higher education institution. You might not meet any males who previously received FSM during your open day, but this doesn't mean there aren't any studying there.

Staff backgrounds

I used to find it strange when some of my lecturers at university used to list their high school on their LinkedIn profile. After all, they had obtained a PhD and were years into their career!

However, looking back, it gave an insight into their lived experience. Some of them came from a humble background. This made it easier to chat about the challenges of growing up on FSM. As a male on FSM, some of your best role models can be staff with similar backgrounds.

Encourage your child to make the most of campus life. Clubs, societies, and peer networks can help them feel less isolated and more supported. You can cheerlead for these activities while respecting your child's independence.

As a parent, your encouragement and support are key to helping your child navigate the world of higher education. By following this guidance, you can set them on a path towards a successful university experience.



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

www.UniTasterDays.com/JargonBuster



Support for mature students, parents, and carers

By Hannah Vincent, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Staffordshire

University life doesn't look the same for everyone. At University of Staffordshire, many students are balancing study with work, family life, or caring responsibilities. If you are a mature student, parent, or carer who is thinking about starting a degree, then there is plenty of support from start to finish.

Mature students

A person is classed as a mature learner if they start their degree aged 21 or above. At University of Staffordshire, this isn't unusual. 50% of our students are classed as mature learners. People of all ages and backgrounds decide to come to university for a change of careers, gain new qualifications, or follow a long-held ambition.

It's never too late for you to start a degree. Your work and life experience can contribute to success in your studies in a positive way.

Balancing life and study

Returning to education while managing other commitments isn't always easy. It can feel a little overwhelming if you are looking after children, supporting a family member, or working part time.

However, universities will recognise these demands and understand. You will find a range of support to give you the best chance of succeeding.

Support available

- **Flexible study options** – this can include part-time routes, online learning, and blended courses that combine in person and virtual teaching (page 33).

- **Childcare support** – some universities have onsite childcare, such as nurseries, and offer guidance on applying for financial support with childcare costs.
- **Academic writing support** – one-to-one support is available for things like essay writing, referencing, and time management. This can be helpful especially if you have taken a break from education.
- **Financial support** – there are a range of bursaries and grants, including support for student parents and carers that universities can offer. Research the options available to you. Bursaries and grants don't have to be paid back, unlike your student loan.
- **Carer support** – dedicated services are in place if you care for someone with an illness, disability, or mental health condition. This includes extra funding and personalised advice.

A welcoming community

University of Staffordshire is proud of its inclusive, supportive environment. As a mature student, you'll find others who have taken similar paths. You will also have the chance to join student societies, attend mature student gatherings, and connect with people who understand your journey.

Start your journey

Studying at university while raising a family, working, or caring for someone takes commitment, but it's also incredibly rewarding. At university, you'll find the support, flexibility, and encouragement to help you thrive.

Whether you're looking to take the next step in your career or try something completely new, your journey can start at university. You won't be doing it alone.

“Your work and life experience can contribute to success in your studies in a positive way.”

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Stoke-on-Trent Campus

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- Insight into our pathway vision and design approach
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- Exploration of how we can support your CPD goals
- Networking over breakfast and lunch

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Shape the future.**



Spaces are limited – scan
the QR code to register
early and secure your place.

staffs.ac.uk

The place of possibility

Supporting Service children at university

By Shaun O'Neill, Community Projects Manager at LiNCHigher

Despite their strong and varied skill sets, Service children are recognised by the Office for Students as an underrepresented group in higher education. Only 24% of Service children progress to higher education, compared to 43% of non-Service children.

Service children frequently face additional barriers that can result in missed opportunities to explore higher education. This article offers advice to help you support a Service child with their progression to university.

1. Identify providers with good support

Many universities now offer contextualised offers for Service children. This means entry requirements may be lower for Service children, or they may provide other adjustments such as a guaranteed interview.

You can also check to see if the student's preferred institution has signed the Armed Forces Covenant. This is a great sign from universities that additional support is available. This support often extends to academic and pastoral support for the full length of study, not just the application process.

2. Share circumstances with providers

Many higher education providers offer additional support to Service children. However, this relies on the university knowing which students come from a military family.

Students are invited to tell universities about their circumstances during the UCAS application process. This information is received by their chosen university. It will often trigger a contextual offer without having to specifically apply for one.

3. Consider the best pathway

University isn't the right choice for every student. There are lots of alternative pathways that students can consider. For instance, degree apprenticeships offer a more hands-on, work-based approach, and they still result in a full degree (page 30). You can find and apply for degree apprenticeships through the UCAS website.

Students should also consider the best university for them. A large university is best if they feel comfortable in a crowd, yet a smaller university is better if they value a personal experience. Feeling at ease in a learning environment will make a huge impact on the student's results and overall happiness while studying.

4. Research grants

Organisations such as the Armed Forces Education Trust and the Lord Kitchener National Memorial Fund offer grants to help service children with their education. These usually need to be applied for ahead of time, so plan ahead to avoid missing out.

5. Play to your strengths

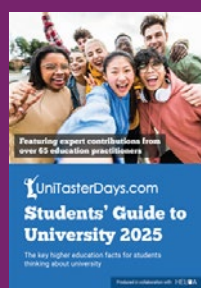
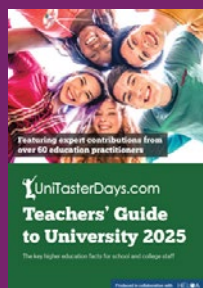
Service children have a huge range of unique skills that can set them apart from other applicants. Use your UCAS personal statement to showcase these skills and highlight the benefits of being a service child. Focus on your strengths and turn your experiences into skills that other people may not have.



Did you know we have two other university guides?

You can download our Teachers' Guide and Students' Guide for free. Please share with your children, young people, aspiring students, teachers, and careers advisers to help their understanding of university.

www.UniTasterDays.com/Resources





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Support for care-experienced and estranged students

**By Liz Bailey, Widening Participation
Senior Officer at the University of Derby**

For parents, carers and guardians of young people in care, the idea of university can be both exciting and overwhelming. You may have concerns about financial support, accommodation, and emotional wellbeing. Rest assured, universities are committed to supporting care-experienced students thrive.



Support before applying

- **Dedicated outreach and advice** – many universities have outreach teams who work with care-experienced young people. They offer tailored advice on course choices, application processes, and personal statements. Some institutions also offer specific activities for care-experienced and estranged students including the University of Derby.
- **Contextual admissions** – many universities apply contextual data to admissions considerations in recognition of the challenges faced by care-experienced students. This can lead to flexible offers, or additional application support. This approach ensures promising students aren't overlooked due to personal circumstances.
- **Financial guidance** – navigating student finance can seem daunting, but support is available. Resources like Propel and the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers provide guidance on tuition fees, maintenance loans, and grants.



Support at university

- **Financial assistance** – from bursaries to hardship funds, universities may provide financial help specifically for students who have been in care.

- **Year-round accommodation** – some universities offer year-round accommodation for care-experienced students. This provides reassuring stability during university holidays. This is often a key factor to help students feel safe and settled.
- **Dedicated support officers** – many universities assign dedicated contacts for care-experienced students, offering consistent guidance throughout their university experience. They can help with academic concerns, financial budgeting, independent living, and accommodation.
- **Mental health and wellbeing services** – universities recognise that emotional support is crucial. They offer services such as counselling, mentoring and wellbeing workshops.
- **Career planning** – career services offer tailored guidance to care-experienced students. This includes help with CVs, identifying and developing transferable skills, job application completion, and support for life beyond graduation.



How you can help

- **Encourage aspirations** – as a parent, carer, or supporter, you should remind your young person that university is a realistic option for them and support is available.
- **Help research support** – each university offers different support, so exploring their websites and contacting universities can provide reassurance (page 22).
- **Attend open days together** – visiting universities can ease anxiety for your young person and yourself by giving you both a real sense of what to expect.
- **Be reassuring** – the transition to university is a big step, but knowing they have your support can make all the difference for your young person.

By accessing the right support and preparing in advance, your care-experienced young person will thrive at university and achieve great success. If you have any questions, reach out to university outreach teams. We are ready to help.

Supporting students with special educational needs and disabilities

By Michael Tomkinson, Head of Student Accessibility, Disability, and Inclusion, and Dr Clare Dickens MBE, Director of Student Life and University Designated Safeguarding Lead, at the University of Wolverhampton

Did you know that 17.3% of UK home students have a disability?

If your young person has a disability - or receives special educational needs and disability (SEND) support - then they may see this as a barrier to studying at higher education. However, lots of support is available to them.

If your young person declares a disability, they'll be protected under the Equality Act 2010. They'll receive reasonable adjustments during their time at university, while ensuring their application isn't discriminated against throughout the admissions process or their studies.

Any condition over a sustained period of 12 months is considered a disability and will receive reasonable adjustments at university in line with the Equality Act.

Disability support

The two levels of support for students at university are:

- reasonable adjustments
- the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

When your young person declares their disability, the university will produce a reasonable adjustment plan. This ensures that they, and their academic lecturers, are aware of how they can best be supported. Remember, it's in the university's best interest to support them to succeed and remove barriers during their studies.

The second level of support is the DSA (page 67). The DSA is a government fund which should be applied for when applying for tuition fee support through Student Finance England.

The DSA is tailored to the individual's needs. It can include support towards additional costs that your young person may incur while studying which are related to their disability.



These additional costs might include:

- travel costs
- support towards specialist equipment, software, and related training
- non-medical helper support, such as a specialist mentor, specialist tutor, British Sign Language Interpreter (BSLI), or a specialist notetaker.

Applying for disability support

Your young person will need to follow a few steps to apply for disability support:

1. Declare their disability on their UCAS application.
2. Apply for the DSA alongside their application for tuition fee support.
3. Declare their disability to their university directly. For instance, if they're hoping to stay in university accommodation, then specialist rooms might be available.
4. Register with a university support team, if available. They will engage with your young person during their time at university.

Final considerations

- Every university will provide your young person with reasonable adjustments, but the type of adjustments may differ. It's important that they engage with the university directly to discuss their specific needs or concerns before applying.
- The DSA has eligibility criteria, so please check your young person is eligible. If they're not, contact their chosen university to discuss the other types of support available to them.
- Attend university open days and specific events. These will enable them to meet with support staff and academics.
- Engage with the students' union and speak to their disability officer or liberation rep. They'll be a go-to individual for your young person during their transition to higher education.

“Remember, it's in the university's best interest to support them to succeed and remove barriers during their studies. „



Introducing The One In Five Podcast

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- ✓ 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

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

Support for international students

By Dorsa Vandani, Student Recruitment Assistant at the University of Salford

Moving to a new country for university is exciting, but it can also be overwhelming. That's where universities step in. We help international students find their footing by offering visa guidance, academic resources, career services, and cultural support. In doing so, we turn a nerve-wracking transition into an enriching experience.

Our support begins before students set foot on campus. Our visa and immigration guidance is essential for helping students navigate ever-changing rules that can feel like solving a puzzle with missing pieces. Some universities offer airport pickup services to make life easier. After surviving long-haul flights, layovers, and dragging suitcases through unfamiliar airports, the last thing a student needs is the stress of arranging transport. Once settled, students will benefit from campus tours, Freshers' Week events, and orientation programmes.

Social and cultural integration is key to feeling at home. Students' unions and societies can create a sense of belonging, especially country-specific societies that offer comfort for students missing home. Nothing beats speaking your language and sharing traditions with others who understand. Weekend cultural trips help students explore the country, its history, and its people. For those with religious or spiritual needs, multi-faith chaplaincy services provide a welcoming space to practice their faith.

Academic success is just as important. Universities provide English language workshops on academic writing and communication to build confidence in coursework (page 17). Study skills sessions cover essay writing, referencing, and critical thinking. These are especially useful for students from different educational backgrounds. Personal academic advisers and tutors are a go-to support system, making students feel more prepared and less overwhelmed.

Money matters. For international students, it can get trickier with changing exchange rates. Bursaries and scholarships ease financial pressure, while budgeting workshops help students make the most of their money. They help students find cheap transport, discover student discounts, and shop without breaking the bank. On-campus jobs or part-time work provides extra cash and valuable experience (page 70). We help students find jobs, understand work hour limits, and learn about benefits.

Career and employability support is crucial for students planning their future. Our CV and cover letter workshops tailored to the local job market give students an edge when applying for jobs. Meanwhile, our clear guidance on post-study work visas and employment rights is essential for those hoping to stay and work after graduation.

Studying abroad comes with challenges. However, with the right support, international students go from feeling like outsiders to truly belonging. Universities play a key role in making the transition smoother. When students feel welcomed, supported, and empowered, they don't just survive their university experience. Instead, they make the most of university, gaining skills, friendships, and memories that last a lifetime.



Support for students who have English as an additional language

By Jess Wood, Schools and Colleges Liaison Executive at Nottingham Trent University

Starting university is a major life step for any student. Moving to a new city, adapting to a new learning environment, and stepping away from the comfort of school or college life can be a daunting experience.

For students who speak English as an additional language (EAL), these challenges may feel even more overwhelming. They will have common and valid concerns, such as:

- Will I be able to keep up with lectures?
- Can I engage fully in university life?
- Will support services be accessible?

Fortunately, UK higher education institutions are committed to making university accessible and inclusive for all students. A wide range of English language support services is available for both international students and home students from multilingual backgrounds.

English support

Many UK universities offer both pre-sessional and in-sessional English language programmes. Pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (PEAP) courses are designed to develop proficiency in academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking before students begin their degree programmes. In-sessional support continues throughout the academic year and may include:

- free English language classes
- one-to-one tutorials with language tutors
- credit-bearing modules focused on academic communication
- language development workshops tailored to specific courses.

Each institution offers different types of support, but all aim to help students build confidence in their academic English and succeed in their studies.

International community

Feeling part of a community is essential for a positive university experience. UK universities

create welcoming environments for students from around the world. Global cafés are informal meet-ups where students can relax, enjoy refreshments, and connect with peers from similar backgrounds.

International societies and cultural groups also play a significant role in helping students adjust. These societies celebrate cultural diversity. They offer social, cultural, and sometimes academic events throughout the year. They provide a space for students to share experiences, build friendships, and feel a sense of belonging.

Library support

University libraries offer more than just books. They are hubs of academic support with services tailored to EAL students. These include:

- academic writing workshops
- referencing and research guidance
- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) online resources
- one-to-one academic support sessions.

Many universities also provide access to digital tools and platforms such as:

- virtual learning environments (Moodle, Blackboard)
- online grammar and writing tools (Grammarly, Write & Improve)
- interactive study apps and language learning platforms (Quizlet, Voxy)
- recorded lectures and captioned learning materials.

These resources help students improve their language skills, understand academic expectations, and engage with their studies more confidently.

Bilingual superpowers

International students and students with EAL are incredibly intelligent. They are an asset wherever they choose to excel their skills. Being bilingual is not a hindrance but a superpower. It should be celebrated. UK higher education institutions are dedicated to ensuring that language is not a barrier to success. Through tailored language support, inclusive communities, and accessible learning resources, EAL students are empowered to thrive both academically and socially.

My parent story by Amanda Southworth

Graduate School Manager at the University of Sheffield

1. Who did you support in their university application journey?

I have been advising students on their post-18 journeys since 2006. However, it was a little different when it came to supporting my own two children, Emma and Zo, through the process.

2. How did they decide what to study?

Emma was very simple. Since the age of 8, she knew she wanted to study musical theatre. Her selection of GCSEs and A-levels were relevant to the subject, and she was spurred on when she had an experience that indicated musical theatre was a realistic option.

Zo was a little more complex. They had the advantage at school of being quite good at a lot of different things: science, maths, art, drama, and design technology. This made selecting both GCSEs and A-levels more difficult, but their passion had always sat with art and science. It led to lots of conversations about career paths and jobs, exploring everything from architecture to nuclear physics. However, Emma had followed her passion, so it felt right to give Zo the same option. Fine Art became the route chosen.

3. How did they decide where to study?

Emma had a lot of options due to the route she had chosen. We looked at conservatoires, universities, and private theatre schools. She ended up applying for 12 different institutions. Zo had a similar situation. They were looking at art schools, as well as university courses. However, all of their applications were done through UCAS which offered an advantage.

Emma wanted the combination of theatre students and other students that a university would provide, as opposed to a theatre school where everybody studies the same subject. Meanwhile, Zo's choice was an emotional reaction. It was a university that we hadn't even considered for the Top 3, but the visit and course talk completely changed their mind.

Ultimately, for them both, choosing where to study came down to a feeling. I could relate to this approach. It was how I chose my own university.

4. Did you attend many open days?

We attended all of the open days. This is mostly because Emma and Zo asked us to join them. There were some long journeys and overnight stays involved. They both had some form of interview or audition at each place, so they needed to attend. We tried to let them do their own thing whilst we were there. Several places offered activities for the parents which made that easier.



**Amanda and
her children,
Emma and Zo**

5. What advice would you give to parents?



Do your own research

I would encourage you to do your own research. You will look at a completely different aspect of student life and the course than your child will. I had to research two completely new areas of study, despite being a UCAS adviser for many years. I had never helped a student apply for musical theatre or art before, so I needed to look at the league tables, application processes, and requirements for two new subjects.



Hold back your opinions

I would also encourage parents to only share information when asked. It's easy to think that they want your opinion – and they do – but remember they are also getting advice from school, universities, friends, and teachers. They are dealing with information overload. They need to process it before they can start making decisions. Be their sounding board. Hold back your personal opinions about a course or a place until you have heard their view.

It's a difficult thing to do, but remember this is their life, and essentially their decision about their future. They're going to ask your opinion because you are their biggest fan and loudest cheerleader. However, you are also an important influence in their life. Your words carry weight. Don't forget that, or you might influence their decision.



Ask about wellbeing support

I created and delivered an open day presentation for parents and carers to help alleviate their concerns. In doing so, I

discovered that concerns about wellbeing are common. Many parents didn't realise they couldn't contact the university to ask how their child is doing. For this reason, if you share these concerns, you might wish to investigate wellbeing support, how this can be accessed, and the security of university accommodation.



Advise on independent living

Offer your young person advice on how to live on their own. Show them how to use a washing machine, make sure they can cook at least two or three one-pot meals, and tell them to opt for bedding in a darker colour. Also, don't buy them too much equipment, or they might end up with 6 irons in a household that are never used. And certainly don't send them with anything you would like to see again. I'm talking from experience here!



Establish a communication system

Agree some sort of communication system with your young person. Declare which social media platforms you will and won't look at. As parents, we stayed away from Snapchat, TikTok, and BeReal, but WhatsApp definitely helped. They also agreed to post on Instagram once a day, so we knew they were alive!

Equally, we used the location-sharing app Life360. This was mainly because Emma was in theatre rehearsals until 10pm on some evenings. As such, it was difficult to know when we could ring her, so it helped to know when she was at home. We never used it to question her movements though.



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Opportunities offered by Uni Connect

By Susan Darlington, Partnership Assistant at Go Higher West Yorkshire

Uni Connect is a national programme funded by the Office for Students. Since 2017, it has brought together regional partnerships of universities, colleges, and other local partners to offer activities, advice, and information on the benefits and realities of higher education (HE). Uni Connect activity covers all HE options, including university study, higher and degree apprenticeships, and technical and vocational qualifications.

Uni Connect believes that access to HE shouldn't be limited by an individual's background, location, or characteristics. This is why the programme's work focuses on young people who are underrepresented in HE or may face additional barriers to accessing HE. This includes:

- care-experienced young people
- first in their family to apply to HE
- pupils in areas with low participation rates to HE
- young people who have been eligible for free school meals (page 8)
- young people at risk of becoming NEET - not in education, employment, or training.



Collaborative and impartial advice

The Uni Connect partnerships respond to local need. They offer impartial advice and information through various methods, such as free online resources, parent and carer workbooks, and expert-led webinars. Areas include:

- student life
- student finance
- apprenticeships
- vocational studies
- UCAS applications
- choosing courses
- wellbeing
- careers.

Each has developed their own programmes of activities, usually delivered with local schools and colleges, to help young people make confident and informed decisions about their futures.

You can find your local partnership on the Uni Connect website. You can also find more general information about university study for anyone on the Discover Uni website.



The benefits of studying in HE

There are many ways to achieve higher levels skills. This is demonstrated through the range of qualification types, modes of study, and learning environments available across England's broad range of HE providers.

Your young person's options could include studying anything from a practical Higher National Certificate, through to a full-time three or four-year undergraduate course.

Some of the numerous benefits of studying in HE are:

- learning transferable skills
- increased earning potential
- health, wellbeing and resilience
- taking part in extra-curricular activities
- social benefits, including industry links
- becoming an expert in a particular area.



Links with employers

By working with local employers, Uni Connect delivers activities to provide your young person with a wide range of subject insights. These can introduce them to HE pathways and careers they hadn't previously known about.

Employer engagement also provides links to help your young person find industry placements. These placements will give them practical experience and transferrable skills, which will help them secure a graduate-level job after their studies.

Uni Connect partnerships work closely with stakeholders to identify regional skills needs, ensuring there is a local pipeline of talent to boost your young person's employment prospects.

Opportunities offered by the University Alliance

By Heather Francis, Senior Student Recruitment Officer at the University of South Wales

The University Alliance represents 16 of the UK's leading technical and professional universities. These Alliance universities specialise in providing degree courses that align with industry needs. Through hands-on teaching and sector-relevant course content, they are producing highly employable graduates who are ready to work.

About the University Alliance

- Alliance universities are leaders in healthcare, engineering, social sciences, creative industries, business, and computing.
- 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. 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 any other group according to the government's Teaching Excellence Framework.
- 67% of research at Alliance universities is rated as internationally excellent or world leading.

Benefits of the University Alliance

Alliance universities train students for jobs in industry, so their approach to teaching is very hands-on and practical. This often involves smaller class sizes and industry-standard equipment. Students will also have exposure to employers through work placement opportunities, teaching delivered by industry professionals, or projects set by industry.

The assessment style also reflects this practical approach with an emphasis on assessing practical projects rather than

exams. Alliance universities also deliver excellent research. This means your young person will gain skills and knowledge at the cutting edge of their fields.

Applying to the University Alliance

Alliance universities accept a range of qualifications such as A-levels, BTECs, and T-Levels. The entry requirements for courses are often mid-tariff, which means they don't require high academic grades.

Some students perceive this as an indicator that the course isn't prestigious, but this isn't the case. Alliance universities offer courses that aren't purely academic, and the entry requirements reflect this distinction. Often, work experience is required to gain entry onto these courses.

Advice for parents and carers

The process of finding the right course and university can be incredibly stressful for students. As a parent or carer, it's important you realise there are different types of universities to suit different types of learners.

There is a stereotype that going to university involves sitting in lecture theatres and taking exams. This isn't the case. There are world-renowned UK universities offering so much more than that. Many of them are part of the University Alliance.

When choosing a university, it's important to consider what success means for the individual student. Commonly, students are told to aim for highly academic courses, and anything else feels like a failing. Far too often, we speak to students who have been directed to alternative pathways (or steered away from university altogether) because they don't succeed in a traditional learning environment. These are often the students who will thrive in an Alliance university.

If exposure to industry and strong employment outcomes is important to your young person, I thoroughly recommend that you explore what Alliance universities have to offer. Book onto an open day. Come and see first-hand how these institutions go beyond the lecture theatre.

How to research universities and courses

By Ellie Gorwood, Student Recruitment Officer (Events) at the University of Salford

There is no right or wrong way to pick a university or course. Perhaps your young person knows where they want to live but they still need to find the perfect course. Maybe they know their future career but aren't sure how to get there. This article offers some tips to help you support your young person in reaching a decision that is right for them.

Choosing a course

Many students will focus on a few top choice courses when looking at universities. If they are contemplating course choices, they could ask themselves the following:

- What subjects do I like studying in school?
- What is it about these subjects that I like?
- Do I have a particular career in mind? Do I need a specific degree to achieve this?
- Do I want to do something completely new?

There are a *lot* of course choices out there. You might even find degree options that you didn't know existed. The broad range of options means there are even more opportunities for your young person to find a subject they love. Understanding why they enjoy certain subjects can help streamline the search for courses best aligned with their interests.

There are plenty of online tools, such as career and degree course quizzes, and articles and

videos which offer insight into the broad range of subjects offered at universities. These are a useful place to start when narrowing down subjects.

Choosing a university

Once your young person has decided their preferred course(s), it's time to look at universities. They'll need to look for universities which offer the course(s) they are interested in. Some courses will be offered at a lot of institutions, whilst others are only offered in a few. It's important to have a good look at the options available.

UCAS lists every university course across the country. There are also a range of online sites, such as WhatUni and The Complete University Guide, where you can search for courses.

All universities have course search tools available on their website. They also have prospectuses which you can pick up at events, or access online. Entry requirements will indicate which institutions are feasible for your young person. This can help narrow down their choices. It may be helpful to look at a few aspirational choices too, and some easily achievable options.

Choosing an experience

Now you have a short list of institutions, start registering for university open days (page 48). These events offer the best opportunity to find out more about their courses, meet students and tutors, and get a feel for the study environment. This all helps your young person decide if they can see themselves studying there.

At this point, with your support, they'll be well on their way to finding the university and course that feels right for them.





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How to choose the right university

By Charlotte Higgins, Undergraduate Recruitment Marketing Officer at the University of Derby

Choosing a degree and a university is a big decision. At the University of Derby, we believe that choice should take into consideration three key factors. This article offers advice on how you as a parent, guardian or carer can support your young person in this stage of their life.

Choosing the right degree

When it comes to choosing the right degree, we often see two types of students. There are students who have a subject area in mind but aren't sure which career they want. Alternatively, there are students who have a career mind but don't know which course will get them there.

There are also various types of degrees, including a traditional three-year programme, foundation pathways to help transition to university, integrated masters if your child is looking for advanced learning, or even a degree apprenticeship.

To find out more, you can visit university websites, read prospectuses, and attend open days. Sometimes, speaking to the experts in person can help you discover options that you or your child might never have come across.

At the University of Derby, we offer tailored support to help your child make the right decision. The right degree will be one they are most passionate about and offers the right opportunities for their career path.



Top tip - if they have a specific career in mind, find out if their degree needs to have any specific accreditations from an industry board.

> Example - if they want to become a professional psychologist, they will need to study a degree that is accredited by the British Psychological Society.

Choosing the right campus

Going to university often means moving away from home for the first time. This is a big change for students, and also a big change for you as their loved ones.

A university's campus is the heart of the learning journey. It's the place where they will spend time in lectures, seminars, and other learning activities, so make sure they choose the campus that is right for them. It should offer passionate teaching staff who are experts in their field with excellent facilities available for your young person to use.

The best way to find the right campus is to attend an open day with your young person. Take the opportunity to attend a subject talk to learn more about their chosen degree and future teachers.





Top tip - Student Finance applications typically open in March. It's worth applying as soon as possible, even if your young person hasn't yet decided where they wish to study.

➤ **Example** - at the University of Derby, we have a dedicated team of staff ready to help you with all student finance questions.

Choosing happiness

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

Universities have a range of support systems available to help. At the University of Derby, our Student Services team offers support from application to graduation. This includes financial advice and academic support plans to get the most out of their university experience.

Your young person can grow their social life and meet like-minded people by engaging with their students' union (page 101). They can participate in welcome events or join a

club, society, or sports team to continue their 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 ensure they choose accommodation that suits their lifestyle and needs.



Top tip – encourage your child to research their student accommodation options in advance, so that they can apply once they receive their offer to study.

➤ **Example** - the University of Derby offers guaranteed halls in award-winning accommodation for all new first-year undergraduates if they make Derby their firm choice.

Making that all-important decision

Going to university will help your young person build a strong foundation, academically and personally, by providing new and exciting opportunities. Whatever subject, career, or campus they choose, support them in making an informed decision so they will thrive at university.



The different types of university

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

As parents, we want to help our young people make the right choice of university. Whilst the most important decision is likely the course, where to study is the next one. You will hear people talk about different types of university. You might hear the terms red brick, ex-polytechnic, or ancient.

However, a more important decision is whether you want a campus or a city university. Or perhaps a Russell Group university. So, what does this mean?

Campus vs city

A campus university is typically located on a self-contained campus. They are usually outside of the city centre and have everything you need in one place. Campus universities have everything on-site, such as their teaching spaces, library, disability support, and careers service.

There will usually be student accommodation and social spaces on campus too, like the students' union, student bar, and café. This means your young person will rarely leave campus for anything other than social activities, shopping, or visiting home. Examples of campus universities include Loughborough, Bath, and Lancaster.

A city university is typically located in a city centre. It will usually have departments, teaching spaces, and other facilities mentioned above located across the city.

Some city universities have many of their buildings in the same area. They still offer student accommodation, and this will be based in the city too, or just outside of the city. Examples of city universities include Durham, Manchester, and Sheffield.

There are pros and cons to both. It's an individual choice, based on the environment in which your young person wants to spend the next 3 to 4 years of their life.

Russell Group universities

Some students actively seek out universities that are members of the Russell Group. A Russell Group university is a research-intensive university. There are 24 Russell Group universities across the UK. Studying at a Russell Group university means that students are taught by world-leading experts with access to cutting-edge research facilities. Russell Group universities have a strong reputation that can enhance career prospects.

It's important to note that there are many prestigious universities that aren't in the Russell Group. Some of these are research intensive, much like the Russell Group members, but choose not to join the group. Choosing between Russell Group and other types of university like the University Alliance (page 21) comes down to personal choice.

Research your options

Your young person must decide their own preferences. However, you can support them in making an informed choice. Firstly, they should begin with online research to narrow down their options. Secondly, they should attend an open day. It's the best way to get a feel for the institution and if the location is going to be right for them.



The different types of university courses

By David Metcalfe, Student Recruitment Coordinator at Newcastle University

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

Degree abbreviations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Module choice

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

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



Engaging with universities online, on campus, and on demand

By Kathryn Elliott, Head of Partnerships at Teesside University London

It can feel daunting supporting your young person to navigate the many university websites, understand the thousands of courses on offer, and narrow all the options down to just 5 on the UCAS application form. Deciding which ones to look at in more detail, and which ones to visit, will shape the next 3 years of their lives, and maybe even the rest of their lives. This article offers advice and reassurance to help you guide your young person.

Engaging online

University websites are a valuable source of information. They provide lots of detail about each course, the available student support, facilities, and accommodation options. They may offer virtual tours, video clips, and other ways to provide information and help you narrow down potential universities and courses for your young person.

Universities often offer virtual or online open days (page 55). These are the closest you'll get to an in-person event without physically visiting the university. Online open days can provide an opportunity to meet course teams and student support staff, allowing you to ask questions in real time.

Social media is another way to engage with universities. It's a revealing way to see how each university interacts with its students. You'll discover the activities and events taking

place on campus. You'll also find comments and posts from existing students which provide an authentic perspective about how they view their university.

Engaging on campus

Open days are a fantastic way of getting a feel for a university, seeing the facilities available, and meeting staff and students. Universities have multiple open days throughout the year. An in-person, on-campus experience is highly recommended, especially for universities within your Top 5 choices.

Make a list of questions before you attend an open day, and another list of any facilities or parts of the university you want to see.

Open days can be expensive, particularly if your young person is looking at options far from home. Be selective about which universities you visit. Some universities offer support with travel costs. You can search for these using the new [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#). Investigate these options and keep all associated receipts if you're entitled to reclaim these costs.

Engaging on demand

Admissions departments are always happy to hear from both prospective students and their parents. Websites will list the best ways to contact them: phone, email, or chat function. Contact them if you have any questions. In addition, academic staff often share their contact details at open days if they are happy to answer questions about their courses.

Sometimes, you can arrange to visit universities outside of the advertised open days, so please do contact them if this is your preference.



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Understanding university league tables

By Zoe Mason, UK Recruitment Manager at the University of Wolverhampton

Choosing a university is an exciting but often overwhelming time for young people and their families. One of the tools you may come across during this journey is a university league table. These tables aim to rank universities based on a range of factors. But what do they really mean, and how can they help your young person make an informed choice?

University league tables

University league tables are published every year by different organisations. They score universities based on a variety of measures, including:

- Student satisfaction – how current students rate their experience
- Graduate prospects – how many students find a job or undertake further study after graduation
- Entry requirements – the typical grades or qualifications students need to join
- Research quality – whether a university produces prestigious research
- Teaching quality – how teaching is rated by students or experts.

Each table uses slightly different assessment methods and gives more importance to certain areas. This means one university might rank higher in one table but lower in another.

Understanding league tables

League tables offer a snapshot of a university's strengths, but they aren't the full

picture. A higher ranking doesn't automatically mean a better experience for your young person. Some things can't be measured, like the sense of community, support services, or whether a course truly sparks their interest.

It's important to remember that league tables don't account for personal factors, such as:

- course content and how it matches your young person's interests and goals
- location, accommodation, and campus facilities
- opportunities like placements, internships, or study abroad (page 102)
- support for wellbeing, mental health, and academic skills.

Starting with league tables

Here are some ways you can support your young person:

- Use league tables as a starting point – they aren't the only tool
- Attend open days or virtual tours – explore the campus, and meet staff and students
- Look closely at the course – the same subject will be taught differently at each university
- Ask about student support services and graduate opportunities
- Help them think about where they'll thrive, not just the place ranked the highest.

Beyond league tables

League tables are a helpful guide, but choosing the right university is about finding the best fit for your young person's ambitions, needs, and happiness. Encourage them to explore all the information available and trust their instincts when deciding where they'll feel most at home.

“A higher ranking doesn't automatically mean a better experience for your young person. Some things can't be measured... ,,

Studying a degree apprenticeship

By Professor Sharon Green, Dean of Executive Education and Skills at the University of Lincoln

A degree apprenticeship is an exciting opportunity to gain both a qualification and hands-on experience in the workplace. By combining academic study with practical learning, degree apprenticeships are becoming a popular choice for students who want to kick-start their careers while earning a salary.

A balanced approach to learning

You'll split your time between studying for your degree and working in a professional environment. This approach allows you to apply what you learn in the classroom directly to your job, making the experience highly relevant and practical.

Apprentices often benefit from dedicated mentors who help guide their learning journey, offering both academic advice and practical insights. This support is crucial for ensuring that apprentices not only succeed in their studies, but also develop the skills needed to thrive in the workplace.

Real-world experience and skill development

Unlike traditional university courses, where you may only gain practical experience through internships or placements, a degree apprenticeship allows you to work from day one.

Employers value apprenticeships because they produce work-ready candidates who have gained a thorough understanding of the industry. Apprentices can contribute meaningfully to their organisations, using the knowledge they've gained from both their degree studies and on-the-job training.

Employer and apprentice feedback

Employers appreciate the fresh perspectives that apprentices bring to their companies. They can contribute to projects with minimal

supervision, thanks to the training they receive from both their employer and the academic institution.

Apprentices value the structured support they receive. Many apprentices feel more confident in their abilities because they can see the direct impact of their work. The ongoing mentoring and feedback from both their workplace and academic tutors help apprentices stay on track and continue developing throughout their apprenticeship.

Career progression and opportunities

A degree apprenticeship doesn't just lead to a qualification – it can also open doors to a wide range of career opportunities. Many apprentices are offered full-time positions at the end of their programme, having already gained the experience and skills employers are looking for.

Earning while you learn allows you to start building your career without the financial burden of traditional university fees. This can be a huge benefit for those looking to avoid student debt.

What to expect

Degree apprenticeships require a high level of commitment, as apprentices must juggle work responsibilities with academic study. But you'll have dedicated study time and work-based learning opportunities, ensuring that both your job and your education receive the attention they deserve.

The combination of academic study and hands-on work means that you'll develop your technical knowledge and essential soft skills like communication, problem-solving, and time management. These are the types of skills that employers value highly.

The best of both worlds

If you're considering a degree apprenticeship, it's a path that offers the best of both worlds: a solid academic foundation and the chance to gain valuable work experience. Apprentices can thrive in their chosen field and set themselves up for a fulfilling, long-term career.



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN



**WE SEE
GREATNESS
IN YOU**



My parent story by Emma Jubbs

Director of Marketing and Recruitment at the University of Lincoln

1. Who did you support in their university application journey?

My son had always had an ambition to study at university. He was on the path to start university in Autumn 2023. To this end, he chose to move from his 11-16 school to a grammar school because he wanted to study A-levels. Looking back, I am still unsure whether this choice equipped him well enough for his university journey.

2. How did they decide what to study?

At the start of Year 12, I would have imagined my son studying sport. However, this quickly changed to an interest in business when he found the subject the easiest of his three A-levels. Moving from a vocational GCSE to an A-level subject is a drastic change. It required some adaptation.

3. How did they decide where to study?

Sixth form peers were a very deciding factor in his first-choice city for university. It was important for him to know that he would have friends with whom he could live and socialise. This surprised me because he was a confident teenager.

4. Did you attend many open days with them?

Yes, we attended open days together. My son knew the university cities he wanted to visit. He was also mindful at this point regarding the anticipated grades. On our first visit, I asked what he would like to see first. His reply: "I don't know. You work at a university, you tell me!"

At this point, I realised that his understanding of what to see at an open day was lacking. He knew the subject area, and he knew he wanted to play sport. Beyond this, he was happy to take parental guidance all the way. We visited 4 open days in total, and didn't go to the university which was his fifth choice.

Accommodation visits were also an eye opener. They might prefer more expensive

and comfortable accommodation than you anticipate. Be mindful of this conversation. Have it early in the cycle, so you can begin budgeting.

5. What advice would you give to parents?

The application process was interesting. Having worked in the sector for so long, there is an assumption that schools guide their students well. This isn't always the case, so you might need to guide your children yourself, but my son was certainly informed around student finance.

My advice to anyone starting this journey with their child is that the year of application is the easier part. It's fun visiting new exciting university cities but remember to guide your child during the visits. Highlight the realities of travel and accommodation. Prepare a plan of action.

Equally, prepare a plan for the night before A-level results day. My son found himself in Clearing (page 87). It was a tricky experience. The Clearing process was seamless on the day, but he still ended up in a university and city that wasn't the first choice he had dreamed of throughout Year 13.

Open up that conversation on A-level results day and the week afterwards. Ensure they are clear about the options they have in front of them. Clearing doesn't close on the night of results day. Make sure you've made the right choices as a family.

Good luck. It's an exciting time for a parent. It certainly makes you wish you were 18 again!



Studying an online university course

By Becky Sandford, SEO Specialist at Falmouth University

In today's fast-paced world, more people than ever are turning to online university courses as a flexible and accessible way to earn an undergraduate or master's degree. Whether you're balancing a full-time job, raising a family, or simply prefer learning from the comfort of your own home, online study offers a level of freedom that traditional, on-campus university courses can't always provide.

Flexibility that fits around your life

One of the biggest advantages of online study is its flexibility. You can access your course materials anytime, anywhere. It could be early in the morning before the school run, during your lunch break at work, or late at night when the house is quiet. This means you can structure your study time around your own schedule, rather than having to fit your life around a fixed timetable.

Study at your own pace

Online university courses also offer different study modes to suit your needs. You might choose to study part-time, spreading your workload over a longer period, or take an accelerated route to complete your degree faster. This adaptability makes studying an online university course a practical choice for those juggling work, family, or other personal commitments.

Learn without leaving home

With an online university course, there's no need to relocate or commute. You can remain living at home. This reduces the cost of moving or travelling. It also means you're studying in a space that's familiar to you. For many students, learning at home better suits

their personal study style. It allows them to focus without the distractions of a busy campus environment.

Online study also removes geographical barriers for going to university. You're no longer limited to choosing a university based purely on location. Instead, you can apply to your ideal institution - whether it's across the country or on the other side of the world - without having to move away from your home, job, or family. This means you don't have to compromise on the quality of your education or your personal circumstances. You can study with a university that aligns with your ambitions, values, and career goals, all from the comfort of your own environment.

A more affordable way to study

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

Stay connected and supported

Many online university courses are designed to give students the opportunity to engage with one another. Through live seminars, group projects, discussion forums, and dedicated online spaces, you'll have plenty of opportunities to connect with fellow students, share ideas, and build a support network. Tutors are also on hand to offer regular feedback and guidance, ensuring you feel supported every step of the way.

An online university course offers the best of both worlds: a respected qualification and the flexibility to study in a way that fits around your life. Whether you're looking to change careers, advance in your current role, or pursue a personal passion, online study puts higher education within reach, wherever you are.

“Online study also removes geographical barriers for going to university. You're no longer limited to choosing a university based purely on location. ”

Studying a part-time university course

By Zoe Mason, UK Recruitment Manager at the University of Wolverhampton

If your young person is considering university, it's easy to assume they'll be studying full-time. But part-time courses are an option that might suit their goals, lifestyle, or circumstances better. As a parent or supporter, understanding how part-time study works will help you guide them in making an informed decision.

What is a part-time course?

Part-time university courses are structured to spread study over a longer period. This allows students to balance learning alongside work, caring responsibilities, or other commitments. While a full-time degree often takes three years, a part-time route might take between four and six years, depending on the subject and university.

Part-time courses are available in many areas, including:

- foundation degrees
- undergraduate degrees
- professional qualifications
- Higher National Diplomas or Certificates.

Some courses are taught during evenings, weekends, or online to make them more accessible.

Why choose part-time study?

There are several reasons your young person might choose part-time study:

- Flexibility - it offers the chance to fit learning around work, family, or other priorities.
- Earning while studying - they can continue to work, which may help with finances (page 70).
- Building experience - combining study and work can give them valuable skills and experience.

- Career change or progression - part-time study is popular with those looking to upskill or retrain while continuing in their current role.

Things to consider

Before committing to part-time study, it's important to understand what it involves. You can support your young person by helping them consider a few aspects:

- Time management - balancing study with other responsibilities takes planning and commitment.
- Tuition fees - part-time courses are usually charged per module or year. Student finance is often available, but it's worth checking the rules.
- Support services - universities offer academic and wellbeing support. It's helpful to explore what's available for part-time students.
- Course structure - some courses offer flexible pathways, while others may follow a set schedule. Checking this can help manage expectations.

How you can help

If your young person is unsure, here are some ways you can support their decision-making. Help them to:

- Explore different course options – understand what part-time study really looks like.
- Research funding options – this includes tuition fee loans and support from an employer.
- Ask questions – speak to course leaders to get a feel for what's involved.
- Plan how they'll balance study and other commitments – this can build confidence.

Earning and learning

Part-time study is a valuable option. It makes university education available to more people, whatever their situation. With the right planning and support, it can offer the best of both worlds - earning and learning - while keeping future ambitions in sight.

Helping you support their BU journey

We understand that choosing university is a big step – not just for students, but for those supporting them too. That's why we've created a dedicated space on our website just for you. Here you can find helpful information about:

- Accommodation
- Applying to university
- Fees and funding
- How to prepare for university
- Our parent, carer and supporter webinars
- Student wellbeing and learning support.

Sign up to our supporters newsletter to stay updated:

www.bournemouth.ac.uk/supporters



Join us for an Open Day

Our Open Days are a great way for you and your young person to explore BU. You'll gain insights into our courses, finance, accommodation, available support, and tour our facilities.

View and book our
upcoming events:



Studying a creative subject at university

By Holly Hayman, Head of Digital and Content at Falmouth University

Creativity is in everyone, and it's for everyone. Changing the way we think about creativity can make a real difference to the university experience. Studying a creative subject doesn't simply mean art – creative courses include architecture, game design, software engineering, and filmmaking.

Studying a creative subject at university is a unique and deeply rewarding experience. Unlike more traditional, theory-based degrees, creative courses are typically hands-on and project-driven. The best universities will generate live briefs from real companies. This encourages students to explore their own ideas, hone their practical skills, and develop their personal artistic style.

The benefits of a creative course

Traditionally creative courses cover a range of disciplines, from fine art and graphic design to film production, music, and performing arts. However, they share a common emphasis on fostering originality and self-expression.

More recently, modern creative courses include game development and story writing, concept art, marketing, advertising, and events management, responding to the demands of an in-demand sector.

At the heart of studying a creative subject is a focus on personal growth alongside developing vital skills. Students are encouraged to push the boundaries of their creativity and think critically about the work they produce. This can be challenging but also liberating.

Whether it's painting, writing, or composing film scores, students often find themselves

working on projects that are both experimental and deeply personal. The freedom to explore different mediums and ideas can feel invigorating, but it also requires a great deal of discipline and self-motivation.

The practicalities of a creative course

A feature of creative degrees is the balance between individual and collaborative work. Much of the study revolves around personal projects, such as creating artwork, writing compositions, or developing design portfolios. However, students are often required to work in groups to push themselves out of their comfort zones.

Collaborative projects help students learn how to communicate their ideas effectively, compromise, and incorporate feedback from others. This is especially true in fields like film production, theatre, or graphic design, where teamwork is essential and mirrors the real-world environment.

The assessment of a creative course

The assessment methods for creative subjects differ from those in more traditional courses: very rarely is there a traditional dissertation and exam. Students are normally assessed based on their practical work. It could be an exhibition, a film, a live performance, a playable game, a piece of fiction, or a series of photographs.

This shift in evaluation can be daunting for some. It requires students to put their creative process under scrutiny. Yet, many students find it incredibly freeing. It gives them a chance to escape the pressure of pass/fail exams.

Build a strong foundation

Ultimately, studying a creative subject at university is both an exciting and demanding journey. It requires a blend of technical skill, personal vision, and the ability to think critically about your own work. But for those passionate about their craft, it offers the chance to grow as an artist and build a strong foundation for a future in the creative industries.

Studying Medicine at university

**By Professor Danny McLaughlin BSc PhD
SFHEA, Dean of Medical Education at the
University of Lincoln**

Studying Medicine at university is a challenging yet rewarding endeavour. Medicine programmes are rigorous to ensure your young person is equipped to meet the demands of the profession and make a positive contribution to healthcare within their local area and beyond.

Programme structure

Medicine programmes in the UK vary slightly between universities but generally follow a similar structure:

- **Years 1-2** – your young people will focus on the fundamentals of medical sciences such as anatomy, physiology, behavioural science, and pharmacology. They will also study public health, ethics, and research skills, and gain some early clinical experience and clinical skills. Teaching is often integrated with clinical cases, which may require small group work. This allows your young person to put their learning into a clinical context right from the start.
- **Years 3-4** – most programmes start full-time clinical placements in Year 3. Initially, your young person will learn the fundamentals of medicine, surgery, primary and community care, child health, mental health, women's health, and long-term conditions. Teaching environments include a variety of clinical settings, such as hospital wards, outpatients, general practice, other community settings, and the emergency department. Your young person may also undertake regular simulated practice back on the university campus. This exposes them to more challenging clinical situations in a safe and controlled way.

- **Year 5** – in the final year, your young person will prepare for the UK Medical Licensing Assessment by undertaking placements in more acute medical and surgical settings and in primary care. Most courses conclude with a series of activities designed to prepare students for practice as newly graduated resident doctors.

Some universities offer 6-year Medicine programmes. These include a gateway year at the beginning of the course to prepare students for university-level study.

Assessments

Assessments are diverse. It's not all about exams. Medical schools also use written assignments, reflective writing, presentations, portfolio work, workplace-based assessments, clinical skills tests, and competency sign-offs.

Medicine admissions process

The admissions process involves several steps which your young person should follow:

1. **Research** – research medical schools by reviewing online course information, making sure they meet the entry requirements of any courses they intend to apply for.
2. **UCAS registration** – register to apply through UCAS in the summer before their start year.
3. **Application** – apply through UCAS in the year before their start year. For 2026 entry, the deadline is 15 October 2025.
4. **Aptitude test** – undertake any required admissions aptitude test by the deadlines set by the universities they have chosen.
5. **Interviews** – if their application scores highly, they will be interviewed to decide if they should be offered a place. Most medical schools use an interview format where candidates have several mini-interviews over the course of 1-2 hours. Each will focus on a different topic.
6. **Offer** – any offer to study Medicine will be conditional on obtaining (or having obtained) the right grades in the right subjects at A-level. For applicants in Year 13, decisions are made when A-level results are released in August.

Studying graduate-entry medicine at university

By Alison O'Hara, Marketing Campaigns Officer at the University of Sunderland

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

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

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

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

What was your experience of the application process?

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

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

Did your previous degree provide you with specific advantages?

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

How did you manage financially?

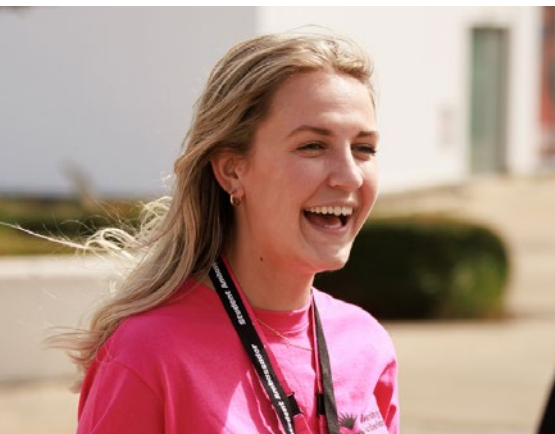
As a postgraduate on the undergraduate course, I didn't get a tuition fee loan. My parents helped, I received a maintenance loan, and I work every summer holiday in various roles, enabling me to save for living expenses.

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

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

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

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



Emma Carnell working as a student ambassador at the University of Sunderland



University of
Sunderland



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How location can enhance the university experience

By Annie Wheeler-Cox, Email Marketing and Content Officer at Falmouth University

For many, moving away for university is their first experience of leaving home. It's a valuable opportunity for your young person to choose where they want to live and find a lifestyle that suits them.

Of course, it's important to consider other factors such as academic reputation, campus culture, and extracurricular activities. However, the physical environment of where you study will impact your young person's life, so they need to choose a location that will enhance it.



Campus and city

Both campus and city university options have strong benefits. Ultimately, it comes down to personal preference. Campus-based universities usually offer everything that is needed onsite for your young person's studies. This means they'll live, learn, and socialise in one place. It reduces travel time and creates a sense of community on their doorstep because they'll live with other students.

City-based universities are usually more spread out throughout a town or city, with lecture halls and student accommodation options being further apart. This can be great for encouraging your young person to get involved with the local community and live more independently.

Some universities fall into both categories. For example, they might have a campus base, with other amenities located in the city, such as accommodation.



Lifestyle and wellbeing

It's also important for your young person to consider how a university's location can impact their overall wellbeing. For those who thrive in nature, studying in a rural or coastal

location may be a fitting choice, giving easy access to the outdoors for walking, sea swimming, and other outdoor activities. These experiences enhance physical fitness and offer a welcome rest between studying.

Meanwhile, if your young person is looking for a fast-paced and urban lifestyle, then they might favour built-up areas with easy access to nightlife and live music. You can find these things in rural locations too, but the options might be more limited.

The surrounding environment will play a big part in their day-to-day university experience. It's important for them to consider what will help them relax, and what they enjoy doing.



Belonging and community

The location of your university can also influence how your young person will connect with their peers and the local community. Living within smaller towns can foster a strong sense of community. Students will bond with locals and feel connected to their environment.

Alternatively, universities in metropolitan areas may expose students to a broader, more diverse population. This allows students to explore various communities and form connections with individuals from different backgrounds.



Personal priorities

Many will approach their university studies with specific priorities or concerns in mind. There's lots to consider: cost of living, future opportunities, safety, proximity to family. Your young person needs to decide what matters most to them personally.

Ultimately, the location of their chosen university can shape their entire experience. The location can provide access to academic and professional opportunities, enhance cultural understanding, improve their wellbeing, and foster a strong sense of community.

Therefore, when supporting your young person with their university journey, remind them to look at more than just the academic opportunities. They should consider how different locations can influence their personal growth, happiness, and future.

The benefits of studying in Scotland

By Emily-Jane Gardiner, RUK Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Glasgow

Your child is nearing the end of school. They're looking to you for advice on where to study. But don't worry, you're not alone. Even Will and Kate infamously had a little help from their parents when deciding on their Scottish university!

While we can't promise a royal title, we can promise that Scotland offers world-class universities, friendly towns, affordable living, and over 600 years of teaching excellence.

Transport links

- 2 mainline train lines - LNER and Avanti trains run regularly throughout the day, covering the length of England. They take around 4.5 hours to travel into Scotland. They can cost as little as £20 for a single journey.
- 5 international airports - flying is one of the quickest and cheapest ways to commute. Flights from London to Scottish airports start from £15 and take just over an hour. Flights from Northern Ireland are even faster and can take only 25 minutes.
- Free bus travel for under 22s - everyone under the age of twenty-two attending a Scottish university is eligible for free bus travel covering the entirety of Scotland.

Employability

"There's no point doing a degree if you can't get a job at the end of it."

Many of us have uttered these words to our children on the journey to choosing a university. Whilst the graduate job market is currently a bit of a minefield, a Scottish degree sets our graduates in good standing to navigate it.

Flexible and professional

Scottish universities have a unique degree structure. Our undergraduate courses last four years and offer the opportunity to be flexible with subjects. For this reason, a Scottish degree is widely respected and known by employers to give an all-round solid and varied education.

Scotland's professional degrees are also highly respected among employers. These courses often come with professional accreditation, alongside the opportunity to complete placements and build industry experience.

Affordability

With data taken from the National Student Money Survey 2024, we're proud to boast that Scotland has an impressive track record for cost of living. On average, students spend around £1020 per month. This is £80 less than the UK average!

Scholarships

Degree funding is awarded through the Student Finance provider of the applicant's resident country. However, often this funding leaves gaps between expenses and the amount provided. Scholarships can help bridge that gap (page 63). Scotland is a generous provider of scholarships to students in the UK. Explore university websites to see what they offer and the eligibility criteria.

Join us

So many students base their final decision on their open day experience. Join us for an open day to see why countless students love studying in Scotland. Plus, it's an excellent excuse for a mini-break!



The benefits of studying in Wales

By Isla McMail, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of South Wales

Supporting your young person's decision to pursue higher education is a big step. Choosing where they study can make all the difference. Wales offers a unique and enriching experience that combines academic excellence with a supportive and welcoming environment. With eight universities to choose from, here are just a few reasons why Wales is a fantastic option for higher education.



A welcoming community

Whether your child prefers the energy of a vibrant city or the charm of a coastal town, they'll find an inclusive and friendly atmosphere in Wales. The country has a strong reputation for its warm, community-focused culture, where people are willing to support one another.

Universities in Wales reflect these values by offering a wide range of support services, from mentoring schemes to career guidance, and student societies to promote a healthy balance between academic life and wellbeing.

There are also many opportunities for part-time work, placements, and internships. Welsh universities often collaborate with local employers to provide valuable real-world experience. This helps students develop the transferable skills that are so important in today's job market.



Affordability

Wales is known for its more affordable cost of living compared to other parts of the UK. Cities such as Cardiff have consistently been named among the most budget-friendly university locations. Essentials like accommodation, food, and travel tend to cost less. This helps your child's student finance and savings go further.

Additionally, students benefit from a wide range of discounts and offers, and each university provides access to bursaries and scholarships to further ease financial pressures.

Language and culture

Studying in Wales is an opportunity to experience a rich and distinctive culture. Welsh is one of the oldest living languages in Europe. Students don't need to speak Welsh to study here, but they'll have the chance to learn it through free courses, cultural events, and even scholarships.

Welsh universities are proud to support and celebrate this unique aspect of national identity, while also maintaining a welcoming environment for students from all backgrounds.



Events and traditions

If your child is looking for a well-rounded university experience, Wales offers a variety of cultural and community events throughout the year. These include:

- **Dydd Gŵyl Dewi (St David's Day)** – a national celebration of our patron saint, marked by parades, concerts, and cultural festivities.
- **The Royal Welsh Show** – one of the UK's largest agricultural shows, highlighting farming heritage, local food, and crafts.
- **The National Eisteddfod** – a renowned annual festival celebrating Welsh language, literature, music, and performance.

Students can also enjoy festivals, food fairs, literary events, and more.



Stunning scenery

If your young person enjoys the outdoors, they'll be spoilt for choice. Wales offers a spectacular natural environment, from the rolling hills of Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park to the awe-inspiring summit of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon). With its castles, rivers, beaches, and hiking trails, it's a fantastic place for students to explore, unwind, and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The benefits of studying in Northern Ireland

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

Northern Ireland is 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 a few reasons why studying in Northern Ireland might be one of the best decisions your young person will ever make.

Affordable living

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 the wallet.

Safety and security

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 your young person is enjoying a night out, or a sunny daytime stroll around the Queen's Quarter, they will encounter a warm and welcoming environment with a strong sense of community.

Gateway to adventure

Northern Ireland's size is one of its greatest assets. Students 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 your young person prefers city life, Belfast's vibrant streets are brimming with music, art, and culture.

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, such as Belsonic and Belfast Vital. Belfast's buzzing nightlife, packed with lively pubs, clubs, and music venues, offers endless entertainment. Whether wandering through the Cathedral Quarter or attending one of the many cultural festivals, your young person will quickly feel Belfast's unmatched energy.

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.

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. Students can hop from a lecture to a scenic hiking trail or a lively gig in record time.

Choosing Northern Ireland isn't just about getting a degree. It's about embracing a lifestyle that's enriching, adventurous, and unique. Your young person might just find the experience of a lifetime.



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With subject areas ranging from Computing and Psychology to Art, Law and Social Sciences, we're proud to offer something truly distinctive – in the heart of South East London.

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The different types of university event

By Rebecca Fletcher, Schools and Colleges Engagement Officer (Recruitment) at Anglia Ruskin University

A young person's journey into higher education can cause mixed emotions for parents and carers. You might feel excited about their next step in life, whilst also feeling nervous and slightly overwhelmed.

However, universities provide lot of information, support, and events for parents and carers to help you understand the available options. This allows you to guide your young people in making their decision.

Higher education fairs

A higher education fair is a valuable first step to take on the journey to supporting your student. At these events, you will have the opportunity to speak to several different universities on the same day. There will be stands to visit hosted by a university representative, academic, or student ambassador.

They'll provide information on their university and the different courses they offer. You will gain resources and information to read at home, so you can consider all the options.

Higher education fairs host a variety of seminars throughout the event. This may include talks on personal statements, degree apprenticeships, or choosing a university course. They'll help you learn more about the process of applying to university and what to expect along the way.

Open days

Next, we encourage you to attend open days at your young person's top university choices. An open day is a comprehensive opportunity to look around facilities, see the accommodation available, and speak with lecturers, staff, and current students. There are different talks throughout the day, and you can join a campus tour to explore the university.

Applicant days

An applicant day offers students, parents, and carers the chance to visit universities where the student has received an offer. It's an excellent way to help your young person make their final decision on where to study. Students can participate in taster sessions for their chosen subject area. Meanwhile, parents and carers can attend various talks and speak to support services.

Campus tours

If you cannot attend an open day, you can attend a campus tour at each university to explore the environment and facilities. Most universities offer this opportunity to parents, carers, and students. You can book directly with the university.

Information and guidance session

Universities provide in-person or virtual support sessions aimed directly at parents and carers. These support sessions help you fill gaps in your knowledge. Topics might include student finance, personal statements, or preparing for university life away from home. Guidance is also available on parent sections of university websites. Some universities even provide a parent and carer's newsletter that you could receive.



The benefits of attending a university event

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

Universities host a variety of events designed to help students explore university life, understand different courses, navigate the application process, and gain a clearer picture of what higher education involves. These events can feel overwhelming at first. However, university staff are there to support your young people every step of the way, helping them feel confident in making informed decisions about their future.

Compare different options

Higher education fairs are large-scale events, often held in central locations. They provide an excellent opportunity for students to explore a wide range of universities in one place. They'll find university representatives, subject-specific talks, and plenty of information available. They can ask questions and gather details in a relaxed, no-pressure environment.

Your young person won't be expected to make any decisions on the day. Instead, these events can spark ideas, broaden horizons, and help them compare different options. Keep an eye on the UCAS and UK University Search websites for upcoming dates.

Understand the environment

Open days are a fantastic way for students to get a feel for individual universities and whether they might be the right fit. These events typically include campus tours, welcome talks, course-specific presentations, and employability sessions.

Open days also provide the chance to speak directly with current students, who share their honest experiences of university life. Visiting a university in person can give students a much clearer picture of the environment

and facilities, helping them to make a more informed decision. Dates for open days can be found by searching on [UniTasterDays](#).

Explore specific subjects

Taster sessions offer a more in-depth look at specific subjects and how they're taught at different universities. These can take place online or in person. They allow students to explore an academic area in greater detail. For instance, The University of Law offers events like Criminal Investigation Days and Real World Lectures. These events can help students decide if a course or subject area is right for them. Again, you can find these by searching on [UniTasterDays](#).

Speak with staff and students

If you cannot attend an open day, you can attend a campus tour at each university to explore the environment and facilities. Most universities offer this opportunity to parents, carers, and students. You can book directly with the university.

Make a decision

When your young person has submitted their UCAS application, they might be invited to an applicant event. These are more personalised visits, designed to help students explore their chosen course and the university in more detail. They offer the chance to meet potential classmates, explore the campus, and sense whether the place is right for them.

Students will also speak with academic staff and support teams, helping them to understand the teaching style, available support, and future career prospects. Meeting the employability team, for example, can be especially helpful in understanding how the university supports students beyond graduation (page 103).

Attending these events will help your young person decide where they'd thrive at each university. In return, it demonstrates to universities that they are engaged and enthusiastic - something that can strengthen their application.

“These events can spark ideas, broaden horizons, and help them compare different options.”

How to prepare for a university fair

By Stephanie Hartley, UK Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Southampton

Attending a university fair is the best way to gather information about higher education options. As parents, it can connect you to your child's journey. Prepare ahead of time to help you make the most of university fairs. This will leave you feeling better informed and in a stronger position to support your child with their next steps.

There are different types of fair that you can attend with your child. Schools and colleges host events with a smaller, select group of universities. Alternatively, there are larger-scale exhibitions where you will find a bigger range of institutions. Both types require planning ahead of time and have very similar benefits.

Seek clarity

Have an open conversation with your child about what they really want. Being on the same page is crucial. It will ensure you both ask questions that are relevant and useful for their future journey. If there's disparity between what they want and what you want, then attending a fair will cause more confusion for you both. You might leave with more questions than answers.

Gain clarity on their intended subject, whether they desire to move away from home, and the overall experience they want to have. Understanding their wishes before attending a fair is imperative. It will make your day much more enjoyable.

Create lists

Ahead of time, fairs will publish a list of universities in attendance. To prepare, you can create a "target list" of institutions. If your child is unsure about their subject choice, then you could identify one or two universities to visit to spark inspiration.

If your child is set on a specific subject, create a shortlist of the institutions that offer that course to ensure an efficient visit. The university representatives will have invaluable sources of information and expertise for you to access. We like to think so, anyway!

Remember your...

Logistically, here are some top items to take with you.

- Entry tickets – download or print your entry tickets ahead of a large-scale university fair. Keep these tickets handy. Universities might offer to scan them to keep in touch.
- Charged devices – charge your devices in case you need to do further research on the day.
- Bags and backpacks – in an age where everything seems digital, the university sector hasn't got the memo! Printed prospectuses are a wonderful source of information. Websites are useful too, but a stack of physical prospectuses makes it all feel real. They create excitement in students and their parents!



How to prepare for a university open day

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

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

Check entry requirements

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

Prepare your travel

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

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

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

Explore the area

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

Plan your day

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

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

Questions to ask

If your young person isn't sure which questions to ask at their open day, then below are some suggestions to help get them started.

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



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Find out more using the QR code.
This page is updated with events regularly.



My parent story by Fay Harris

CEO of Derbyshire Dales CVS and former Deputy CEO of Keele University Students' Union

1. Who did you support in their university application journey?

I supported my sons. One went to Leeds Conservatoire, then the Royal College of Music for a Masters degree. The second went to Aberdeen. We are supporting the third with shopping for universities now. They had always wanted to study at university. They had grown up on a university campus due to my role at Keele, so they been exposed to higher education for a long time. We were aspirational for them. They just kind of assumed it was the next step.

Our second child toyed with an apprenticeship degree but discounted it once he'd been to some open days. He decided three years of being away from home and experimenting was more for him. The third has seen how the others have used their degrees to begin their desired careers, which has helped his decision.

2. How did they decide what to study?

They were influenced by the subjects they enjoyed and studied at A level. The A-level process helped them decide what they never

wanted to study again! My musical son used to dip out of Maths to go to the music practice rooms. Maths wasn't the right choice for him, in hindsight!

My second son found out the hard way that History wasn't for him. Now, he's studying Neuroscience and Psychology and enjoying it. My third son wants to go into aeronautical engineering. He has done so for a long time, but I have no idea where this came from...

3. How did they decide where to study?

Many universities visited their college. We also supported them to attend open days. We looked at the local town close to the potential choices of university. My third son came along for the ride and watched what was happening.

My first and second sons looked at the course. My third is playing the long game and exploring what he needs to study to get into the profession he wants to enter.

4. Did you attend many open days?

We visited Aberdeen and Sussex and loads more in between. The trip to Aberdeen was fun and expensive. We had to fly because it was on a weekday event requiring time away from our studies and work, so flying helped us travel there and back quickly. Given the distance involved, I wanted a red carpet, glitter, and unicorns on arrival. Sadly, we didn't get this, but there was a piper, sunshine, and barbecue!



Aberdeen demonstrated its ability to make you feel welcome and at home. A lecturer in the grand hall was at great pains to give us time and that personal touch. It had a great feel to it. Leeds Conservatoire did well too. They inspired my son to work hard to get there, so he could receive one-to-one tuition and become absorbed into a creative space.

However, open days are a mixed experience. Some events are organised brilliantly, and others not so much. Some make a fuss of parents, and others ignore them. Some involve the students' union, and others preferred to pretend they don't exist. Some have banks of professors to reassure you about value for money, and others have ill-informed ambassadors in tired high-vis vests, showing you accommodation without knowing the cost. Liverpool wowed us with the Yoko Ono Hall. They impressed us with a joint talk with an elected officer from the students' union and a pro vice-chancellor.

A visit to another university felt like someone forgot there was an open day happening, and the event was put together at the last minute. The tour involved a look into the SU, which was open, but only in the sense the doors weren't locked. That kind of thing sticks in your mind.

Another university was very impressive in terms of scale and kudos, yet failed at marshalling large numbers of visitors. I

think this worried me more than my son, who was impressed by their campus, the lab demonstrations, and the scale of the place.

By the time my third son applies, he will have set a record in how many open days he has attended. He attended the events with his older brothers, and now his own choices. However, it helps to try before you buy.

5. What advice would you give to parents?

Encourage your children to spend time on their personal statements before the deadlines start looming. The summer is the best time, though persuading them to write it then is difficult. However, once September arrives, their workload steps up, and the statement becomes a chore.

Be mindful of application deadlines. Not all of them are at the same time. The Conservatoire process was new to us all. The deadlines and application process were different to the traditional UCAS application process. For instance, it involved submitting a video of how my son played.

Try visiting a university on a day that isn't an open day. It can give you a more authentic picture of what the place is like. Finally, spend time looking at course options. The range is huge. It will pay off if Clearing becomes a thing.

“Try visiting a university on a day that isn't an open day. It can give you a more authentic picture of what the place is like. ”



Prepare for Clearing with our helpful Clearing Guide!

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- ☒ Understand the importance of “knowing your why”
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- ☒ Gain advice from current student, Leah Brooks!



www.UniTasterDays.com/ClearingGuide

Making the most of a university open day

By Jim Calcutt, Head of UK Student Recruitment at the University of Winchester

Sometimes, the old ways are the best! That is certainly the case when deciding on which university to attend. Open days have been a fixture in prospective students' diaries for decades. Even after a brief intermission during the COVID-19 pandemic, they remain the most valuable way to discover the best place to spend three years or more studying.

As a parent, carer, or general supporter, you are essential in making this decision. You are the person rooting for their young person to become the best version of themselves. So, how can they make the most of these days?

Register for newsletters

Before the event starts, many universities have dedicated parent and supporter newsletters. These advertise upcoming events such as open days, and offer a wealth of information, advice, and tips for managing the university process. They can provide invaluable information to prepare you.

Additionally, some universities allow parents and supporters to receive the same event information as the student for events they have signed up for. This way, even if you have a less-than-communicative teenager, you are still in the loop with how the day will look and, most importantly, where you can get the free tea and coffee!

Attend supporter sessions

Alongside the central academic sessions for students, most open days offer specific sessions for parents and supporters to attend. They focus on finance, support, and applying to university. These sessions can give an excellent overview of key steps in the university process, delivered by people who work in these areas daily.

If you cannot attend due to a clash with another session, you also have the option to visit the open day advice fair to ask your questions... which nicely leads to the next point!

Ask questions

In addition to seeing the university and getting a sense of the atmosphere, open days are also a time for you to ask your questions. Staff, academics, and student ambassadors are ready to answer any questions: is it safe? What time does the students' union shut? Where is the closest Nando's?

Universities appreciate that sometimes students are too shy to ask their questions in front of a group of strangers. This is where you come in as a parent or supporter. Stick your hand up and ask away. Will it embarrass them? Yes. But will it make them better informed? Absolutely!

Explore the area

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

Debrief afterwards

By the time you travel home, you may have more questions than answers, but you'll also have a massive stack of additional information and opinions. Use this time to share your thoughts and what you learnt, whilst also allowing your young person to share their feelings.

You'll have your own opinions but keep an open mind. Let them be heard. Hopefully, you'll be as excited as your young person. If not, remember that it's their decision. They may have seen or felt something different to you.

Some of my fondest memories with my mum are when we travelled from our home in Margate up and down the M25 (and beyond) to look around universities. Her companionship and support allowed a nervous and anxious teenager to better themselves through education.

Your role as a parent, carer, or supporter is indispensable. Attending open days alongside your young person will provide an excellent chance to be a part of this life-changing opportunity in their lives.



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Please scan this QR code to attend our next Parents and Supporters Webinar – supporting your young person navigate applying to University.



Accessing university events on a budget

By Sarah White, Regional Student Recruitment Manager at the University of Gloucestershire

University events like open days, offer holder days, exhibitions, subject tasters, and residential are an important way to explore options and get a feel for student life. Best of all, there are plenty of ways to take part without breaking the bank. Here are some simple, budget-friendly tips to help you and your child make the most of every opportunity.

Attend school-organised trips

Encourage your child to attend university visits organised through their school or college. These trips often include subject tasters and a chance to look around campus, often at little cost or free. Many universities help cover the cost of coach travel too, so it's an easy and affordable way to visit.

If your child's school is hosting a careers fair or higher education event, make sure they go along. Some events are open to parents and carers, giving you the chance to join the conversation, offer support, and help your child connect with the right people.

Explore your local options

Visiting a nearby university can save both time and money. Even if your child is planning to move away, exploring local campuses offers a helpful comparison and could open up options they hadn't considered. With the rising cost of living, more students are choosing to stay

closer to home. You might be surprised by what your local university has to offer.

Lift share and travel smart

Whether you're doing the driving, or your child is heading off with friends, sharing lifts is an efficient way to keep costs down. If others at school or college are attending the same event, why not suggest setting up a car share? It will spread the cost and make the journey more fun.

Some universities offer travel bursaries for open days and offer holder days. You can search for these using the new [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#). Check university websites, hold onto any receipts, and don't be afraid to ask about support. Many universities have funding set aside to help students who might otherwise miss out.

Save on snacks

Open days are long, so staying fuelled matters. Check ahead to see if the university offers free refreshments or lunch on the day. If not, campus cafés and the students' union are great spots for affordable food. Student ambassadors will happily point you to their favourite budget-friendly places. Bringing your own food is always a good shout too. It saves money, avoids queues, and gives you more time to explore.

Visit virtually

Nothing beats being there in person, but online experiences are better than ever (page 55). Many universities offer virtual tours, online open days, and real student stories through social media. Register for mailing lists to stay in the loop and access everything from video walk-throughs to subject Q&As.

 [UniTasterDays.com](https://www.UniTasterDays.com)

Do you need financial support to attend an open day?

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Search for event incentives at www.UniTasterDays.com/EventIncentives



Advice for attending an online university event

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

Attending every university open day on your child's shortlist is costly, both in money and time. This is why many universities offer online events, allowing students to find out more about their courses and facilities. These events take many formats and can help you decide which universities to visit in person.

Types of events

- Online chats – your child can begin an online chat with staff or students studying their course.
- Taster lectures – hosted by academic staff, these help your child get a feel for their teaching style.
- Information sessions – these range from support-based sessions, such as applying for finance, to course information sessions, with information about course structure from an academic or student.
- Parent and carer sessions – dedicated sessions for you, so please come with questions.

Narrowing down

The two big flagship events hosted on university campuses are open days (pre-application) and applicant days (post-application). It's important for your child to see where they could study in person before they decide their firm choice. However, online events will help narrow down their options.

In the pre-application stage, online events are a good way to discover more about a course and get a feel for the staff. If this makes your child want to apply for that university, they could later attend an in-person applicant day. In the post-application stage, if they have already visited in person, then an online event could help them decide between their five choices. The event could remind them of a key factor that helps them to decide their firm and insurance choices.

What to do at online events

You can attend an online event with your child. Treat these events like an in-person event, with a few additional checks:

- Download if required – often you can view events in your browser, but sometimes it's best to download the platform app in advance, such as Teams or Zoom.
- Prepare questions – these could be asked live or using the chat function. Don't be afraid to ask. Our job is to provide advice and guidance to ensure all questions are answered.
- Improve connectivity – limit how many devices are using your Wi-Fi network. This could slow down speeds. Remember, even some microwaves and washing machines are internet-enabled.
- Access the recording – taking notes is important, even if the session is being recorded. However, make sure you obtain the recording, so you can rewatch anything you might have missed.

Online events are an important tool in your young person's journey to university. They provide advice and guidance to help them decide where to visit in person, and they contribute to an informed choice about where to study. Much like an in-person event, your parental support at online events is just as important.



Top questions to ask at university fairs

By Matt Spink, Graduate Student Recruitment Assistant at the University of Salford

As a parent, carer, or guardian, you want your children to make the right choice when it comes to university. With thousands of options available in the UK alone, it can be daunting to make a final decision. Luckily, there are plenty of opportunities for your young people to engage with universities at higher education fairs.

These events are vital opportunities for them to speak to university staff and ask questions. This article will get you started with a few suggested questions.

Q1 - Does the university offer the course?

This is the most important question. Every following question wouldn't matter if you don't get the right answer to this one. Not all institutions will offer the course that your young person wants to study. Sometimes, a course is so niche that only a few universities offer it.

Also, two institutions could offer a course with the same name, but the content could differ vastly. As such, your young person needs to consider which topics they want to study. Starting those conversations early will ensure they find a course that truly interests them.

Q2 - How are students assessed?

Like course content, assessment methods differ from one institution to the next. You'll find compulsory exams, coursework-heavy

modules, and practical or performance-led assessments. Your young person might prefer one method over another, so they should ask their shortlisted universities if they align with their preferences.

Q3 - Where is the university?

The location of a university isn't always obvious, but it's an important consideration (page 40). Does your young person want to live far away or stay local? Do they want to live in a city or a seaside town? Is it easy to travel to and from? The simple question of location can tick another box on their preference list.

Q4 - What are your accommodation options?

The question about location offers a natural segue to accommodation options. If your young person is looking to move out, then accommodation could be a deciding factor. Do they prefer ensuite or shared bathrooms? Self-catered or catered? On-campus or off-campus?

Affordability is another huge factor to consider. Staff members at a higher education fair might not have specific pricing, but they can provide a ball-park price for their accommodation options.

Q5 - How can I help digest this information?

The last question is one for you to ask. Your young person will gather a wealth of information from multiple institutions. Now it's time to use that information to narrow down their options. Naturally, more questions will start to form, but that's a good thing. There will be more opportunities to speak to the universities that begin to stand out from the rest.



My advice for parents by Jerry Ndi

International Finance and Economics student at Queen Mary University of London



It takes a village to do just about anything. The face-value university experience is felt by the student, but the journey to get there is heavily influenced by the people around them.

As parents and supporters, you should enter conversations about university early in the process. To help you, UniTasterDays produces this Parents' Guide every year. It's an honest guide providing everything you should know to help steer your kids during this crucial life transition.

I'm Jerry Ndi, a second-year student at Queen Mary University of London, studying Economics and International Finance. I'm also an incoming Compliance Associate Intern at Mobilize Financial Services and founder of the eLearning platform, Super PE Online.

Now let's rewind.

Although I'm a second-gen university student, the application process still felt like stepping into the unknown. My biggest support system was Mr Wong, my sixth form tutor. That man deserves to have his cake and eat it. He guided my entire UCAS journey, proofread my personal statement like an annoying hawk, and reminded me I was more than good enough, even when I faced difficulties.

My parents were right there too. Not in the let-me-fill-out-your-form way, but in the we-believe-in-you way. They offered emotional support, helped with proofreading, and - like every good African parent - made sure I never missed a deadline.

Growing up, the pressure to go to university and land a "good, stable job" wasn't just encouraged. It was practically woven into my DNA. This pressure drives me, but if I'm honest, it also feeds into imposter syndrome. The fear of not being enough. The fear of failing everyone who's rooting for you.

So, this is the advice I'd offer to parents supporting their own children through university:

- Support doesn't mean control - let your child steer, but be their compass.
- Get involved, even if quietly - a lift to an open day, a chat after a long revision night, these things matter.
- Validate the pressure, then balance it - acknowledge their stress, and remind them that self-worth isn't tied to a grade or a degree.
- Celebrate the wins - big or small, each milestone is part of them becoming themselves. My dad made a habit of buying me a brand-new pen for every exam I sat, even though I already had plenty of pens. It was a little gesture, but it felt special. It really is the little things.

University is a whole new world: academically, socially, emotionally. Behind every successful student is someone who believed in them when they didn't believe in themselves.

Be that someone. And never underestimate the power of just being there.

“Support doesn't mean control - let your child steer, but be their compass,,



Jerry is one of the hosts of The Uni Guide Podcast. Listen to over 40 episodes offering valuable insights into applying to university.

Note from  **UniTasterDays**
This student finance information has been kindly provided by Martin Lewis for you to share with your children.

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 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 2028 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 unsaid 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 at www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/university-living-costs-calculator/ 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/students/student-loans-england-plan-5/.

Other important student guides to read:

- How to budget as a student: www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-budgeting-planner/
- Best student bank accounts: www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-bank-account/
- Student checklist: www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-guide/



University scholarships and bursaries

By Scott Mahoney, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of South Wales

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

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

Scholarships vs bursaries

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

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

Potential and performance

The key message to share with your child is this: scholarships and bursaries aren't just about rewarding achievement. Many are aimed at recognising potential and increasing access to higher education.

There may be support available for those who have:

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

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

Finding scholarships and bursaries

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

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



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Scholarships: finding financial opportunities and standing out in applications

By Jon Hering, Head of Commercial at Blackbullion

We understand that helping a young person prepare for university can be exciting, but it also comes with financial pressures. With tuition fees set to increase in September 2025, combined with the ongoing cost of living crisis and inflation, families are feeling the strain more than ever. For many, the maintenance loan no longer stretches far enough.

That is where extra funding can make a real difference.

At Blackbullion, we have helped release over £25 million in additional funding through grants, bursaries, hardship funds, and scholarships, all accessible through our Funding Hub. Since launching our first corporate scholarship in April 2023, we have partnered with organisations such as Amazon, Nationwide, and Accenture to help students manage the financial realities of higher education.

While more opportunities are now available, scholarships are still competitive. This guide

is here to help you, as a parent or supporter, understand how the system works and how you can help your young person boost their chances of success.

Key times for scholarship applications

Knowing when to expect scholarships to open can help your young person stay ahead of the curve:

- **March** – National Scholarships Week is hosted by Blackbullion. The 2025 event, hosted in partnership with Amazon, saw Blackbullion release over £1.1 million in new scholarships.
- **April** – a key period for scholarship launches, so encourage your young person to prepare applications in early Spring.
- **September** – brings a second wave of opportunities with the start of the new academic year.

Scholarships as a gateway to careers

Scholarships often include more than just financial support. Many offer internships, mentoring, and career opportunities. These extras can be incredibly valuable in helping your young person develop skills, gain experience, and begin building their professional network.

Encourage them to apply for scholarships that align with their career goals, as these opportunities can be just as important as the funding itself.



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.



Scholarships vs bursaries

The scholarship marketplace remains fragmented, but there are more tools than ever to help. You can search directly through universities or by using a scholarships aggregator like Blackbullion's Funding Hub, The Scholarship Hub, and the British Council.

As parents and supporters, you should also be aware of 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.



Quick tip – sign up for newsletters or alerts from scholarship websites. These can help you and your young person stay on top of deadlines and new openings.

Increasing their chances for success

We work with scholarship providers from both higher education institutions and the private sector, and they consistently tell us that strong applications are personal and heartfelt. Funders want to know more than just grades. They want to know why someone is applying and what impact the funding will have on their future.

Encourage your young person to:

- Share their story – talk about their background, personal challenges and ambitions.
- Connect their goals to their chosen subject – show how the degree fits into their career aspirations.
- Tailor each application – show they have researched the funder and understand the organisation's mission and values.

Be prepared with evidence

Many scholarships require proof of financial need. To avoid delays, make sure your young person has the following ready:

- A Student Loans Company Entitlement Letter
- A university offer letter, whether conditional or unconditional

Being organised can make the application process smoother and far less stressful.

There are many students and, unfortunately, a limited number of opportunities. The best way to improve the odds is to apply widely. Encourage your young person to explore every option and submit multiple applications.

Supporting them through this process can make a real difference, not only in securing funding but also in building confidence and setting them up for long-term success.



CAUTION: *Scholarship reviewers can usually spot when AI-generated responses have been copied and pasted. Tools such as ChatGPT can help shape ideas, but it is important that the final application is written in your young person's own voice. We have guidance available on our website to support with this. [Read our AI guidance.](#)*



The NHS Learning Support Fund

By Teri Garfitt, Money Advice Manager at the University of Gloucestershire

Choosing a career in healthcare is more than a degree decision. It's a commitment to helping others and making a difference. Funding can play a big part in making that journey possible for many students.

That's why we're here to help you navigate the NHS Learning Support Fund (LSF). The LSF is a financial support package designed to ease financial pressure to let you focus on what matters most: your studies, placements, and future career.

What is the LSF?

The LSF is a non-repayable financial package available to eligible students studying full-time allied health courses. It's offered by the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) to support students with the cost of living and studying in England.

If you're starting an eligible course in September 2025 or January 2026, and you usually live in the UK, you may be eligible to apply.

LSF support

Eligible students can access a range of support:

- Training Grant – £5,000 per academic year, or a pro-rata amount for part-time students.
- Parental Support – £2,000 per academic year for students with dependent children under 15 years old, or under 17 if registered with special educational needs.
- Specialist Subject Payment – £1,000 per year for students on courses in shortage areas.
- Exceptional Support Fund – Up to £3,000 per academic year for students experiencing financial hardship who may have exhausted all other funds, such as any financial assistance funds through their university.

This is all in addition to core support from Student Finance England:

- Tuition Fee Loans
- Maintenance Loans
- Dependants' Grants
- Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

Students from other parts of the UK will need to apply through their relevant national funding body, such as Student Finance Wales, SAAS (Scotland), or Student Finance Northern Ireland.

Applying for the LSF

Applications for the LSF are made directly through the NHSBSA website. You'll need to create an account, provide relevant documentation, and reapply for each academic year. It's best to apply early to make sure funding is in place for when you start.

Courses eligible for the LSF

- 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
- Orthoptics
- Orthotics and prosthetics
- Paramedic science – except DipHE and FD courses
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry or chiropody
- Radiography – diagnostic and therapeutic
- Speech and language therapy

Social Work isn't covered by the LSF, but students can apply for the Social Work Bursary (SWB) through NHSBSA.

Support for the LSF

Universities have dedicated specialist finance advice teams to help you understand your next steps. For instance, at the University of Gloucestershire, our Money Advice Team will support students through every stage of the application. This includes understanding eligibility, gathering documents, and applying for wider support. We're here to make sure financial challenges don't stand in the way of your future.

My supporter story by Jess Wood

**Schools and Colleges Liaison Executive at
Nottingham Trent University**

1. Who did you support in their university application journey?

I supported my younger sister with her decision to go to university. She didn't always want to study at university. It was something she was encouraged to do as she advanced through secondary school. Much like me, she didn't know university was an accessible option because we were the first in our family to complete A-levels and consider university.

2. How did they decide what to study?

In her earlier years of school, my sister really excelled within STEM subjects, particularly maths, but found a real interest in law when given the choice to study this at A-level. Her final university choices were between Biosciences and Law. She eventually chose Law because she has an analytical mind and a hunger for justice, plus her interest in the topic made her excited to explore the subject further.

3. How did they decide where to study?

My sister was really open-minded. Narrowing down her final choices was hard, but she was certain she wanted to move away from home. Her school suggested Oxbridge. They offered their full support with her application, and it became a no-brainer for her.

I particularly supported this decision because I didn't receive the same encouragement from my own teachers. I know that dual support from home and school can be invaluable.

Eventually, she went with the place where she felt the most comfortable. It wasn't too far away from home. She was with people who were likeminded and from similar backgrounds. It was also somewhere with societies where she could continue her love for STEM.

4. Did you attend many open days?

Yes, open days are so valuable. In my profession, we constantly tell students about the importance of open days. I had to attend open days on my own. Even then, I didn't quite understand how important they were until I had 'the feeling' which confirmed my choice was correct. Together, we attended as many open days as she needed until she was certain.

5. What advice would you give to parents and supporters?

Be patient, encouraging, and involved. It helped my sister to have someone actively encouraging open days, planning the days, and assisting with research about the types of available courses.

Often, students consider a course within the general school curriculum, without understanding the breadth of courses out there. Help explore course options beyond what the student already knows, including course content, accreditation, and career prospects.

Equally, support your young people at open days. Even if you have different views on their choices, stay supportive and respectful of their decisions. This helps build trust in their own decision-making process.



The Disabled Students' Allowance

By Caitlin Shaw, Education Liaison Assistant at Edge Hill University

As your young person embarks on their journey to higher education, they may have concerns about how they'll be supported during their studies. Universities are committed to ensuring the success of their students and recognise potential barriers in learning.

While the transition to higher education is a significant change for your young person, it's important to understand the extensive support available to them while studying, including the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

What is the DSA?

The Disabled Students' Allowance is a government-funded support scheme designed to assist students with learning difficulties, mental health issues, and disabilities by covering the additional costs of studying in higher education.

Unlike Student Finance, this support scheme is tailored to individual needs and the cost of support doesn't need to be repaid. DSA promotes inclusivity within higher education, ensuring that students can engage in university life and achieve their full potential.

DSA eligibility

The DSA supports students who have:

- specific learning difficulties – for example, dyslexia or ADHD
- mental health conditions – for example, anxiety or depression
- physical disabilities – for example, if you use a wheelchair or a special keyboard
- sensory disabilities – for example, if you're visually impaired, deaf, or have a hearing impairment
- long-term health conditions – for example, cancer or chronic heart disease.

DSA support

Students beginning their undergraduate or postgraduate studies in 2025 can get up to £27,783 to cover costs of:

- specialist equipment – for example, a computer or assistance software required because of your disability
- non-medical helpers – for example, a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter or specialist note taker
- extra travel to attend your course or placement because of your disability
- other disability-related study support – for example, having to print additional copies of documents for proof-reading.

DSA application process

To apply for DSA, your young person needs to:

1. **Apply for Student Finance** – they can apply for DSA as part of their Student Finance application. If they haven't applied for student finance because they don't need it, they can complete a DSA1 form to apply solely for the DSA. This can be found on the Government website.
2. **Submit evidence of disability** – your student will need to provide medical evidence of their disability. This could be a letter from a doctor, psychologist, or other health professional.
3. **Attend a study needs assessment** – once DSA eligibility is confirmed, your young person will attend a study needs assessment. A professional will discuss the support required to meet their specific needs. After the assessment, your student will receive a personalised support package. The funding will be used for necessary resources and services.

As a parent or carer, you can find out more about student support directly through each university.

“This support scheme is tailored to individual needs and the cost of support doesn't need to be repaid.”



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Managing your money at university

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

Working out a realistic budget can reduce anxiety for both students and their parents and carers. However, it's important that students understand their financial limits. This means taking responsibility for planning, so they are clear on spending limits and if they might need to find extra income. To best support your student to make wise financial decisions, these are the key factors to consider.

Income

Firstly, work out what income is available. Students will be eligible for student finance (page 58). The tuition fee loan goes straight to the university. The maintenance loan is paid to the student for living expenses. For many students, expected outgoings will exceed the maintenance loan, so planning how to meet the shortfall is essential. Additional opportunities for income could include:

- savings
- work placements
- parental contribution
- part-time work (page 70)
- grants, scholarships, and bursaries.

Student maintenance loans are usually paid at the start of term, or monthly in Scotland, so it's important for students to learn to manage their budget quickly.

Outgoings

Secondly, list outgoings and allocate a realistic spend against each item. Budgeting apps can make it easier to track:

- food
- laundry
- clothing
- mobile phones
- commuting costs
- books and equipment
- socialising and activities
- accommodation and bills.

Accommodation is often the biggest outgoing, but travel costs soon add up for students living

at home. Work out how much is needed for the essentials, then check what budget is available for extras. Remember, some weeks will be more expensive, such as Freshers Week, and other weeks will be less expensive, such as exam time.

Savvy spending

Making small changes and spending wisely can create significant savings over a term. Investigate:

- travel cards
- student discounts
- batch cooking meals
- making a packed lunch
- carrying a reusable water bottle and cup
- discount supermarkets and reduced "yellow label" items
- borrowing or purchasing preloved books and clothes
- university initiatives: kitchen equipment recycling, free laptop schemes, free campus events and food.

Socialising, making new friends, and trying different activities is an important aspect of university life. There are loads of options for the budget conscious. Explore:

- student societies for cheap events – also, a great way to meet new people
- websites such as UNiDAYS and Student Beans for discounts.

Staying in control

Debt is expensive. Avoid penalties by keeping tracking of finances. Consider:

- student bank account incentives and benefits
- pre-arranged free overdrafts to avoid fees
- reviewing subscriptions
- keeping credit cards for emergencies only
- avoiding payment schemes where costs can rise unexpectedly.

Universities have support services available to provide advice to students facing financial difficulties. If your young person is worried about finance, they should contact their student wellbeing team. Universities may have a hardship fund for exceptional cases in an emergency.

Budgeting may seem boring and stressful for your young people. However, begin this dialogue early, and prepare a realistic budget together to avoid worry further down the line.

Part-time work opportunities at university

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

Studying full-time and working part-time is absolutely possible. Your young people just need to plan their time carefully and have a schedule in place. I hope that this article will give you and your young people an insight into the available opportunities.

On campus

On campus jobs help students earn whilst they learn. That could even tie into their subject area. Your young person could become a student ambassador, which offers valuable flexibility and variation. Student ambassadors assist with open days, campus tours, subject taster days, and get involved with talks about university life.

There are other job opportunities on campus too. Students can create social media content, help with subject-specific tasks, support with office administration, or work for their students' union in a wide variety of roles.

Off campus

Off campus part-time work could be available within local retail, hospitality, leisure, or tourism companies. For instance, surrounding Southampton Solent, there are

shops, bars, restaurants, leisure clubs, and theatres where students find part-time work alongside their studies.

Within their search, your young person should check the work is student friendly. They should only agree to manageable hours and the job should be flexible around their studies, especially busy exam periods.

Benefits of part-time work

Part-time work gives your young person an extra bit of financial support, and it's a brilliant addition to their CV. It's a chance for them to develop skills that are crucial for their employment.

I worked part-time whilst studying for my undergraduate degree. It was a welcome mental break away from my studies. At the same time, I earned money for social activities during the month.

Finding part-time work

Your young person can research part-time work options ahead of time, even if they're unsure which university they'll be attending. If attending an open day, they could seek advice from current students.

Equally, they can contact their university careers teams to learn about on and off-campus opportunities. Every university has a careers support service. For example, Southampton Solent's team is called Solent Careers. They offer help with job application forms, creating a strong CV, and where to look for work opportunities.



Saving money with student discount cards

By Lucy Pickering, Engagement Officer at the University of Wolverhampton

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 for your young person, especially on a student budget.

Student discounts can help them alleviate some of this financial pressure. They provide exclusive savings on products and services, which allows them 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 your young person can update their 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. When registering, your young person will need to enter their university institution to verify their student status alongside their personal information. Once done, this allows them access to hundreds of offers.

Physical student discounts

TOTUM (previously named NUS Extra) is a physical card that allows your young person access to student discounts in store 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 they 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. Your young person should always ask if a discount is available. For example, many bus services offer discounted rates when students show their 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 get the most from student discounts. Your young person should:

- keep discount apps updated on their phone, such as Student Beans and UNiDAYS
- carry physical cards with them, such as their student ID or TOTUM card, so they 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, therefore having them all will maximise saving opportunities!



Understanding the admissions and offer making process

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

Being well-informed about the admissions process is a vital part of supporting your young person's university choices. As with all elements of the application, checking specific university policies is key, but here are some things to consider during your research.

Contextual offers

To ensure that the application process is fair and accessible, universities provide contextual offers to eligible students (page 84). These usually result in a lower offer than their standard entry requirements. Universities publish their contextual offer policies online. They provide advice and guidance about their eligibility criteria and how contextual offers could support suitable students.

Subject-specific requirements

Some courses require students to meet minimum subject requirements to be accepted. For example, Medicine usually requires A-levels in Chemistry and Biology. It also has minimum requirements for GCSE subjects, such as English Language and Maths. Check the entry requirements for courses that your young person is interested in. These need to be achievable to be eligible for an offer.

Alternative offers

If your young person has certain qualifications, such as the EPQ or Core Maths, then they might receive an alternative offer. This recognises the additional knowledge gained by undertaking these qualifications. This approach varies between universities, so ask how they regard

these qualifications. It can result in students being given more flexibility on results day if they narrowly miss their offer.

Extenuating circumstances

Universities are notified about extenuating circumstances in the UCAS teacher reference. However, additional circumstances can arise after applying through UCAS. If this occurs, you can submit an extenuating circumstances form to each university. This allows your young person – or anyone connected to them, such as yourself or their teachers – to share additional circumstances that might have affected their learning.

Offer timelines

Universities start making offers in early Autumn. However, your young person might not receive an offer for several months. Speed of response will depend on their subject choice, overall demand for places, and the strategies used to manage cohort numbers.

For instance, universities may operate a 'gathered field' approach for high-demand courses like Psychology. This means the university will review all applications received between September and January, but only after the equal consideration deadline has passed in January.

Emails are important

Offers from universities are communicated through the UCAS Hub. However, universities may contact applicants directly if they need additional details which cannot fit into the UCAS offer text box. For this reason, your young person should frequently check the email address they provided on their UCAS application.

Remember, all universities have admissions contact details on their website. Please get in touch if you have any questions.

“Speed of response will depend on their subject choice, overall demand for places, and the strategies used to manage cohort numbers.”

Discover University for Parents and Supporters

We understand how important it is for parents and supporters to be well equipped to support their young person's journey to higher education. Our dedicated Discover University webpages, newsletters and social media feeds will provide the key information needed at each stage of the journey.

We host online webinars throughout the year specifically for supporters covering topics such as financing higher education, applying to university, making the most of an open day and becoming a student.



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How pre-16 and post-16 choices can affect university options

By Maya Patel, Recruitment Officer (Schools and Colleges) at Brunel University of London

When it comes to applying for university, many students focus on post-16 choices, such as A-levels or vocational qualifications. However, pre-16 choices can also have a lasting impact on their future university application. From subject selection to academic performance, both stages of education play a crucial role in shaping the higher education options available for your young person.

Contextual offers

The academic journey begins before sixth form or college. In the UK, students typically choose their GCSE subjects (or equivalent) in Year 9. These decisions can significantly influence what they can study later.

Universities often have specific-subject requirements for certain degree courses. For example, if your young person wants to study Medicine, most universities require strong GCSE grades in Maths, English, and Science. Some even require top grades, such as 7-9. A poor performance in their GCSEs can limit their university options, and also their post-16 options.

In addition, competitive courses like Law, Engineering, or Dentistry will often consider overall academic profile, which includes GCSE results. Universities use this to assess consistency and academic potential, particularly when many applicants have similar predicted A-level grades.

Post-16 choices

Once your young person has finished GCSEs, the subjects and qualifications they choose are

even more critical. Universities often specify required A-levels or equivalent qualifications for entry into particular courses. For instance, engineering degrees typically require Maths and Physics, while Psychology might need Biology or another science subject.

If your young person is considering a competitive course - such as Medicine, Law, or courses at Oxbridge - then their post-16 choices can open the door or close it. Leading universities often have strong preferences for traditional A-level subjects. They might not consider new or vocational subjects as favourably.

Additionally, the type of qualification matters. While A-levels are the standard academic route, alternatives such as BTECs or T Levels can also lead to university. However, some universities and courses might not accept them or require them to be combined with other qualifications. Check the entry requirements early and plan accordingly.

Strategic planning

To keep university options open, your young person should start planning as early as Year 9. Choosing a broad range of strong subjects at GCSE gives them flexibility at A-level, which expands their university choices.

Speak with teachers and career advisers, and investigate university websites to uncover their entry requirements. It's also helpful to explore courses that interest your young person, and reverse-engineer the steps needed to qualify.

Open the door

The journey to university doesn't start at 18. It begins with the academic and subject choices your young person makes many years earlier. By understanding how pre-16 and post-16 decisions shape their path, you can help them make informed choices that align with their long-term goals. In doing so, you'll keep the doors to higher education wide open.

“To keep university options open, your young person should start planning as early as Year 9.”

The 2026 changes to personal statements

By Nia Stokes, Student Recruitment Officer, Swansea University

A personal statement is a key part of a student's application process when applying to university. It allows them to explain directly to admissions tutors why they're a good fit for their chosen course. The format of the personal statement is changing for September 2026 entry, with the aim of making it less daunting for applicants.

Whether you've had previous experience with personal statements, or this is your first time helping a child through their application, this article will give you the tools to understand and support your student with the new personal statement format.

The personal statement was previously a long essay. It's now split into three sections, each with their own question. Each section must have a minimum of 350 characters, while the whole statement can have a maximum of 4000 characters overall. Students must choose how to balance this across each section.

Students should see this new format as a scaffolding to showcase their personal qualities, skills, and passions. To help, this article offers a breakdown of talking points for each section.



Section 1: Why do you want to study this course or subject?

- Talk about motivations – reference a key role model or moment in your child's life, or something that has led them to choose their course.
- Show subject knowledge – discuss topics that interest them, evidenced with books, podcasts, documentaries, webinar attendance, and school trips.
- Mention future plans – share career goals for their future profession, or what's important to their future more generally, and how the course helps achieve that.



Section 2: How have your qualifications and studies helped you prepare for this course or subject?

- Describe current studies in relation to the course – focus on specific modules, and even link these to the university's degree syllabus.
- Share transferable skills – demonstrate core skills gained from school subjects, personal strengths, and extra activities like the Extended Project or Welsh Baccalaureate.
- Include relevant educational achievements – discuss winning a competition, being a member of council, acting as team captain, or taking a lead role.



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

- Showcase work experience, employment, or volunteering opportunities – this can be from outside the subject area provided they mention relevant skills.
- Hobbies or extra-curricular activities – consider sports, reading, playing an instrument, joining cadets, and relevant trips.
- Mention personal life experiences or responsibilities – for instance, caring for family, challenging circumstances, anything they've overcome personally and how it's impacted them.
- Share gap year plans or past experiences – include details of what they've been doing leading up to university and how this links to their future studies.

Some points may overlap across the sections, but it's important that your young person doesn't repeat themselves. The statement is viewed as a whole, not as individual sections, so the character count must be used wisely. Finally, advise your young person to use a PEEL or STAR framework to evidence their points. This will add more depth and context than simply listing subjects and grades.

Writing an outstanding personal statement

By Natasha Parker-Wood, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Huddersfield

Personal statements are a chance for students to shout about their experiences and skills, whilst standing out from other applicants. This article offers tips and techniques to help you support your young person through drafting and enhancing their statement.

Get everything down

Students find it difficult to reflect on their experiences. Writing down everything they have done can help them gain confidence in their experiences before tackling their statement. Even if something doesn't appear directly related to their course, they can speak about the transferable skills gained.

Capture everything: sports, hobbies, awards, school responsibilities, jobs, musical instruments, online courses, languages, volunteering, school projects, and trips. Get it all down!

Start to structure

Personal statements are split into 3 sections:

1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?
2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

Ask your young person to divide their list of written experiences into these three sections, speaking about each experience only once. Use each section as a chance to reveal fresh ideas and skills.

Students don't have to write these questions in order. If you find your young person struggles with question 1, start with another question instead.

Remember, students have a total of 4000 characters (including spaces) for their personal statement. This is spread between the 3 questions. Help your young person to write concisely.

Question 1 - Why this course?

This section focuses on their motivation for studying the course, their knowledge in the area, and how the degree will fit into their future plans.

Universities want to see that students have researched the course. Sharing education activities outside of the curriculum is essential: reading books and articles, listening to podcasts, watching TED talks and lectures, attending summer schools, entering competitions, and completing online courses.

Equally, students should speak about their future. This could be a specific profession the degree will launch them into, or how the knowledge gained from the course will help them achieve their goal.

Question 2 and 3 - The ABC structure

The ABC structure is handy for structuring experiences and offering the right amount of detail:

- Action – the activity or action – such as volunteering or a school project
- Benefit – the skills gained from the action – such as teamwork or leadership
- Course - how this links to their chosen course.

For experiences not directly linked to the course, your young person can talk about how it prepares them for university study instead.

Keep refining

Remind your young person that their statement won't be perfect at first. They will need to refine their work over multiple drafts. This can take weeks and months, so starting early is a priority!



Learn more on episode 36 of The Uni Guide Podcast.

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Qualifications accepted by universities

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

Entry requirements sit at the core of every university application. For most UK applicants, each university course will require GCSEs and A Levels. However, there are many more qualifications and options to suit applicants from every walk of life, and universities are becoming aware of the value they represent.

It's easy to overlook the importance of GCSEs in a university application, but these grades are vital in determining eligibility for many university degrees (page 74). Requirements are given on university and UCAS webpages. Typically, they require GCSE English Language, and sometimes Maths, Science, or a Modern Language depending on the course.

However, universities may accept alternatives, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Equally, every university will accept equivalents for mixed or non-UK qualifications.

Level 3 qualifications are even more diverse. These include BTECs, Access to Higher Education Diplomas, the International Baccalaureate, T-levels, and more. Applicants may even choose to study a mixture of qualifications, with the most common combinations being BTEC and A-level courses.

Universities list some of these accepted Level 3 qualifications on their course webpages alongside A-levels, complete with equivalencies for subject requirements. For instance, they

might require a certain number of modules, and a grade or score achieved or predicted in a particular module (such as Mathematics for an Economics degree).

Many institutions have bespoke webpages with a longer list of accepted qualifications, including equivalencies for grades, scores, and UCAS points if the university uses them. If a qualification is considered in a specific way, the university will make this clear: for example, "AAT Level 3 NVQ is considered equivalent to grade A at A-level."

Universities set their own entry requirements, including accepted qualification types, and review these between application cycles. Your young person should make their choices based on up-to-date information.

Certain universities or courses might not accept a particular qualification type. They may require additional study to meet subject requirements. For example, a BMBS Medicine programme may require BTEC candidates to sit A-levels in science. Equally, they might only accept applications from specific Access to HE Diplomas.

Sometimes, finding all the necessary information isn't possible on one's own. Some candidates have complex circumstances and educational histories. Others have a particularly varied mix of qualifications. As such, they may struggle to understand specific eligibility requirements, or how the terms of their offer are expressed.

University admissions teams are accessible experts in their own institution's policies. Their contact information is listed on relevant webpages. This allows your young people and their nominated contacts (such as yourselves as their parents and supporters) to seek bespoke, individual answers to their questions.

“It's easy to overlook the importance of GCSEs in a university application, but these grades are vital in determining eligibility for many university degrees.”

Preparing a portfolio for a creative course

By Rachel Lamb, Course Leader and Academic Lead, Living CV, at Southampton Solent University

A portfolio is the best chance for your young person to shine if they are applying for a creative degree at university. It's a collection of their best work. It gives universities like Southampton Solent a real sense of what they can do, and what they're passionate about.

Don't worry if it sounds a bit daunting. This article offers a simple guide to help you support your young person in putting together something fantastic.

What is a creative portfolio?

Think about it like this: your young person's grades show what they've learned, but their portfolio shows them. It lets tutors see their skills, ideas, and their unique way of looking at things. It's their visual story.

The best portfolios show a range of your young person's abilities and interests. It should include a mix of finished pieces, sketchbook or development work, and any personal projects that showcase their ability and passion. Finished work for fashion courses could be garment designs, photoshoots, or brand campaigns. For art, include paintings, sculptures, or drawings. For media, try short films, photography series, or graphic design work.

Show the creative process

And they shouldn't just show the outcome. Universities love to see how your young person reached their final artefacts. They should

include sketches, initial ideas, experiments with materials, and notes. This shows their working process.

Your young person should show different techniques and approaches in their creative portfolio. If they're into fashion, they could include both design sketches and textile work. If they're into media, they could show a mix of video and photography.

Equally, creative portfolios are always enhanced if the student has worked on something just because they wanted to. Passion projects can really make a portfolio stand out.

Making a portfolio shine

- **Quality over quantity** – ten strong pieces are much better than twenty okay ones. Your young person should choose their absolute best work.
- **Presentation matters** – how they present their portfolio is important. If it's physical, it should be neat and well-organised. If it's digital, the layout should be clear and easy to navigate.
- **Tell their story** – for each piece, your young person should add a sentence or two explaining what it is and why they included it. This gives context to their work.
- **Get feedback** – they should ask teachers and creative friends (and even yourself as a parent) to look at their portfolio before submitting. Fresh eyes can spot things they might have missed.

Preparing a portfolio is an exciting part of applying to university. It's a chance for your young person to really express themselves and show their chosen universities what makes them a unique creative talent. Good luck!



My parent story by Philippa Dobrée-Carey

Founder of [FromHighSchoolToUni.com](https://www.fromhighschooltouni.com)

Navigating the university application process as a parent is like sitting in the passenger seat while your child is learning to drive. The L-plates are on, they're swotting up on the theory, but they lack practical experience.

Schools rightly focus their guidance on students, as this is their journey. However, parents are often left in the dark, with maybe a brief mention in the school newsletter. Meanwhile, between coursework, exams, and revision, students must also research courses, write personal statements, and attend open days.

As a parent who has been through this transition – and as someone now helping others to navigate it – I want to share my experience and some hard-earned wisdom.

1. Who did you support?

When my daughter got a place at the University of Bath in 2018, I had no idea how to help her prepare, what to pack, or how much money she would need. I never had a traditional university experience myself, having gone to a local college while waiting for a commission in the

Royal Navy. She was effectively a first-in-family student (page 7) who would live on campus, so we figured things out together.

Her international school provided strong application support, including guidance sessions with counsellors, university fairs, and personal statement reviews. Their process was rigorous and effective, so I didn't need to be heavily involved. However, even with this valuable support, I had to step in when the school's advice wasn't in her best interests.

University wasn't always her plan, but then how many 17-year-olds map out their future? Whether it was a clear goal or just 'felt like the right move,' she was quite determined once she had made up her mind.

2. How did they decide what to study?

As a bilingual student, choosing Modern Languages and European Studies was a combination of passion and practicality. She wasn't sure about a career, but the course was broad enough to keep options open. As a parent, I encouraged her, but I never pushed a particular subject. Looking back, balance was important.

3. How did they decide where to study?

Initially, one university was her first choice. But a school-organised tour changed her mind. The buildings felt austere, the atmosphere off, and transport logistics were a nightmare.



That's why it's important to visit. Even if a course looks good on paper, the environment and location are just as important.

4. Did you attend many open days?

My daughter's school organised a week of UK university tours, allowing students to visit up to five universities. These visits were invaluable in narrowing down her choices. However, many families coordinate their own open day tours. They are a big undertaking, so here is my advice to help you navigate these events.

Plan ahead

Mark dates in your calendar, plan the route if visiting several campuses, and plot your tour using a campus map. Equally, read the timetable provided by each university. You might need to sign up for information sessions in advance. Attending talks and tours helps you get a good feel for the course and culture of each university.

Assess the location

Consider if it's easy to get to the university and back home again. This is important to factor into your budget for home visits. Furthermore, explore the surroundings whilst there. Visit the local town, not just the campus. Can your young person see themselves living there for the next few years? Does it feel safe and affordable?

Take notes and photos

Comparing options later is easier with reminders. Ask about student services, mental health support, and careers advice. Ask the uncomfortable questions too, especially if your young person is introverted, but don't take over. Speaking of comfort...

Dress comfortably

This is my top tip: wear comfortable shoes as you'll walk a lot! And bring a backpack with essentials such as a notepad, pen, umbrella, water bottle, and snacks to stay organised and hydrated throughout the day. Being hangry and wet is enough to give you a negative impression of the place!

5. What advice would you give to parents?

Firstly, it's important to be involved. Schools and university counsellors are experts at the process, but they don't know your child. Their advice is helpful, but they aren't personally invested in each student's ambitions. For instance, my daughter's counsellor discouraged her from applying to her first choice, suggesting she 'aim lower' and consider a partner university instead. Had she listened, she'd have missed the best experience of her life.

Secondly, encourage independence. Your child will need to cook, clean, and budget during their university years. Start preparing them early.

Finally, expect U-turns. Their initial university goals may change by the time they apply, or even after they start at university. Either way, check any change is their choice, not peer influence. Switching course or campus is costly, so it shouldn't be done lightly.

But ultimately, it's their decision. Our role as parents isn't to control the process, but to guide and protect their interests. Engage and empower your child, even if they take detours along the way.

Philippa and her family



Accessing admissions support through fair access programmes

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

Universities across the UK are committed to attracting the best students, regardless of their circumstances or background. Whilst researching university options with your young person, you may hear the terms widening access, widening participation, and fair access used interchangeably. Essentially, they all aim to make higher education more open and accessible to learners.

Fair access programmes exist to create a more inclusive educational environment. To take part in a programme, students usually need to meet a widening access criterion. Some examples of students who may be eligible include those who are:

- Living in a deprived postcode area according to IMD or SIMD
- Young or unpaid carers
- Care experienced
- In receipt of free school meals
- Refugees or asylum seekers
- Estranged from their family
- In the armed forces, veterans, or have parents/carers in the armed forces.

Fair access programmes give students an insight into university life. Many come with added benefits, such as access to application support, or reduced entry grades. Fair access programmes differ depending on which area of the UK you live in. Some examples of fair access programmes include summer schools, outreach projects, and peer to peer mentoring opportunities. Programmes may be subject specific, such as the Reach Programme in

Scotland which supports access to high demand professions.

Most universities have their own fair access or contextual policy. This allows students from widening access backgrounds to get a reduced offer of admission. It may even guarantee places to widening access applicants. For courses with interviews or auditions, such as teaching or music, widening access applicants may be guaranteed to progress to this stage.

Universities can only apply these contextual policies when we know about an applicant's circumstances. The best way to share a circumstance is through the UCAS application form in the personal details section. Teachers or advisers should also verify this information in their reference. Once this information is shared, universities may contact your young person to discuss support options to help them succeed in their studies.

Financial support is a key aspect to widening access. Many universities will offer scholarships and bursaries to students in financial need or from an underrepresented group. Some will offer travel bursaries to help with the cost of attending open days or discounts on accommodation. You can search for these using the new [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#).

Start the conversation early with universities. Visit their websites to discover which fair access programmes are available, and if they would be relevant to your young person. Some fair access programmes run across multiple years. These provide tailored opportunities to prospective students at different stages in their application journey.

As parents and carers, don't be afraid to contact universities or speak to staff at open days. We're here to support you as well as prospective students!

“Universities may contact your young person to discuss support options to help them succeed in their studies.”

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Contextual university admissions

By Ruth Boyce, School and College Engagement Officer at the University of Exeter

Fair access to higher education is hugely important to universities. It enables social mobility and helps to improve opportunities and life-chances for individuals and their communities.

When universities review an application, they take into consideration the context in which applicants have achieved their academic qualifications. If those applying meet certain eligibility criteria, universities may make an offer which is lower than the typical entry requirements. This is called a contextual offer.

Understanding contextual offers

Contextual offers are below the standard range. For example, if a course asks for A-level grades of AAB, then a contextual offer might be BBB. Equally, BTEC students might receive a contextual offer asking for DDM, instead of the higher DDD. You can find information on standard and contextual offers on each subject course page. Some universities reduce the grades required by one grade, whilst others offer a three-grade reduction.

Eligibility for contextual offers

Contextual offers are based on different criteria. Each university has their own eligibility, although some of the reasons might be the same. Examples include:

- Home location – postcodes will indicate if students live in an area with a high level of deprivation, or a low number of people going to university.
- Personal circumstances – for instance, if a student is a carer, a care leaver, an estranged student, someone with care experience, or a recipient of Free School

Meals (page 8). Equally, a student might be seeking asylum, have limited leave to remain, or have refugee status.

- Progression programme participation – there are some specific progression programmes offered by universities or recognised by their partners.

These aren't the only criteria, and many universities will consider a range of circumstances.

Declaring eligibility

The UCAS application form includes several questions to allow universities to understand the context in which applicants have achieved their academic qualifications. Universities consider this information as part of their assessment of each candidate.

Alternative offers

These are different to contextual offers. An alternative offer might be given because the student is completing non-traditional qualifications. For instance, at the University of Exeter, alternative offers are made when an applicant is taking an EPQ or Core Maths qualification. Applicants who achieve a grade A in their EPQ or Core Maths receive a one-grade reduction below the standard offer (excluding any subject requirements). This recognises and rewards the additional learning gained by completing these qualifications.

Checking eligibility

Check the eligibility criteria set by your young person's chosen universities. This can take time to research. We have an eligibility checker tool to make this quick and easy.

Even if a student is eligible for a contextual offer, they must still achieve the minimum subject requirements for the course. For example, if a grade A is needed in A-level Maths for an Economics degree, then they must achieve this grade to be accepted, regardless of their wider contextual eligibility.

“Universities may make an offer which is lower than the typical entry requirements. This is called a contextual offer.”

What happens after receiving an offer

By Sophie Hawkins, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Essex

Congratulations, your young person has received a university offer!

While this is an exciting time, it's important to prepare for what comes next ...

Conditional and unconditional offers

Your young person will be notified through their UCAS portal when a university decision is available. Encourage them to check the details of their offers carefully.

Most offers will be conditional on achieving specific grades in their exams, so they will need to wait for results day to know if they have secured a place. Depending on the course, they might need to attend an interview, assessment, or complete a DBS check. Make sure they mark any deadlines for these in their diary.

An unconditional offer means they have already met the entry requirements, so the university will accept them if they want to go there. Read the offer carefully to check for any post-offer requirements or documents to provide.

Deciding which offers to accept

Before accepting an offer, your young person should research and gather as much additional information as possible about their courses and universities. If invited to an offer-holder day, we encourage them (and you) to attend. They can spend time with their department, ask questions, and meet current students.

To make an informed decision, they should consider accommodation options if living away from home, or commuting costs, and check their eligibility for scholarships and bursaries

(page 63). If they can't attend in person, they can usually speak to students or staff using online university chat communities.

Accepting and declining offers

Universities make decisions at different times. There is no rush to accept offers. Your young person should wait until they've heard from all of their chosen universities before making a decision. Make a note of any deadlines by which they should reply to their offers. Often, they need to confirm their choices by early June.

They will need to decide on a firm (first) choice and an insurance (second) choice. Their firm choice is the university they really want to go to. Ideally, their insurance choice should have lower grade requirements. This will increase the likelihood that they'll be accepted by their insurance choice if they don't meet the grades required for their firm choice.

If accepting a conditional offer, their place will be confirmed when all conditions of the offer have been met. This is usually on results day. Their conditional offer will become unconditional. If accepting an unconditional offer, they will go to that university and no insurance choice is needed.

Offers should be accepted through the UCAS portal, which has an option to reply to their offers. They will also need to decline any other offers.

Using Clearing

Your young person might change their mind. They might wish to decline an offer after initially accepting it. However, their other offers won't be available anymore, because these disappear after being declined. For this reason, they should wait until Clearing opens before declining an offer. Once Clearing is open, they can speak to the university directly. They can check if places are available on their preferred course, before they decline the offer they have already accepted.



Listen to sample Clearing phone calls on episode 32 of The Uni Guide Podcast.

How to choose university accommodation

By Edward Fisher, School and College Engagement Officer at the University of Exeter

The thought of your young person moving away for university might seem daunting. Finding the right accommodation for them will help reduce your nerves. This article will help you decipher the maze of options, enabling you and your young person to make an informed decision.

University accommodation

University-owned or university-managed accommodation is normally prioritised for first-year students. It's usually located on or near campus. There are a variety of rooms available, from studio rooms to catered halls.

Positives

- Close to university facilities
- Bills are usually included in the rent
- Lots of opportunities for social activities
- Most universities offer wellbeing support through their in-house residence team.

Challenges

- Might get noisy at times
- Shared areas can be messy
- Accommodation is allocated, reducing choice.

Private halls

Like university accommodation, private halls are designed for students. They usually consist of rooms and shared communal areas. The key difference is that private halls are owned and run by a private organisation.

Positives

- Often located in the centre of town
- Built for students, so it shares similar social benefits as university halls
- Students studying at other institutions can also live there, giving your young person the opportunity to expand their social circle.

Challenges

- There could be additional costs for extra features, like communal cinema rooms
- Might have the same noise and cleanliness challenges as university accommodation.

Private student housing

This is where students rent a shared house from a letting agency or private landlord.

Positives

- Greater independence - students have more choice about where they live, and who they live with.

Challenges

- Might limit social opportunities
- Can spend more time traveling to university
- Need to manage bills and household admin.

Living at home

Some people decide to live at home and commute to university.

Positives

- No packing and moving
- Students will be close to their home support network
- A cheaper option, as students normally won't pay rent.

Challenges

- Might limit social opportunities
- Can spend more time traveling to university
- Could limit valuable experience of living away from home.

Spend time researching the various options. Look at university websites to get accurate information about each accommodation and check their locations in relation to campus. If considering private accommodation, check if the university has a list of approved accommodation providers. Some universities have formal partnerships with providers, giving you peace of mind.

Ask your young person what factors are important to them. Talk through which options best fit those factors: location, room type, cost, social factor, or independence. Visit the accommodation with your young person or attend virtual events together.

Finally, if you are still nervous, remember university terms aren't that long. Soon, you'll have your young person back home asking for lifts, favours, and food!

Understanding and preparing for Clearing

By Celine Scott, Senior Student Recruitment Officer at Southampton Solent University

Most people believe that Clearing is for students who didn't get the grades they needed on results day. Nobody wants to imagine themselves in that position, so it's not widely discussed.

Clearing does support these students, but it's also for students who:

- didn't receive any offers,
- change their mind and want to study something or somewhere different
- don't meet the requirements for another reason
- decide to apply to university late in the cycle, after 30 June.

Whatever the reason, anyone can apply through Clearing if universities still have places available. Prospective students can search for courses on UCAS and filter the search to show Clearing places (these are simply places that are yet to be filled). During Clearing, grade requirements are often lowered, so the options available may surprise you.

Once they have found a course of interest, your young person should visit the university website for a little more information and to obtain the Clearing phone number. The next step is to call the university to enquire about a place.

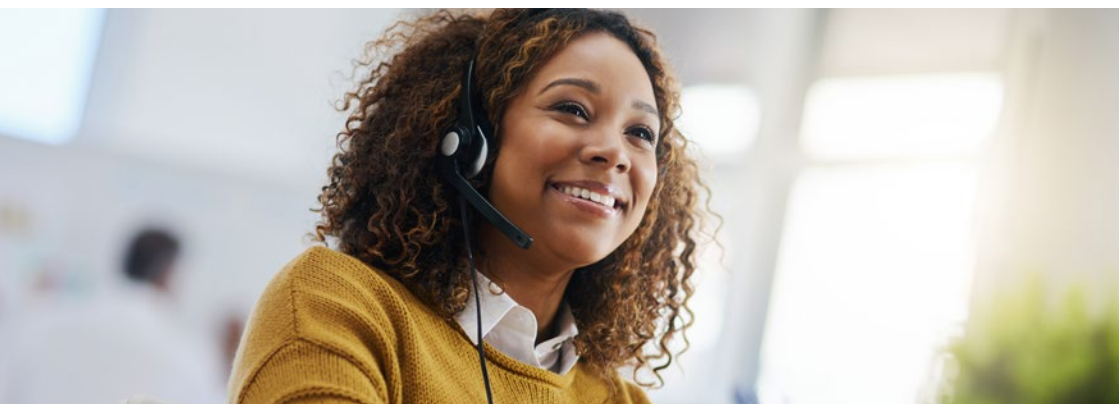
The busiest day of the Clearing period is A-level results day. You may find yourself consoling an upset teenager on this day. However, rest assured, there are thousands of places still available on UCAS every year, and every university has a room packed with people ready to answer the phones. Whilst we encourage your support, it must be the person applying who makes the phone call. We can only offer spaces to them directly.

If requirements are met over the phone, then the university will make an informal offer and send an email with further instructions. Now here's the good bit: your young person can receive as many informal offers as they like. This means they can keep their options open. Some universities even offer a Clearing open day immediately after A-level results day, so applicants can make an informed decision before accepting a Clearing offer.

Once a decision is made, the applicant must add their Clearing choice on UCAS. They can only do this for one place at a time, so must be sure about the decision. All the information about how to do this will be included in the informal offer email.

Students can call back anytime to ask the universities additional questions. They might want to ask about accommodation or check the progress of their application if they're feeling anxious. We're always happy to help. Finally, they should update their information with student finance if they have previously applied elsewhere.

And that's it. Relax. It's easier than you think!



My advice for parents by Rosie Glover

Law student at Durham University



My university application journey was supported by many people in various ways, including my mum and dad. They wanted me to go to university, which conveniently aligned with my own ambition to attend university, meaning it was a no-brainer.

My parents didn't go to university themselves. They saw it as a way for me to better myself long term, and open up an array of opportunities, especially as a budding lawyer.

My parents attended various open days with me. They were incredibly patient. They travelled as far as 7 hours away by car to see over 10 different universities. On one occasion, I didn't like the university after a 4-hour drive, so we turned back and came straight home again!

They were very much thrilled when I told them I had received offers, whilst also having full faith and confidence that I would receive the offers. Even during the tougher times of the process, including my admissions tests and rejection from Oxford, they were incredibly supportive.

On the day I found out I was rejected from Oxford, my dad got straight on the phone to look at the other universities I had received offers from. He showed me that the rejection was just a redirection, and that I would enjoy myself and thrive at the other universities too.

I have some key advice for supporters and parents who want to help their own loved ones on their university application journey. Firstly, be available for your young people. Talk about their feelings and thought process towards each university and course they are considering.

Secondly, make sure you aren't biased towards a certain route. Ultimately, their university choice and course choice are something they'll have to live with for 3+ years. It can get tough. Even as I'm writing this, I have 2 summatives and 4 exams imminent. Therefore, you must let them

think about what choices will give them the best success, mentally and educationally. Respect their decision.

Thirdly, I would suggest looking into the application process yourself, so you can relate to what your young person is experiencing. Lots of courses require admissions tests and interviews. Understanding the pressure they're under can help direct your approach, so your young person feels supported and encouraged.

For example, my parents had no clue about the law admissions tests and books I had to read for my personal statement. Yet, when I asked them to practice with me, or tell me if my paragraph made sense, they would try their hardest to help. Their efforts helped me believe in myself. It gave me a push to know I had their full backing.

Finally, I recommend reminding your young person about the other elements to university. It's easy to get swept up in the course itself, the entry requirements, and the accommodation. But there are so many factors my parents had to remind me about, and I'm so glad they did, otherwise I could have made incredibly bad decisions.

These factors included financial support, counselling and mental health services, housing availability for second and third years, safety of the location, options to travel back home, sport facilities, music facilities, and more. These are all part of the university experience too. Together, they will help your young person to flourish!

Rosie and her parents



What happens after results day

By Jenna Page, Regional Schools, Colleges, and Outreach Officer at the University of South Wales

Results day is an exciting and emotional time for young people and those who support them. Whether things go to plan or take an unexpected turn, it's helpful to know what the possible outcomes are and how you, as a parent or carer, can help guide your child through their next steps.

If all goes to plan

If your child achieves the grades they need, they'll be able to log into UCAS and confirm their place at their first-choice university. From there, the university will be in touch in the weeks that follow with more details about enrolment, accommodation, and arrival. It's a good time to start preparing, from shopping for essentials to packing for the exciting journey ahead (page 91).

If they miss their first choice

If your child doesn't get into their first-choice university but holds an offer from their insurance choice, they can log into UCAS and accept this instead. The process is very similar, and they'll soon receive further information about starting university from their new institution.

If they don't have a place

There are several reasons why a student might not hold a university place on results day:

- They may not have applied during the main UCAS application cycle
- They may have changed their mind about what or where they want to study
- They may not have achieved the grades required for their firm or insurance choices
- They may have exceeded their expected grades and want to explore other options.

In any of these situations, students can explore opportunities through Clearing. This is a system that matches applicants to courses with remaining places.

What is Clearing?

Clearing allows students to apply for university courses that still have vacancies. Not all courses will be available. For instance, Medicine rarely enters Clearing, but there are still thousands of options across a wide range of subjects and universities.

Clearing can feel overwhelming. Many students experience stress or uncertainty at this stage, especially if things haven't gone as expected. The key is to remain calm and avoid rushing into decisions.

Your child can contact universities directly, share their results, speak to course tutors, and even take part in interviews, often all over the phone. Some may receive verbal offers on the spot. Encourage them not to accept the first offer they receive unless it feels right.

University helplines are usually open all day and often throughout the weekend. This gives students time to compare courses, ask questions, and explore their options. Many institutions offer in-person or virtual visit days over the summer to help students get a feel for the campus and facilities before making a final choice.

Supporting their decision

Most importantly, your child should find the university and course that is right for them. Support them in taking the time they need to speak to as many universities as necessary. Help them consider their options carefully.

No matter the route they take, securing a university place is a significant achievement. Even if the path wasn't quite what they imagined, they should feel proud of themselves. It's a moment worth celebrating.

“Many students experience stress or uncertainty at this stage, especially if things haven't gone as expected.”

How to support your child after they start at university

By Caitlin Houston, Senior Recruitment Officer (RUK) at the University of Strathclyde

University is a nerve-racking time for anyone watching their young person step out into the world for the first time. You may be concerned about a number of things on their behalf: finances, making friends, the difference between their schooling experience and higher education. This article suggests a few things you can do to support their move to the next stage of their lives.

Research the university

Universities have a wealth of support services available for students:

- Providing academic support – help with referencing and coding classes
- Financial advice – budgeting workshops and hardship funds
- Social opportunities – freshers week events to help them settle in
- Professional careers services
- Disability and wellbeing support.

You can research these yourself using university websites. If your child needs them, you'll be well-equipped in knowing what their university has to offer.

You can follow universities on social media to stay updated with everything happening on campus. Further research like this will help you learn what's on offer. Hopefully, it leaves you feeling well-informed and reassured that universities have your young person's best interests at heart.

Discuss finances

Going to university is an expensive time. Budgeting is incredibly important (page 69). Encourage your young person to apply early for student loans. Research any extra pockets of money that might be available, such as bursaries and scholarships. Budgeting exercises can help them understand their expenses: socialising, rent, food, commuting. It will help them think about where the money will come from.

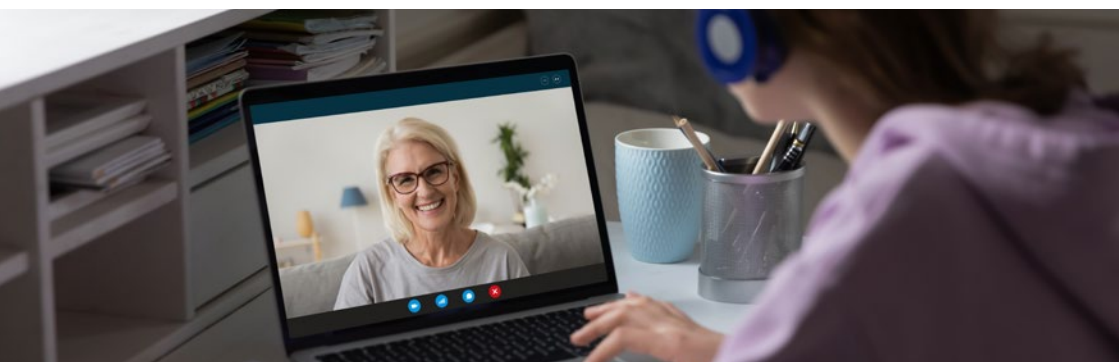
Check in regularly

Some parents and carers commit to a regular weekly or fortnightly video call to catch up with the student in their lives. Listen to their experiences. Share some of your own hints and tips, from the best recipes to laundry hacks! Scheduling a reoccurring time brings some structure, especially if they are away from home. It can help overcome home sickness.

If your child is still living at home, set aside some time to walk together. This will allow an opportunity for them to talk about their exciting classes and projects, or talk about anything that's bothering them.

Embrace the change

It's daunting to adapt to this next stage of their lives, but students with a supportive home environment will continue to benefit from this at university. Be excited for them. Ask them lots of questions about their course, their university, their new friends, and their experiences. Make sure they know you're still there for them. Encourage them to reach out for help if they need it.



Exploring unexpected opportunities at university

By Evie Podmore, Undergraduate Outreach Assistant Placement Student at Keele University

As a parent, you might feel out of the loop about the opportunities available at university because A) there's so much, and B) everyone's experience is different!

Even as a student, I still find myself shocked at the number of new opportunities that pop up at university. This article outlines some of the unexpected opportunities to help you support your child in making the most of university.

Society committees

Firstly, you might know about the wealth of societies available at university. Most universities have over 100, catering to all interests. However, your young person can do more than just participate.

They can become part of the committee who runs each society. Roles include president, treasurer, media coordinator, and social organiser. It's a valuable way to be involved, gain new skills, and get closer to your society members.

Volunteering

There are lots of volunteering opportunities available (page 100). You can even volunteer with your lecturing staff to assist their research. This lets your child work towards an academic paper before they've even graduated.

They can also volunteer for their students' union (SU), usually on student panels or for charity fundraisers. The SU offers wider volunteering opportunities with local charities or organisations: helping with marketing, social media, coordinating events. Some students even volunteer to complete marathons, bungee jump, and more!

Internships

Many internships are only available through university. These range from in-person to online internships. Sometimes these internships are paid. Often short-term and flexible, they allow your child to gain valuable industry experience whilst studying. They can also open a wealth of career doors.

Placements are like internships. However, you can do these for a semester or a year as a part of a sandwich degree. This allows your child to experience working in industry at a company which accepts students, which is most companies. It offers valuable life and career experience, ready for graduation.

Studying abroad

Studying abroad is an option if your child wants to spread their wings and experience new cultures. Students can study abroad for a semester, which lasts around 3 months, or a whole academic year between Year 2 and their final year. Some universities offer summer schools, allowing for a shorter adventure.

Try everything

There is a wealth of things for your young person to experience at university. This article doesn't even cover all of the unexpected opportunities, and more are constantly cropping up. Encourage your child to try as much as possible. It's the perfect time to give everything a go!





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Exploring the local area at university

By Robin Schieferstein, Creative and Professional Writing student at St Mary's University, Twickenham

University is a massive step for both students and their parents or guardians, especially if they are moving away from home for the first time. I moved 100 miles away from my parents. It was a daunting move, but it was exciting to discover the area around my new home.

There's always somewhere to explore, whether your young person is heading off to a busy city or a quiet town. If they're in the process of deciding where to study, or they're already preparing for university life, then these tips will hopefully make the whole experience seem less intimidating.

Wander

Wandering is one of the best things to do during an offer-holder day. After your talks and tours, take advantage of the opportunity to explore the local area. Go with your young person to check out the local spots. Exploring together means they can point out cafes, shops, and parks that interest them.

Get lost

At one of my offer-holder days, my dad and I explored the local area without the help of Google Maps or any other support. We got lost a few times, but that was part of the fun!

Ask for recommendations

Ask current students about their favourite places. It's also useful to ask about their experiences living and studying in the area. Students are always keen to share their knowledge. You'll discover the best shops, restaurants, transport, and student discounts. You might even discover places that only the locals know about.

Find what matters to you

Remember, university is about more than what you learn in the classroom. It's about the whole experience. Think about what matters to your young person. For instance, keen swimmers might wish to find the nearest swimming pool, whilst others might wish to know about part-time job opportunities in the area (page 70).

Start getting excited

Discovering the local area can make the transition to university less overwhelming. Take time to talk to current students and get acquainted with the area. It will make starting university a lot more exciting. Next time you're at a university event, don't just focus on the campus activities. Explore the local area and ask questions, so your young person can discover the places that'll make university feel like a home away from home.





St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

St Mary's Parents' and Carers' Webinar

Thursday 10th July | 5.30-6.30pm



Are you supporting a young person on their journey to university? Or exploring your own options?

Join us for an informative webinar delivered by St Mary's Schools and Colleges team, who will guide you through the university application process and introduce you to everything St Mary's has to offer.

In this session, we'll cover:

- ▶ How students can write a standout application
- ▶ The different types of funding available to UK students
- ▶ The range of support offered by St Mary's Student Services team

You'll also hear from our current students

who will share their personal experiences and insights into university life at St Mary's. They'll be on hand to answer your questions and offer advice from a student perspective.

While this event is aimed at parents and carers, students in their first and second year or sixth form or college are more than welcome to attend.

Book your place here

How your child can shape their university experience

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

Supporting your young person through university can make a big difference in ensuring they make the most of their time there. From building relationships to fostering independence, here are some ways you can help guide them toward success.

The power of relationships

Encourage your young person to build strong relationships at university. Friends can be invaluable for sharing experiences, providing support, and collaborating on academic tasks. Even with the rise of online learning, attending in-person sessions is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging, which research shows leads to better academic outcomes. Remind them that lecturers are there to help. They should ask questions, seek advice, and establish a rapport. A little effort can go a long way in creating a supportive academic network.

Active participation matters

Attending lectures and workshops is vital, but being actively engaged while there is equally important. Encourage your young person to focus, take notes, and avoid distractions like using social media during sessions. There will be additional research and reading required outside of lectures. This is essential for meaningful participation and making the most of their academic investment.

Promoting independence

University is a time for your young person to develop independent learning skills. Unlike school, there's greater responsibility to stay organised and manage their own time. Encourage them to read feedback carefully, recognising their strengths while addressing areas for improvement. This mindset will help them grow academically and apply lessons across all their coursework.

Thinking about the future

It's never too early to consider career goals. Suggest that your young person uses the university's career services to explore volunteering, internships, and part-time jobs that enhance their CV. Balancing work, social life, and personal hobbies is important too. Helping them schedule downtime can prevent burnout and keep them motivated.

Seeking support

Remind your young person that they don't have to navigate university alone. Along with lecturers, there are also librarians, study advisers, and wellbeing services who are ready to help. If they ever feel overwhelmed, encourage them to reach out. There's always someone available to provide guidance.

By staying involved and offering thoughtful encouragement, you can help your young person shape a university experience that's rewarding and enjoyable. Their journey is a shared success, and your support will be a pillar of strength along the way.



My parent story by Sara Quin

**Schools and Colleges Engagement Officer at
Leeds Trinity University**

1. Who did you support?

When my eldest son went to university, it was the start of an exciting journey - not just for him, but for our whole family. Now, as my daughter begins her own application process, I've been reflecting on what we learned the first time around and the advice I can share with other parents going through this stage.

2. How did they decide what to study?

My son is currently in his second year studying Particle Physics. He was space-mad from a young age, so his passion for physics naturally led him toward university. It made choosing a course easy but deciding where to study took more effort.

My daughter is in Year 12, so we are starting the journey again. She has always loved sport. She explored options on websites like UCAS and Prospects. In doing so, she discovered that a Sport and Exercise Science degree would perfectly match her passion for sport and her career aspirations.

3. Did you attend many open days?

For my son, we took an active role by attending numerous open days. We split the visits between my husband and I to avoid dragging our younger children along each time. We mixed up traveling by car and public transport to give our son a sense of distance, costs, and commuting logistics.

Open days were an essential part of his decision-making process. At that time, I worked in the accommodation team at Leeds Trinity. I found it fascinating to compare different styles of student housing across universities. Open days also provided invaluable opportunities to

interact with current students and staff.

For my daughter, we have already attended two open days. She's planning more visits over the summer, fitting them in around her part-time job. She is keen to ensure she's well-prepared before the busy autumn term begins at sixth form.

4. What advice would you give to parents?

Encourage organisation - suggest they create notes or spreadsheets to track universities they're considering. Include open day dates and identify inevitable clashes, so they can prioritise visits.

- **Prepare questions** – help them brainstorm questions for open days but let them take the lead in asking. They should talk to students too. They're experts on campus life and provide honest insights.
- **Consider long-term costs** – research accommodation costs for the first year but also for later years. Some cities have shortages or high prices.
- **Let them decide** – support their gut instincts about where they want to go rather than pushing your preferences. They'll thrive if they feel ownership over their decision.
- **Car-share or pre-book travel** – save money by car-sharing or booking family train tickets if friends are visiting the same open days.
- **Support their wellbeing** – balancing exams, assignments, teen life, and big decisions can be overwhelming. Emotional support is vital.

It's amazing how quickly time flies. Watching your children make big life decisions can feel daunting, but it's also incredibly rewarding. Try to enjoy this exciting chapter together. It's not just about finding the right course. It's about helping them take their first steps toward independence, whilst offering your support every step of the way. You've got this!

“Support their gut instincts about where they want to go, rather than pushing your own preferences.”

The benefits of joining a student society

By Dr Jay Rees, Student Recruitment Manager Southwest at The University of Law

I'm often asked the same questions at university fairs and exhibitions. How can I make myself more employable? How do I make friends at university? And why should I even go at all?

My answer is always the same: student societies!

They're the easiest and most rewarding way for your young person to boost their CV, learn new skills, and make friends who share their passions. Your young person can't experience university to its fullest unless they're fully immersed in student culture!



Boosting your CV

Student societies are an effective way to boost a CV. Most universities offer 100 societies or more. Your young person should join one as soon as they arrive at university. Joining a society related to their degree will benefit their studies through study groups, weekly book readings, and catch-ups about current assignments. It will also help them develop core professional skills.

Your young person can become a committee member for their chosen society, such as a president, treasurer, or events coordinator. Many societies offer opportunities for public speaking, event organisation, social media management, and the creation of marketing materials.

Taking on these roles will help them develop essential leadership, communication, teamwork, and even project management skills. By getting involved, they can easily build core skills, boost their confidence, and enhance their professional profile, all while balancing their studies.



Finding friends and settling in

Societies are the perfect way to make friends and settle into university life, especially when settling in an unfamiliar place. With a full social calendar, your young person will have plenty of opportunities to step out of their comfort zone, meet new people, and try something different.

Society members span all year groups, so they'll soon meet older and more experienced students in the years above. They'll quickly learn the best food spots, the most enjoyable social opportunities, the hidden gems on campus, and even when to avoid the coffee queue at their local cafe.

Societies also allow your young person to connect with others who share their interests, such as passion for their degree, a common hobby, or simply a desire to meet new people. There's a place for everyone, whether your young person is joining a subject-based group, a sports society, or even a Taylor Swift fan club. With regular events like socials, coffee mornings, weekly puzzles, and themed meetups, it's easy to build relationships and get involved.



Enjoying the student experience

Your young person should have fun and fully enjoy their time at university. There's a wide variety of exciting activities and societies to join: fashion, role-playing, gaming, there's something for everyone. Joining a society offers a chance to step outside of academia and the typical nine-to-five routine.

I always enjoy sharing stories with students about the unique societies I've encountered in my career. There's the Quidditch Society, where students run around on brooms. There's the True Crime Clubs, where members take part in murder mystery dinners, immersive investigations, and hold period cosplay contests. The opportunities for new, unusual experiences are undoubtedly endless!

And if your young person can't find a society that sparks their interest, they can create their own. This is a fantastic way to carve out their own space. They might even create the next big society on campus!

The benefits of joining a sports team

By Dominic White, Former President of the Union of Students at the University of Derby and Regional Student Chair of British Universities and Colleges Sport for the East Midlands

The world of university sport is full of energy, competition, and unforgettable moments. The level of competition and the range of programmes vary from one university to another. However, the benefits of getting involved in sport are universal and go far beyond the pitch.

Community

University sports clubs are a vibrant and essential part of student life, offering far more than just physical activity. Getting involved in sport is a fantastic way to boost wellbeing, meet new people, and become part of a close-knit, supportive community. There is something for every interest and ability, ranging from popular sports like badminton and hockey to growing sports like baseball, trampolining, and polo.

At the University of Derby, sport plays a key role in student life. Your young person will find a welcoming and inclusive community, no matter their background. They could join a team, try a new activity for the first time, or simply cheer from the sidelines. It's not just about sport. It's about belonging.

Competition

Students have the chance to compete at a variety of levels. They can represent their university nationally through BUCS (British Universities & Colleges Sport) or take part in more relaxed intramural leagues, such as halls competitions or course-based teams. These opportunities bring students together through shared goals, commitment, and a healthy dose of rivalry, creating the perfect blend of challenge and camaraderie.

Competing in BUCS allows students to wear their university colours with pride, test their skills against teams from across the country, and become part of a long-standing tradition of university sport. It's a chance for your young person to push themselves, improve their performance, and feel the thrill of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with teammates in pursuit of something bigger.

At the same time, intramural sport offers a more social and inclusive approach to competition. It's perfect for those who want the fun of regular matches without the pressure of national fixtures. These leagues foster the same sense of team spirit and connection. They help students build relationships and boost their confidence in a supportive, low-stakes environment.

Connection

Beyond the matches and training sessions, joining a sports team offers a powerful sense of connection. University can feel overwhelming at times, especially when adjusting to new routines and environments. However, a sports team gives your young person a ready-made community to rely on. From socials to away-day road trips, the friendships built through university sport often become a support network.

At Derby, that spirit is championed through Team Derby, a community that values inclusion, encouragement, and pride in representing the university. Sport becomes a space where your young person isn't just seen as a student or a player, but as a valued part of something bigger.

For many students, their sports team becomes their university family - a group of people to grow with, learn from, and create lasting memories alongside. Whether competing at a national level, staying active, or making friends, the value of joining a team lies in the sense of belonging. We don't just play together. We grow together.





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Times Good University
Guide 2025)

Office for
Students 

The benefits of volunteering at university

By Niall Seenan, UK and Ireland Student Recruitment Manager at Glasgow Caledonian University

Volunteering is one of the activities that your young person can do outside of their studies to benefit them now but also in the future. University is about much more than just the academic side. Volunteering can help your young person get the most out of their university experience.

Personal growth

Volunteering fosters personal growth by instilling a sense of responsibility, empathy, and compassion. Employers value volunteer experience, as it demonstrates commitment, teamwork, and leadership skills. Many universities hold Volunteering Fairs that connect students with relevant opportunities. These can help develop skills such as communication, problem-solving, and time management. Furthermore, opportunities like volunteering at the NHS provides hands-on experience that are beneficial for future careers.

Networking opportunities

Volunteering provides the opportunity for students to build connections with professionals, peers, and organisations that may prove useful for their future career. Universities collaborate with local charities and other institutions to create excellent networking opportunities. Engaging with like-minded individuals and industry experts can open doors to internships, mentorship programmes, and potentially future jobs for your young person.

Mental and physical wellbeing

Volunteering can vastly improve wellbeing. Acts of kindness and altruism have been shown to reduce stress and increase overall happiness. Universities encourage students to participate in initiatives that support mental health, such as befriending programmes and volunteering time to run a university club or society. Getting involved with a club or society also provides an opportunity to develop lifelong friends.

Enhanced experience

University life extends beyond lectures and exams, with extracurricular activities playing a crucial role in a well-rounded student experience. Taking part in volunteering allows students to develop friendships, gain leadership experience, and become more engaged with campus life, enriching their overall university experience.

Making a difference

One of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering is making a meaningful difference in communities. Whatever cause is close to your young person's heart, volunteering will provide them with the chance to give back and make a difference. This sense of purpose and impact is incredibly fulfilling. It helps shape a strong sense of social responsibility that can feed into whatever they do after university.

Ready, set, volunteer

Volunteering at university is a valuable experience that goes beyond academic achievements. It enhances personal growth, develops skills, builds networks, improves wellbeing, and allows students to contribute positively to society. With many universities offering structured volunteering opportunities and partnerships with local charities, your young person has the chance to make a difference while also benefiting from their experiences.



Making the most of the students' union

By Dominic White, Schools and Colleges Regional Assistant at the University of Derby and Former President of the Union of Students at the University of Derby

A students' union (SU) is more than just a place or organisation. The SU is the gateway to student life at its best. It helps students to settle in, make friends, and get involved by providing support, representing the student voice, and hosting unforgettable events. The SU allows your young person to be part of a vibrant student community where everyone feels welcome.

What is an SU?

A students' union is a student-led organisation that exists to represent, support, and bring students together. The SU creates a welcoming, inclusive community where your young person can find their people, feel at home, and make lasting memories. The SU works to ensure every student feels part of something bigger through events, societies, campaigns, and support services.

At its heart is a commitment to democracy. Each year, students elect representatives - from course reps to the SU President - to champion the student voice and shape a university experience that works for everyone.

What does an SU offer?

University is more than lectures and assignments. It's about feeling like you truly belong. That's where the SU comes in. At the University of Derby, the SU is home to a thriving community of students, with over 100 sports clubs and societies to explore. Whether you're into poetry or football, academic interests or shared identities, there's a place for students to connect.

The SU brings people together through a packed programme of events: Freshers' Week, cultural celebrations, movie nights, festivals, and more. These moments create shared experiences and lasting friendships that define your time at university. When students need support, the SU is right there beside them.

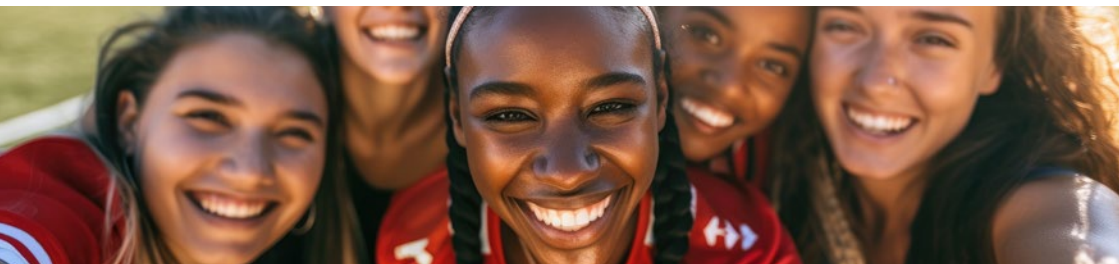
Its friendly, student-focused welfare team offers free, confidential advice on everything from housing to mental health to money worries. And the SU offers part-time roles and local volunteering projects to help students give back and build their CV.

How to get involved

At the University of Derby, students automatically become a member of our SU - the Union of Students - when they enrol as a student. This means they're part of a student-led community from day one. It allows them to feel part of something bigger, whether they're looking for friendship, support, or a place to explore their interests.

One of the first chances to get involved is at the Freshers' Fair. This is a lively welcome event where students can meet, register for sports clubs and societies, and connect with local organisations and services. It's the perfect way to start feeling at home. The SU offers something for every interest. Students also find meaningful ways to get involved through volunteering and student representation. These give them the chance to shape their university experience and build strong connections along the way.

More than anything, the SU is a space where students can be themselves, meet others, and feel like they belong. When exploring potential universities, your young person shouldn't just think about the course. They should think about the community waiting to welcome them.



The benefits of undertaking a study abroad placement

By Jon Baglow, Senior Digital Officer at Falmouth University

Studying abroad is an enriching experience, especially for students who haven't travelled outside the UK before. This article breaks down what study abroad means, who it might benefit, and what your young person should consider if they're thinking about studying abroad.

Studying abroad

Study abroad is an opportunity for your young person to spend time during their university degree in another country. This could be a single week or an entire year of study. The length varies by university and by course.

Usually, study abroad schemes are organised by the university, often in collaboration with the student themselves. The university places the student in a partner university or college where they will continue their studies. Occasionally, students source their own placement, though this is rare.

In the UK, many students use Government funding to enable them to study abroad, such as the Turing Scheme. The Turing Scheme is the UK Government's global programme to study and work abroad. The scheme provides funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world.

Benefits to studying abroad

There are two main reasons to study abroad. The first is that your young person will learn from academic and technical teams at another university or college. The second is that your young person will immerse themselves in another culture. Together, these reasons provide a host of benefits.

1. Employability skills

In today's increasingly globalised job market, employers highly value candidates with international exposure and diverse skill sets. It has the potential to set your young person apart when applying for graduate jobs.

Employers also seek graduates who are adaptable, proactive, and able to think critically in different environments. A study abroad placement enables students to cultivate these qualities through real-world experiences: meeting new people, living in a new place, and travelling alone.

2. Interpersonal skills

Moving to another country – even for a couple of weeks – is an exciting challenge, and an opportunity for personal growth. Studying abroad often involves internships or work placements alongside the studying. This provides invaluable professional experience. Exposure to different work cultures can help them develop a global mindset, which helps when communicating to people from other cultures.

3. Gaining confidence

Your young person will grow personally by studying abroad. Living and studying in a foreign country will expose them to diverse cultures, encouraging them to become more open-minded and empathetic.

They may choose to study in a country where they can't speak the native language. They'll need to navigate language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliar social norms. These experiences will give them confidence when dealing with new people and situations throughout their studies and future career.



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

How career support makes a difference

Katie Bateman, Student Careers and Employability Manager at the University of Gloucestershire

When your young person starts university, you're not just thinking about the next few years - you're thinking about what comes afterwards. University career services, such as our Career Studio team at the University of Gloucestershire, help bridge the gap between academic learning and professional application. This ensures students develop the knowledge and practical skills required by employers.

Understanding careers support

Most universities offer dedicated career support through specialised teams. These professionals offer:

- one-to-one career coaching and guidance
- support with placements, internships, and work experience
- CV advice and interview preparation
- connections to potential employers and industry networks
- support with graduate job applications
- career assessment tools to help students identify their strengths and interests.

University careers teams work closely with academic schools to embed career planning into the curriculum. This means students get the support they need, when they need it, while connecting what they learn in class with where they want to go next.

Enhanced careers support

Forward-thinking universities enhance their career offerings with additional benefits. At the University of Gloucestershire, we also offer:

- lifetime careers support, even after graduation
- a paid graduate internship scheme for those needing a bit more support to get started
- regular employer events and industry meetups
- a mentoring programme that connects students with graduates already working in their field.

These connections open doors. We help students build a strong professional network while they study. It might be a conversation that sparks an idea, a placement that turns into a job, or a mentor who shares real-world insight.

Comparing careers support

If you're helping your young person choose where to study, these questions can help you compare how different universities support ambitious students:

- How are careers and employability built into the course?
- What support is available from day one?
- How does the university connect students with employers?
- What kind of work experience or placement options are on offer?
- What percentage of graduates are in work or further study?
- How are students supported to adapt to emerging technologies and AI?
- Is there help for those interested in setting up their own business?

Accessing careers support

It's never too soon for students to start thinking about their future. Encourage your young person to access career support from their first year. They'll have more time to explore their options, gain experience, and develop a strong sense of direction.

At the University of Gloucestershire, students are supported from the very start of their course. Through personalised career plans and hands-on experience, they can build a portfolio of skills that grows alongside their learning.

We also place real value on reflection. Students are encouraged to think about what they've learned, how they've developed, and how each experience connects to their future. This approach helps them step into interviews with clarity and confidence, ready to show employers what they can do.

Wherever your child's ambition lies, they won't be on the journey alone. Their career services team will be there to guide and support them every step of the way.

How a degree opens up employability

By Louise Newley, Schools and Colleges Engagement Officer at Anglia Ruskin University

Going to university is about more than just academic studies. University will equip your young person with key subject skills and knowledge that qualify them for their desired career. However, there are even more opportunities available at university that will enhance their skillset and increase their graduate employability.

University is a safe and supportive environment. Your young person can become more independent, work towards long-term goals, identify their skills, stand out from the crowd, and showcase their value to future employers. Whatever their background and aspirations, university is a place for them to develop and be their authentic self.

Speak to employability teams at open days to discover the support available to your young person throughout their studies. At Anglia Ruskin University, we work closely with our students towards graduate capitals which are key to navigating their future employment journey.

These graduate capitals are:

- **Knowledge and skills** – evidencing and applying subject knowledge in a professional capacity through real-world situations.
- **Social capitals** – learning to communicate and build networks in a variety of settings with other professionals.
- **Cultural capitals** – being able to respond appropriately to a variety of different professional situations in multiple environments.
- **Identity** – being aware of their professional self and what differentiates them from others.
- **Adaptability** – being resilient and able to adapt confidently to challenging situations. Having a growth mindset and creatively navigating negative situations to learn and develop further.

- **The whole person** – all the attributes your young person has to offer to employers, including their personal qualities, professional skillset, and online presence.

Students use several opportunities to achieve the graduate capitals:

- **Lectures and seminars** – proactively engaging with their peers and academic staff.
- **Ruskin modules** – engaging modules focused on sustainability that critically explore issues affecting our communities and the planet.
- **ARUCPD** – a free co-curricular course linked to relevant industry skills. It provides 15 co-curricular credits per module. These are added to the student's degree transcript upon graduation.
- **Links with industry** – university academics and employability teams will support interactions with industry in several ways: careers fairs, webinars, guest lectures, access to platforms such as Handshake.
- **Live briefs** – an opportunity to put learning into action by working on projects presented by a business. Students work collaboratively with professionals towards a solution.
- **On-campus employment** – in 2023-24, over 1500 ARU students were placed in paid employment or internships by our onsite temp agency. They earned a total of £1.8million alongside their studies.
- **Student's union roles** – further paid roles are available within our student's union. These are varied opportunities to develop transferrable skills whilst earning.
- **Integrated course placement** – benefits of placement years include networking professionally, earning a salary, and experiencing industry-specific employment to build a skillset.

Your young people might feel uneasy when moving outside of their comfort zone. However, they should go to university with an open mind, immerse themselves into university life, and take opportunities that come their way. By aiming high, they will maximise their self-development and achieve graduate success!

Preparing students for their future careers

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

University is a time of personal and academic growth – an opportunity to learn, explore, and discover new paths. While many students may not know exactly what career path they want to pursue, their time in higher education plays a key role in shaping their future. University offers opportunities to develop skills, gain hands-on experience, and expand networks in preparation for their future career.

Building a future career

Our goal is not only to help students succeed at university but to ensure they thrive beyond it. This means equipping them with the skills, experience, and confidence needed for their future careers. At the University of Derby, we offer a research-informed, industry-relevant curriculum designed to prepare students for the real world.

For instance, our two-year accelerated degree in International Business and AI, run in collaboration with Rolls-Royce, is just one example of how our courses meet the evolving needs of the job market. Through continuous investment in industry engagement and state-of-the-art facilities, we provide the tools necessary for students to succeed.

Our three-year promise

Career services are vital resources for students to explore career options, secure internships, and connect with employers. These services often include CV tailoring, interview preparation, career counselling, and job search resources. Engaging with these services provides students with personalised advice, insights into the job market, and an understanding of the skills valued by employers.

Universities also host career fairs, giving students opportunities to meet employers and develop networking skills. At Derby, we offer career support for up to three years after graduation, ensuring our students are supported as they transition into the workforce.

Real-world learning

Internships and work placements are some of the most effective ways to gain experience, apply academic knowledge, and build a professional network. Many universities, including Derby, partner with local and global companies to offer hands-on opportunities that provide industry insights and practical skills.

These positions enhance student CVs and help develop key skills including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. In some cases, internships lead to full-time job offers, providing students with a pathway to employment even before they graduate.

Engaging in extra-curricular activities

Extra-curricular activities, such as societies, sports, or volunteering, play a significant role in enhancing employability. These activities demonstrate to potential employers that students possess a well-rounded skillset, including leadership, teamwork, and time management.

Participating in clubs or initiatives aligned with career interests also provides valuable networking opportunities with professionals and like-minded peers. These connections can be crucial when seeking a career after graduation.

Building a strong foundation

There is no expectation that your young people will have their entire career path figured out during their studies. That is why universities provide a wide range of support to guide them. By taking full advantage of career services, internships, and extra-curricular opportunities, students can build a strong foundation for their future.

Proactively seeking career development opportunities will help your young people develop essential skills. It will also ensure they are ready to take on the challenges of the professional world with confidence. Their career starts now.



**Learn more on
episode 26
of The Uni
Guide Podcast.**

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