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over 50 education practitioners.**

 **UniTasterDays.com**

Teachers' Guide to University 2024

The key higher education facts for school and college staff.

Produced in collaboration with **HELQA**

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Welcome to the UniTasterDays.com Teachers' Guide to University

This guide has been produced to support you to deliver excellent university guidance to your students.

As well as supporting you in your day-to-day role, it will also anticipate a conversation between you (the teacher/careers adviser) and your student (the potential higher education applicant), arming you with solid answers to their questions about moving on to higher education. It has been produced based on the higher education system in England, and was released in October 2023.

The guide aims to clarify the current position for you and your students following so many significant sector changes. Crucially, it looks to bring you closer to the institutions that offer so many ways for your students to explore higher education, before committing to it.

Helping students to make the right choice

As with any of life's landmark choices, higher education is not a decision to be taken lightly. Sound advice and first-hand insight into what students face, at an early stage, provides a smoother path to successful higher-level study, and a better chance of a satisfying and fulfilling career. This guide helps you to provide it.

Universities operate in a more competitive market than ever. It's in their interest to attract students by inviting them to Open Days, workshops, talks and all manner of familiarisation events – be that on campus, in school or online. The following pages show a selection of activities your students will find useful.

The simple fact is that your students now have a wider choice than ever of ways to 'try on higher education for size' and to ask any question they want to the university staff member or student best equipped to answer it.

Experts on your side

This guide features contributions from experts in higher education, as well as specialists from outside the sector with fantastic advice and support to share. It has been produced in collaboration with HELOA - and we are very grateful for their support and the contributions made throughout the guide by HELOA members.

I should also add that often in the guide, we use the term 'university' – but it is acknowledged that not only universities offer higher education programmes. We just use the term 'university' as it avoids another acronym and using repeated references to 'higher education institutions' throughout.

I hope you will find this Teachers' Guide to University useful, and that you'll visit UniTasterDays.com to search or request your next event soon.

Jon Cheek - Director, UniTasterDays.com
Jon@unitasterdays.com



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What's new in higher education? Introducing the recent changes

By Reena Kaur, Student Recruitment and Access Officer at Keele University and HELOA UK Chair

As we start the new academic year, we're reminded that there is no such thing as a quiet summer! It's been a busy time across the higher education sector and there have been plenty of changes too. I've summarised some of the key updates below.

Apprenticeships search

Earlier this year, the Department for Education and UCAS announced that, from September, students will be able to browse and discover apprenticeship opportunities on UCAS Hub alongside university courses. This development will allow students to explore multiple avenues for their post-18 options on a central platform. In September 2024, students will also be able to complete applications for apprenticeships on UCAS for the first time, streamlining the research process and providing an accessible hub for all their next steps.

Courses choice and employability

There's been a continued discussion in the media around the value of higher education and comments around reducing spaces on what the government deem to be 'rip-off courses'. In their opinion, these are courses that don't have strong employability prospects. However, universities are increasingly focused on employability and while they improve skills and work-based learning, supported by employer engagement, it is imperative to remember that they also prepare graduates for jobs and sectors that don't exist yet.

Student experience and teaching methods

Every university is focused on providing a high-quality student experience and that involves offering support that's in line with increased mental health disclosures and the cost-of-living crisis. We encourage students to explore student support services as part of their general university research.

Also consider that a range of platforms are being implemented to enhance teaching methods and the new Teaching Excellence Framework gradings will be released at the end of September. It is key that students have an awareness of how they want to learn when applying to university - blended and online learning doesn't work for all.

Personal statements

Following the change to the references section on the UCAS application, there's also an in-depth consultation occurring around the format of personal statements. It is likely that UCAS will move away from free text (allowing up to 4000 characters or 47 lines), and implement set questions instead. These questions are still in discussion as they need to be suitable for all applicants and ensure they continue to improve access to higher education for those from under-represented backgrounds. Expect to hear more about this in the UCAS Adviser newsletter over the next year and remember to share your views!

UCAS have forecasted that the demand for higher education will continue to grow with an expected 1 million applications by 2030. And while there is a concern around capacity, funding and student choice, universities will continue to offer a range of opportunities to facilitate the interests of students. It's important that you as teachers and advisers continue to discuss options with students, so that they're aware of their choices and any changes in higher education. We're here to help with both, so please reach out to us!



Working with student recruitment and outreach teams: who, what, where and when

By Hope Nightingale, Student Recruitment Manager at Aston University

You want to start working with universities so you can provide more opportunities for your students, but where do you start? Here is a brief introduction and some top tips for engaging with student recruitment and outreach teams.

Who?

Each university will have a team that delivers information, advice and guidance to students about their future choices, but what they're called can vary. Teams may be called recruitment, outreach, marketing, widening participation, schools liaison – the list goes on. This is understandably confusing when trying to find the right person to contact. A good place to start is [UniTasterDays](#), which lists university events and, most importantly, connects you to the right team.

What?

Teams offer support at higher education fairs as well as presentations on topics such as applying to university, student finance and student life. Additional support includes workshops, subject-specific activities and campus experience days. Some institutions may also be able to provide specialist advice around university interviews or portfolio advice. Increasingly popular since the pandemic are revision, study skills and employability events, as well as confidence-building and wellbeing workshops. We're always happy to adapt sessions or create new ones, so if you have an idea, just ask!

Where?








You can bring your students to campus or we can come to you – the choice is yours! Visiting a university campus can be a great experience for students and it will give them

an insight into what being a real student is like. Most teams will also be happy to come out to schools and colleges to deliver activities. Since the pandemic, it's been fantastic to get back out to schools, but you can also ask us to deliver virtual activities – particularly useful if you want to engage with a university further afield!

When?

Activities are run all-year round but some months are busier than others. March, April and June in particular are very busy and universities get booked up quickly, so book early if you'd like an activity delivered during this time. Teams may also be able to accommodate day, evening and weekend events, so do get in touch to see what's possible. Most teams will publish the dates for their on-campus events such as Taster Days, Open Days and school visits on their websites, at the start of the academic year, so take a look and start planning.

My top tips:

-  Initial contact – look for a generic email address or a section on the website to contact. These are often listed on [UniTasterDays](#) too.
-  If you have an idea for a workshop, let us know and we'll do our best to make it happen. If your students find something useful, the chances are others will too.
-  Sign up for newsletters and follow recruitment and outreach teams on social media to receive their latest news and events.
-  Go national! Invite universities to events from across the country. Many teams have regional officers now, so you'll be surprised who might exhibit from much further afield.
-  Book early if you'd like a talk or workshop delivered, especially during busy months.
-  Give feedback – teams are always happy to hear if something has worked, or if it hasn't!
-  We're always happy to give advice and guidance – and are only a call or email away.

Your students' journey starts here



Aston University's Student Recruitment and Outreach team works nationwide to give students the very best information, advice, and guidance.

We deliver fun and engaging activities both on and off campus;

- Subject tasters
- Campus visits
- Teacher CPD
- UCAS application and personal statement support
- Student finance and budgeting workshops
- Undergraduate student-led subject tasters
- Graduate employability workshops
- Advice and guidance on gaining work experience
- HE Fairs



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Saturday 30 September
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What to expect when starting a new relationship with a university

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

Having worked at four different universities, I know that they all have a different offering for schools and colleges. But there are similar things that you can expect during your first interaction with a university.

The start of a blossoming relationship

As with every success in education, relationships are very impactful and every university wants to cement a positive relationship with you from the start.

“ Be open with what your expectations are and what you hope to gain from your working relationship. Your university contact should be equally open with what they need from you. ”

Your university partner needs to understand what makes your school unique and what your individual needs are. They can then explore what bespoke support or activities they can offer. Help them to tailor content to make it more engaging and relevant by sharing your school and student demographics. No single university can offer everything, but they should be willing to signpost to others who can help.

Preparing for a visit

If you have not received one beforehand, ask for an agenda of the day with agreed goals.

This is helpful, especially if you can't attend and a colleague is running the trip for you – it ensures all parties are clear on expectations.

Regular check-ins

If the university is hosting you, they should be checking in after each session. Be open and honest with how the day is going. If you're the host, offer quick and constructive feedback after the first session so they know they're hitting your expectations and can make any necessary amends.

Data, data, data

Universities need data to demonstrate the impact of their engagements for external and internal evaluation. Students will often be asked baseline questions at the start of the session and offered an evaluation later. You and your colleagues should be requested to complete some form of evaluation, either on the day or shortly after. And ask if the outcomes can be shared with you so that you can use it for your own internal monitoring, such as the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Ask who is the best contact going forward

Each university will have a central point of contact, who can offer you a wide range of support, even if they're not the person you initially booked through. If they can't help, ask them for an introduction to other helpful contacts, either internally or at other institutions.

Don't be afraid to ask

Ultimately, a university's role is to support your students. Never be afraid to ask if they can do something for you. Your first time working with a university is always exciting and should be seen as the start of a long-term relationship. Keep in touch, ask questions and don't be afraid to ask for a favour.

As long as your students reach the right destination for them, we've all done our jobs properly.



How universities can support your attainment raising activities

By Dr Hannah Merry, Head of Higher Horizons Operations (Uni Connect Programme)

Universities have been asked to do more to raise attainment in schools – but what does this mean?

If you have been your school's careers lead or outreach co-ordinator for a while, you will know that the government often change their mind about how they want universities to support schools.

The government's latest priority for universities is to support attainment raising. This should, they say, boost equal access to university because we know the attainment of student groups underrepresented in higher education is often lower than their more advantaged peers. If pupils achieve better grades in their exams, it should widen their options for post-16 and post-18 study.

The first thing to say here is that universities are not the experts in how to support attainment raising in schools. And we know that. Teachers support young people to achieve their best every single day, and we are not going to claim we have all the answers. We also know that so many of the challenges young people face happen outside of school, and neither universities nor schools can solve these without the support of other agencies. But we do believe we can work in partnership with you to complement your school's attainment raising strategies.

So, what can we do to support attainment raising, and what do we do already?

University outreach teams already do a lot of

different things that are designed to support attainment. Some of this activity might have an explicit focus on attainment like offering revision or study skills sessions, tutoring or academic mentoring from undergraduate students. This type of work is designed to boost skills used for learning (what you might hear referred to as metacognition) or improve confidence in academic skills (what we refer to as self-efficacy). You may have taken cohorts to university taster days - these are often subject-specific, with extra- or supra-curricular activities designed to enhance knowledge gained inside the classroom.

Universities also deliver other types of activities which might have the secondary effect of boosting attainment, by helping young people improve their motivation and give them a route to higher education. This work is just as important as work directly aiming to boost attainment - good exam grades might widen choice, but if students aren't empowered to understand their options or understand how they can achieve their goals, they may not be able to make an informed choice about which university is right for them, or which type of qualifications they should take at sixth form or college to facilitate entry to the course or university they are aiming for.

You should expect to see the continuation of these types of information, advice, and guidance activities, along with campus visits which show young people the realities of university life so they can picture themselves there.

Supporting good attainment is only one part of working towards equal access to higher education. If we want to improve access to higher education, we not only need to give young people the tools (study skills, exam technique, motivation) to succeed, but also the knowledge to make informed choices. Universities should be aiming to do both - and you should not be afraid to remind them of that.

“ Supporting good attainment is only one part of working towards equal access to higher education. If we want to improve access to higher education, we not only need to give young people the tools to succeed, but also the knowledge to make informed choices ”

Supporting you to achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks

By Charlie Kettlewell, Outreach and Schools Liaison Officer at University College Birmingham

The ever-changing landscape of careers can feel a little overwhelming for careers advisers. However, university officers are always happy to support you with Gatsby wherever we can. When booking programmes with universities, please let your contact know which benchmarks you wish to hit, as we may be able to amend pre-existing content to suit your needs.

Please find a guide below showing how universities can support you with each one of the eight!

Gatsby Benchmark 1. A stable careers programme

We hope that involving a university can help with your wraparound approach to careers. You can book us in for multiple programmes or have an agreed workshop for different year groups. Just remember to book in advance so you can publish it on your website.

Gatsby Benchmark 2. Learning from career and labour market information

This depends on the offer of the university. Some universities will offer workshops that focus on careers information and others won't. Do enquire with each institution about your needs as they may surprise you – many universities have a focus on careers and will tell students how their study options can impact or support future employment.

Gatsby Benchmark 3. Addressing the needs of each pupil

As part of a visit, we aim to support as many pupils as possible. But to hit this benchmark, 1-2-1 advice must be recorded. If you provide resources for the university representative to complete for student records, we can talk through the student's next steps and support by giving further guidance – similar to benchmark eight.

Gatsby Benchmark 4. Linking curriculum learning to careers

Universities run a number of subject-specific taster workshops, so let us know what students are

currently studying so we can link your curriculum to ours. We can also include a discussion around the career prospects in those areas.

Gatsby Benchmark 5. Encounters with employees and employers

All university staff that visit your school or college are technically employees and represent a company, so you could ask university representatives to share information about their role with your students, to help hit benchmark five. Ask us to provide a slide at the beginning of a talk or workshop, or set questions to answer at a careers fair.

Gatsby Benchmark 6. Experiences of workplaces

Enquire as to whether we can host work experience or shadowing opportunities for your students or if we could come in during work experience weeks to run workshops.

Gatsby Benchmark 7. Encounters with further and higher education

The most obvious of the bunch! Universities can always help you with benchmark seven, in whatever capacity you need us. Some universities also provide apprenticeships or further education courses, so they may be able to support with more than higher education.

Gatsby Benchmark 8. Personal guidance

Whether it's a mock interview or a personal statement check, university officers are always happy to give personalised information, advice and guidance. While we aren't usually qualified careers advisers, we're here to support decision-making, so please ask us. This is particularly useful for pre-16 students, as the guidance doesn't have to be completed by a Level 6 IAG Adviser. Some officers may also be Level 6 trained, so please ask as we may be able to support with this benchmark for post-16 students too.

Examples of how universities can support you with the Gatsby Benchmarks:

- taster days
- mock interviews and personal statement checks
- work placement opportunities
- workshops (careers, choosing a course, subject-specific)
- careers fairs
- assemblies and talks
- mentoring
- summer schools.

Information sessions with St Mary's Schools and Colleges



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London



The St Mary's Schools and Colleges team delivers information, advice and guidance to post-16 learners considering higher education study, aiming to ensure students make informed decisions about their future.

Our presentations and workshops include:

- Why go to university?
- Making good choices (choosing a university)
- Writing personal statements
- Academic taster seminars
- Campus experience days
- Student finance information

For more information please contact schools.colleges@stmarys.ac.uk

or visit stmarys.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges

or call 020 8240 2364

For upcoming Open Events, visit stmarys.ac.uk/open-events/upcoming.aspx



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98% of graduates are
in employment, vocation
or further study within 15
months of graduation
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The Sunday Times
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A guide to providing university information to parents and carers

By **Beth Bradbury, UK Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Sheffield**

Parents and carers are often keen to support their young person when exploring their options and making informed decisions about what their next steps will be after sixth form or college. Though for many, this can be a daunting prospect.

University opportunities

When working with parents or carers, it is crucial to avoid making assumptions about their awareness or understanding of opportunities. The breadth of university options is an ever-developing landscape, and those supporting young people may not be aware that the best path for one person isn't necessarily the right decision for another.

Timescales

It is vital that parents and carers are aware of timescales and are informed and involved throughout the whole process. This ensures they can best support their young person when exploring different courses and institutions before completing their applications.

There are a number of other time-sensitive aspects that parents and carers should be aware of, especially if their young person wants to apply for competitive courses or [Russell Group](#) universities. These include [UCAT/BMAT](#) aptitude tests, internal school and college and [UCAS deadlines](#), interviews, [MOOCs](#) and EPQs. Parents and carers should also be informed about how to use UCAS Hub, what to expect on results day and how their young person can use Clearing. Although the majority of students won't access Clearing, the anticipation of results day is often the driver of a lot of apprehension for parents and students alike.

The [What Is Clearing?](#) resource on the UCAS website is a very useful point of reference.

Terminology

Although you'll have a good handle on the many terms and acronyms used in relation to higher education, this terminology may be intimidating to parents and carers. While not making assumptions and actively trying to make information accessible, a useful resource for those less familiar with university jargon is the [UniTasterDays Jargon Buster](#).

Research

Share as many research tools as possible with parents and carers. Not only so they're well armed to support their young person with their decision-making, but also to dispel any misconceptions or preconceived ideas they may have about higher education.

It is key that parents and carers understand how to support their young person with their research, such as looking beyond course names to ensure that choices align with interests and career aspirations, and understanding that different options may require specific entry qualifications, grades and subjects. Parents and carers should also guide their young person with their insurance choice – helping them to understand that selecting a university with lower grades than they're predicted will put them in a more secure position on results day.

Parent and supporter resources

Parents and carers may be unaware that lots of universities have dedicated sections of their website that can provide them with useful tools and information. These often include resources, virtual information sessions or video and contact details should they need to seek advice.

Note from UniTasterDays

Every year, we produce a guide like this, but for parents and guardians. They (and you) can download this with no registration required at:

www.unitasterdays.com/parents



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- Sat 28 Oct 2023
- Sat 18 Nov 2023
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- Wed 17 Jan 2024
- Sat 15 June 2024

We're the number one young university in the UK

(Times Higher Education Rankings, 2023)



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

Five things EVERYONE should know about English student finance

By Martin Lewis, Founder of MoneySavingExpert.com

The start of the 2023 academic year saw the biggest shake up to student finance in England for a decade. The changes were both subtle and massive. On the surface they looked like a tweak, but in practice it will increase the eventual cost of going to university by over 50% for many typical graduates. I recognise that isn't what you want to read, and it's tough for me to write it too...

...as the last thing I want to do is put you off going. I still believe if university is right for you, you should go. University can be life enhancing and often lead to increased earnings potential – but a higher cost means it's worth taking a serious, practical, look at whether it is right or not, or if there other better options – and go into it with your eyes open.

Let's also ignore the huge political spittle that flies about student loans, that's a societal issue. My focus is on the personal, what university will cost YOU – so you understand the impact on your pocket - and that is radically different to what you usually hear. Be careful too of listening to past student's tales – even older siblings – as how student finance works depends on when they started and where in the UK they are from.

My five rules below are written for first time undergraduates who are resident in England starting university in September 2023, September 2024 and likely after (unless there's a big politics shift). Those from elsewhere in



the UK see www.MoneySavingExpert.com/RestOfUK or for those who started earlier in England please see my different guide at www.MoneySavingExpert.com/StudentMythbuster.

Even this is only a summary though, for more detailed help (including whether you should be taking the loan) see my expanded guide at www.MoneySavingExpert.com/2023studentloans.

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

Students don't pay the university or other higher education institutions directly. Tuition fees, typically up to £9,250, are paid for you by the Student Loans Company. Over a typical 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 (though repayments won't start until April 2026 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 family residual income, which for most people is a proxy for 'parental income'.

The loan received starts to be reduced from a family income of just £25,000 upwards, until around £58,000 to £70,000 (depending 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 2023 starters (and likely it'll be roughly similar for 2024), the full annual loan is:

- £8,400 if living at home.
- £9,978 away from home.
- £13,022 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/ParentalContribution 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 together 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 is only likely to get worse as the living loan has not been updated close to the increase in inflation during the cost of living crisis.

So, when deciding where to study, look at all the costs, transport, 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.

What you repay each month after university depends solely on what you earn, 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 £50,000 and you repay £900 a year
- In fact, let's be ridiculous and say tuition fees have been upped to £1m a year, so you owe £3m+, you still ONLY repay £900 a year

So as you can see, 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 new 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 AND/OR don't take the full loan AND/OR are lucky enough to have access to large amounts of spare cash, just ignore the amount you 'owe'.

Instead in practice what happens is you effectively pay an extra 9% tax on your income (not including National Insurance) for 40 years.

At current rates, it works like this:

Earnings	Uni goers	Non-uni goers
Up to £12,570	No tax	No tax
From £12,571 - £25,000	20%	20%
From £25,000 - £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 – the measure of how quickly prices of all things are rising. It changes annually each September based on the prior March's RPI. That's likely to be high for 2023 – 2024, but will hopefully drop substantially after that.

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 of 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' it can be changed at the whim of administrations.

You can take some reassurance from the fact this new system only impacts new starters, 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'.

Why will the new system cost so much more for many?

The cost of a student going to university has long been split between the state and the individual (paid in the years after they've studied). The government decided to swing the pendulum even further towards the individual and away from the state with three big changes for 2023 starters.

- It lowered the repayment threshold, so all those above the threshold pay more each year.
- Most importantly it extended the maximum time you repay for from 30 to 40 years, this has a huge impact.
- It did one positive change - the rate of interest added has been reduced to RPI (it used to be up to RPI +3%) though that mainly benefits higher earning graduates who'll clear the whole loan in 40 years.

So, while under the old system for each pound spent on higher education the government funded 44p and the student 56p, under this new system on average the government will fund 19p and the student 81p.

Other important student guides to read:

[How to budget as a student](#)
[Best student bank accounts](#)
[Student checklist](#)

University bursaries and scholarships – what are they?

By Wendy Price OBE, Head of Widening Access and Participation at the University of Sunderland

University is one of the most popular post-18 options. However for some students and parents/carers, costs can be a prohibiting factor. While student finance helps with university fees, student loans only stretch so far.

Universities offer additional financial support through bursaries and scholarships. Exploring these options with your students may encourage them to think differently about their options.

What's the difference between bursaries and scholarships?

Both terms refer to financial support that does not need to be paid back. However, there are key differences:

- **Bursaries** are usually based on personal circumstances such as background or location.
- **Scholarships** are usually based on an achievement, including academic, sport or music. They need to be applied for and are often competitive.

University bursaries

Bursaries are awards offered to students who are currently under-represented in higher education. These bursaries aim to remove barriers to education and encourage students to attend university who may not have previously considered it.

Some bursaries need to be applied for and some are automatically awarded. Most universities also have hardship funds: one-off payments that help students who fall into unexpected financial hardship.

To help with budgeting, some bursaries are awarded termly over several academic years.

University scholarships

Scholarships can be more competitive, they usually involve an application and are often awarded based on academic performance or

excellence in certain areas. Scholarships are usually given in termly instalments and can be cash or credit based.

Our University of Sunderland flagship scholarship rewards students who have the highest increase between their GCSE grades and Level 3 qualifications. They are given credit to spend on course resources and cash to help with living costs.

There are also scholarships for specific subjects. Sometimes, scholarships are supported by philanthropic donors. For example, at the University of Sunderland we have a Creative Writing scholarship that is kindly supported by a local author and former student.

Universities may also have music and sport scholarships. These help support students with their sporting endeavours and usually go towards coaching, travel and equipment.

Deadlines

Many scholarships and bursaries have application deadlines, some even before students start university. Therefore, it's important students look into this as they do their initial UCAS research, and make a note of any deadlines. They should also look out for emails from the universities they've applied to for deadline notifications.

Where to find scholarships and bursaries

With many scholarships and bursaries on offer from different universities, it's worth encouraging your students to do their research. This can be through various channels including:

- **university websites**, where the criteria for all their scholarships and bursaries will be displayed.
- **university Open Days**, where finance teams are available to talk your students through their options.
- **The Scholarship Hub**, which houses a large database of available funding for UK and EU students.
- **the gov.uk website**, which lists the government-funded awards available

The most important thing is to let your students know there is financial help available. Whether they are budding musicians or sportspeople, or think university isn't for them because of their circumstances, there's likely to be some form of financial help or guidance for them.



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Scholarships update: how your students can stand out

By Jon Hering, Scholarships Lead at Blackbullion

Introduction

Over the last 12 months, the UK's emphasis on scholarships has increased more dramatically than in previous years. With the cost-of-living crisis exacerbating the already expensive commitment of pursuing a university degree, stakeholders outside of the education sector have taken notice and begun to step in.

In November, we saw the unveiling of Santander's new Education Strategy, which included a multi-million pound scholarship programme. Even UK grime artist, Stormzy, is getting involved by funding dozens of scholarships for Black students at Cambridge.

However, even with more opportunities opening up for your learners, the market for scholarships is still small and very competitive. So, here's some guidance which will point your students in the direction of the right opportunities and help them to maximise their chance of securing the awards by smashing their applications.

Finding opportunities

The scholarships marketplace is fractured – most funders have not got behind a collective approach just yet. As such, searching for scholarships can be tricky.

For students who have already secured a place at university, the first port of call should always be the university itself. Many universities have a wide array of bursaries, grants and scholarships for students to apply for, depending on their circumstances. Unfortunately, using traditional website navigation can be challenging. Instead, try googling the name of the university + scholarships, i.e., "King's College London scholarships", which usually does the trick!

For students who have not yet chosen their university course, and for those who feel as though finances are a barrier between them and university, you can recommend using a scholarships aggregator to search for opportunities. Websites such as Blackbullion's Funding Hub, The Scholarship Hub and even the British Council.

“ Quick tip: Sign up to newsletters which will update your students and teachers of upcoming scholarship and bursary opportunities! ”

Increasing the chance of success

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



Sharing experiences about their families, personal achievements and aspirations will help their application. And linking their career goals to the subject they've chosen to study demonstrates a commitment to their education and their future, which goes a long way with funders.

Another excellent way for your students to stand out is to show off their knowledge and research of the funder. Each scholarship application is different, so demonstrating to the funder that their application is for them and them only will ensure that the student is noticed.

Another important note for your students is to remember to provide evidence. Many scholarships will be targeted at students who require the additional funding due to personal circumstances. In these situations, most funders will ask for evidence of the students' financial situation, so they should have bank statements, SLC Entitlement Letters and photo ID's ready to go if they want to speed up the process!

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



CAUTION: Reviewers can tell when students use artificial intelligence on their scholarship applications! That doesn't mean that students shouldn't use Chat GPT to assist with their applications, but it does mean that they need to be careful.

“ Another excellent way for your students to stand out is to show off their knowledge and research of the funder. Each scholarship application is different, so demonstrating to the funder that their application is for them and them only will ensure that the student is noticed. ,”



A guide to the Disabled Students' Allowance

By Chantal Bradburn, Outreach and Widening Participation Manager at the University of Chester

It's essential that students are aware of the support available to them while they're studying at university, especially if their lives are impacted by a disability.

Alongside Student Finance funding, and the in-house pastoral and accessibility-based support that universities provide, the government also offers the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). The DSA is intended to provide support for students who have a physical or mental-health related disability.

Unlike the Student Finance arrangements, the DSA is not income-assessed. It is based on the individual's specific disability and does not need to be repaid.

The DSA can help with many different expenses, but it is important to note that it only covers costs associated with a student's studies. For example:

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

Who is eligible for the DSA?

Students who are going to study at undergraduate or postgraduate level; who qualify for student finance loans in the UK; and who are going to study on a course that lasts at least one year may be able to apply for the DSA.

Important note:

Universities and Student Finance England are happy to answer any queries about DSA and further information, including up to date figures, can [be found online](#).

A student is eligible for DSA if they have a:

- **specific learning difficulty**, for example, dyslexia or ADHD
- **mental health condition**, for example, anxiety or depression
- **physical disability**, for example, they use crutches, a wheelchair or a special keyboard
- **sensory disability**, for example, they are visually impaired, deaf or have a hearing impairment
- **long-term health condition**, for example, cancer, chronic heart disease or HIV.

There is a separate disability allowance for NHS students.

DSA applications

The DSA application is available as part of the Student Finance England application. If students have not completed an online finance application and are applying by post, DSA application forms can be [downloaded here](#). If a student wishes to apply solely for DSA (and not Student Finance) they can do so using the form DSA1 from the web link above.

Providing evidence

For both physical and mental health related disabilities, a report or letter from a relevant doctor or consultant may be required. Students can complete and submit their evidence on the gov.uk website, using [this link](#).

For specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, a copy of a diagnostic assessment from a practitioner, psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher will be needed.

Once the application is complete and evidence has been provided, Student Finance will assess whether the student is eligible and, in some cases, contact them about an assessment.

How is DSA paid?

Students will be made aware of what they're eligible for and whether their allowance will be paid directly to them, or to their education provider to cover the cost of their specialist equipment or support.

It is important that new applicants do not buy any equipment until they've received their payment, as they cannot be reimbursed for any purchases made before they've received a decision from SFE.

A guide to the NHS Learning Support Fund for health courses

By Kayleigh Drake, Student Recruitment Manager at the University of Suffolk

Arranging finance is an important part of student life and knowing there's additional help available can reassure those who otherwise might not think they can afford higher education.

The NHS Learning Support Fund is an additional source of funding for eligible students who are studying healthcare courses and can be used towards the costs of training, childcare and travel.

Student Finance Advisers at universities are on hand to help with any initial queries and to support students throughout their study years, making them aware of any funding routes that might be available to them.

Applications for the NHS Learning Support Fund tend to open in spring or early summer leading up to the course start in September. Students apply directly through the Learning Support website but new students will need to create an online account before they can apply for funding for each year of study.

Payments from the fund are then made to students in three installments across the year. Travel or accommodation claims that are made will be paid as and when they're processed, not at the same time as the main elements, and students will need to remember to obtain and keep receipts or proof of

purchase documents in order to make these claims.

The Learning Support Fund is a grant fund, not a loan fund, which means that the payments don't need to be paid back. And because they're not based on household income either, anyone who meets the grant requirements will be awarded equally. There are four main parts to the NHS Learning Support Fund:

- **Training grant** – this is the main element and is a £5,000 award (pro rata for part-time students), paid at each level of study. There is also the potential for a further £1,000 for students studying a shortage or specialist subject. These are recognised as mental health nursing, learning disability nursing, radiography (diagnostic and therapeutic), prosthetics and orthotics, and orthoptics and podiatry.
- **Parental support** – an award of £2,000 for students who have parental responsibility for a child under 15, or 17 years old with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- **Travel and dual accommodation** – this is for the reimbursement of some of the costs incurred when travelling to placements, or if secondary/temporary accommodation is needed.
- **Exceptional support fund** – is for students experiencing financial difficulty. This fund is available when they've exhausted all support from their university, and is income and expenditure assessed.

For more information visit the [NHS Learning Support Fund \(LSF\) | NHSBSA](#)



Budgeting for students – a university guide

By Jonny Barker, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Salford

We know that the financial aspects of university can be daunting for students, especially as this may be the first time they've had to manage their money independently. They may also have no experience of how much everyday essentials can add up to. Add in a cost-of-living crisis, loan amounts that haven't kept up with inflation and moving to a brand-new place away from their usual support network, it's not surprising that many students are feeling stressed or anxious about their finances. With that in mind, we asked current Salford students to share their best advice for budgeting.

Planning ahead

The most important piece of advice our students gave was the necessity to establish their budget. Everyone's circumstances are different, so it is important students do this individually. It's very common to be over budget the first time, so they should look out for ways they can make reductions or savings. There's a variety of online budgeting templates available, so encourage your students to check those out if they're struggling to make their own.

Is it essential?

If students are struggling to find ways to save money, they should make a list of their essentials. Do they absolutely need that Netflix subscription or expensive phone contract? Are there cheaper alternatives? Is Spotify premium essential, or can they save money by listening to ads instead?

Buying second hand

Most courses will have a list of required books, but this doesn't mean your students have to spend large amounts of money on brand new copies. Looking in charity shops, second hand bookshops, Facebook Marketplace or buying them from older students on their course are good alternatives.

Learning to cook

Spending the summer before university learning how to cook is not just a healthy option, but will save money in the long run as ready meals, takeaways and frozen pizza tend to cost more than cooking at home. Of course, they don't need to become Gordon Ramsay, but knowing four or five key dishes will make life much easier – not to mention impress their new flatmates!

Student discounts

Wherever they go, they should remember to ask if the shop, restaurant or bar offers a student discount! There are also apps such as Student Beans and UniDays that give online discounts, and a 16-25 Railcard should be an essential item if they're travelling home regularly.

Student banking

There's a myriad of different student bank accounts out there, each offering different incentives. While having a student bank account is an absolute must, it is worth students spending a bit of time doing some research to find the one that's best for them. Martin Lewis has a helpful guide on his website, which is a perfect place to start.

Recognising the importance of budgeting is essential for an easier student journey and guiding first-time students to achieving fiscal responsibility is paramount. More often than not, it is a lack of knowledge that causes stress and anxiety around money. By providing your students with these tools, you can alleviate some of their worries and give them the best possible start at university.





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How can students make the most of university?

By Ross Neale, Graduate Coordinator at the University of York

This article approaches three key themes to empower you to support students to make the most of university. Occasionally the advice straddles multiple themes (e.g. university societies can be a mix of social, academic, and professional in focus), and sometimes none - such as financial advice - for which I would recommend MoneySavingExpert.com.

Theme one: Social

The social element of university can be one of the newest and most unnerving for students. It's also an aspect of university (and broader personal development) which will develop naturally, and for which there is lots of pastoral support available. Importantly, as teachers and careers colleagues, you can support students by encouraging them to recognise the value in what they have to add to conversations, so that they learn to feel more confident approaching and engaging with people in new environments. You can also encourage students to get involved with sports and societies, reminding them that bursaries and financial support exists for membership costs. It's important for young people to experience networking, to get comfortable with small talk and to learn to be interested in other people - your support will go a long way with this.

Theme two: Academic

Most students understand that university requires hard work and time management, but only a handful will understand what these look like. And whilst students will have lots of academic support available to them, they may not be prompted to actively reflect on their understanding of hard work and time management in their lives. In this way, you can play a pivotal role in supporting a student to reflect on how they use their time.

Additionally, you can:

- signpost to maths and writing skills centres
- encourage students to seriously consider studying a language (e.g., elective modules)
- don't let doubts about the logistics or practicalities (*'all my friends will have graduated' / 'I don't speak the language'*) dissuade them from understanding the benefits of a year abroad
- recommend the Turing Scheme and the British Council.

Theme three: Professional

Professional development is a critical aspect of university, yet often belatedly acknowledged by students. To that end, simply introducing the availability of professional opportunities in the second/third term of their first year - once they've socially acclimatised - will have a significant impact on supporting them to realise their potential. You could encourage students to:

- become course representatives to practice public speaking (also check out Vinh Giang on YouTube!)
- do a year in industry; reassure students that they will find housemates and housing
- attend jobs fairs
- make the most of their summer holidays by getting involved with vacation or volunteer schemes

Students have the rest of their lives for their career and it is perhaps more important to first support them to develop the skills which will serve them well when building towards it, such as effective networking and building self-confidence!

University will be transformative for many students, and their social, academic and professional development should be about embracing opportunities and nurturing their passion. These are some of the hallmarks of university and will build a solid foundation to help students map their careers. As teachers and careers advisers, your support plays a critical role in helping students feel confident and prepared to take their next step.

“ University will be transformative for many students, and their social, academic and professional development should be about embracing opportunities and nurturing their passion. ”

How to support your students with their transition to university

By Rubela Begum, Student Recruitment and Marketing Assistant at the University of Birmingham

The transition to university from sixth form or college marks a new chapter for students. It can be a daunting yet exciting experience for many, that involves adapting to new educational, social and physical environments. This article will offer insight into the common challenges students face and advice on how you can prepare them for their higher education journey.

Before joining university

Lack of knowledge, being unprepared and mismatched expectations about student life can lead to disappointment when transitioning to university. However, there are many ways students can prepare to make the transition easier. Here are some suggestions:

- engage with university Open Days and read through university websites
- speak to an academic about the course and ask questions regarding contact hours and the workload
- chat with current students either in person or online to gain a deeper understanding of university life
- visit the accommodation and understand the process of applying for it
- talk to student services and learn what support is available.

Independent learning

Students enjoy greater autonomy over their learning at university, which encourages them to delve deeper into their subject, be active learners and develop valuable skills, such as problem-solving and critical analysis.

Our advice is to encourage students to reflect on their current skills and how they might apply them at university. For example, students will likely have developed their organisation and time management skills at school or college.

We suggest students spend some time thinking about ways to improve these skills to handle their new academic priorities effectively and consider what areas they may need extra support with.

On that note, we recommend students use their university's academic skills services to help them in areas such as essay writing, referencing, presentations and note-taking among many others. We also want to stress that independent learning does not have to be a solitary activity. In fact, studying with peers can often engage students with their learning.

Money and budgeting

Whatever a student's financial situation is, university provides a great platform to learn financial responsibility and gain essential budgeting skills.

We suggest that students gain an understanding about how to fund their university experience before they start. Checking how much money they'll receive for their student loan and then weighing that up with their accommodation, food, travel, course and social costs will help them to start budgeting and living within their means early on.

There are great ways to save money as a student, such as bulk-buying, meal-prepping and using student discounts. Many universities offer scholarships and bursaries, often advertised on their websites, and many universities have a financial hardship fund for any students who are really struggling to make ends meet.

Forming friendships

Many people comment on how they 'made friends for life' at university. But for some students, moving away from their support network can make them feel lonely at university.

We encourage students to attend induction week activities, immerse themselves in social events and join clubs and societies. Getting involved in all that university has to offer is a great way to meet new people who share the same interests and can help to form supportive friendships. Connecting on social media, especially with people they're going to be living with, is also an excellent way for your students to foster friendships before they start.

Student life - what's it all about?

By Liv Squires, Senior Student Recruitment Officer at Solent University

Whether they choose to move away or commute from home, going to university means life takes a different turn for many students. Here, I will cover a few key things which may be helpful during conversations with your students about student life.

Researching

Throughout the application process and enrolment week, students are encouraged to carry out research about their university options. If students are unfamiliar with the location, then the first year will be a time of discovery – all about exploring new surroundings and activities to get involved in. One tip would be to simply Google search 'top 10 things to do' in the city or 'top 10 things to do' near their university. It can give an insight into what's available around them and could help them finalise their UCAS choices, especially if they're feeling torn.

Giving societies a go

Students don't have to do any societies! But what I always encourage – speaking from my own experience as someone who used to be quite shy and nervous, is just to give it a go! Assure students that there's never any pressure to get involved – they don't have to adopt a party lifestyle if that isn't something they enjoy – but there's usually something to suit everyone. Extra-curricular activities are also a fantastic addition to their CV.

Money, money, money!

Budgeting! It's definitely a part of navigating life as a student. If students haven't had sole management of their money before or haven't had as many financial responsibilities, this is a great stepping stone to introducing them to daily, weekly and monthly costs. To prepare, we recommend encouraging students to carry out budgeting activities by getting them to research how much the average student food shop is or asking them to produce the cheapest total for a mock shopping list. This can give them some idea of what they'll need to consider, especially if they choose to live away from home. However, if students do ever find themselves struggling, help is always available.

Reaching out

My final piece of advice is to reach out to universities in relation to student life. Make sure students ask questions, it doesn't matter what they are! Questions about their chosen course are important, but so are questions about life outside their studies. We encourage prospective students to engage with current students, after all, these are the people experiencing it first-hand. Simple questions such as 'what do you do in your spare time?', 'how do you find living away from home?', 'what's the accommodation like?' are a good place to start.

Each student's experience will be unique to them and it's something to be excited about. The recipe for a happy and wholesome student life is that the course is right, the location interests them and they can truly picture themselves living there. If students take time and give consideration to these things, they're already on the road to success!



How universities support students in need of additional support

By The Student Services Team at the University of South Wales

Universities offer a variety of support services which provide confidential support and guidance to their students. These services are accessible and the support provided is designed to enable students to study as independently as possible.

Here are some of the support services that University of South Wales students receive as an example for your students of what to expect when they start university.

The Wellbeing Service

The Wellbeing Service consists of the Health Service, Mental Health and Counselling Service, and Disability Service. The purpose of these services is to help students with their physical and mental health, social welfare and to support students as they study. They offer free, impartial advice and support to students and have a wide range of support and resources available.

Disability Service

The Disability Service provides information, advice and guidance, and co-ordinates disability-related support for students. This includes students with physical, sensory,

mental health or unseen disabilities, specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) and autism.

Mental Wellbeing Service

The Mental Wellbeing Service is made up of a number of teams who are available to support students with their mental health and wellbeing during their time at university. Each team has different specialisms and different approaches for each person.

Wellbeing Advisers are available to talk to students about their wellbeing and mental health. It is a confidential service, where the adviser can explore the student's needs to help develop an understanding of what service or support may be most suitable. These could include workshops, short courses, activities, mental health support and counselling.

Health Service

The Health Service provides advice and support to form part of our healthcare provision alongside the GP, pharmacist, dentist and the NHS.

Study Skills Service

The Student Development and Study Skills Service provides advice, information and resources to help improve academic performance and to help students develop transferable skills for employment.

Student Mentoring

Student-to-student mentoring schemes include practical or pastoral support for new students, plus weekly sessions focusing on academic work.

“Universities offer a variety of support services that provide confidential support and guidance to their students. These services are accessible and the support provided is designed to enable students to study as independently as possible. ”

Progression Advice Team

The Progression Advice Team works with students to identify areas of academic concern, advice on their available options and help with accessing the relevant tools and support to be a successful learner. The Progression Advice Team also produce a number of resources to support students through their academic journey.

Student Money Advice Team

The Student Money Advice Team provides support and advice to help students make informed decision about money.

The Service helps students find out about funding opportunities, how to maximise funding resources while they're at university and offer help and advice on managing money. They also offer direct assistance (where possible) if students get into financial difficulty.

Academic Support

The Students' Academic support network is made up of course leaders, module tutors and a personal academic coach (or personal tutors). The personal tutors can help students plan their personal, academic and professional development. They support a student's overall

progress, rather than focussing on individual assignments or modules.

Careers

Careers provides support with careers advice, employment, work placements and much more to help students prepare for their future.

Chaplaincy

The Chaplaincy is an open and inclusive service to the whole community. It offers confidential and non-judgmental support to students irrespective of faith, culture, gender or sexual orientation.

Students' Union

The Students' Union offers support and guidance on academic and welfare-related matters, extracurricular activities including clubs, teams and societies, and student representation. The Students' Union is also responsible for administering the Course Representatives and Student Voice Representatives systems.

When students are doing their research on what university to attend, it is important that they consider the usual criteria, such as courses, entry requirements and location, as well as the other university services that will support them on their journey.



Supporting students who are elite in their sport

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

Many students compete and perform in a range of sports, either as an individual athlete or within team sports. For those with sporting talent, going to university is a chance to get a degree and can be a great opportunity to develop their sporting abilities.

How much sport?

This comes down to the student, they may be competing at a county level, have represented their country individually or play for a local league. In competitive sports, student teams take part in matches against other universities. Inter-university competitions are run by British Universities & Colleges Sports (BUCS). Students can check the BUCS league of the sport they are interested in to see which universities are competing at a high level.

For some students, it makes sense to join university teams, but for others there can be opportunities in the local area that suit their needs better. Most universities will have partnerships with local clubs and, in some cases, academics and coaches may work for the university but also local or national teams. At the University of Winchester, we have a strong partnership with one of the largest athletics clubs by membership in the UK, but prospective students would not necessarily know that without a bit of research. Students may need assistance identifying which universities are linked to certain sports, particularly when associated with teams or clubs in the area.

Support

Some universities are leading the way – supporting talented athletes by being accredited by the Talented Athlete Scholarship

Scheme (TASS) initiative. The Sport England-backed programme supports young sports people seeking to gain qualifications as well as achieve their sporting goals. Schemes such as these recognise that undergraduates involved in elite sport need extra support to balance the needs of their studies and their sporting activities. For example, students who have been away at competitions or training camps can access resources and catch-up sessions with teaching staff.

Most universities are flexible about the degree a student is studying whilst competing and training. However, if the course is demanding, perhaps with placements, then students need to consider whether they will enjoy balancing the sport with their studies. Their broader university experience will be shaped by the time committed to training as well as academic study.

Scholarships and Bursaries

Many institutions offer scholarships or bursaries, which are often competitive and the numbers are limited. Rather than handing out money, many help students with attending competitions, physiotherapy sessions in university facilities or with their gym membership. It's important that this forms part of the student's research, so encourage them to check university websites before they apply. Often, the support is not confirmed until students have accepted the university as their firm choice.

Facilities

Great facilities can make a huge difference to training. It is important that students consider the way they train now, but also how this may change as they progress with their career. This might be the practical aspects such as pools, athletic tracks or accommodation with a gym, but this can also be the expertise of staff to hone the athletes' talents.

For those talented in sport, it will be important to dig a little deeper into the support, facilities and opportunities outside their degree study. These can have a significant impact on their career prospects.

“**For those with sporting talent, going to university is a chance to get a degree and can be a great opportunity to develop their sporting abilities.**”



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Helping students with university accommodation

By Georgie Linton-Smart, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Birmingham

Universities have a range of accommodation options for students to suit a variety of budgets and requirements. It is important for students to spend time researching options online and take a look at the accommodation in person if they visit a university's Open Day or Applicant Day to help them select the most suitable option.

Accommodation applications vary between universities and may have different deadlines. Students are typically able to apply for their accommodation after they've made their firm/insurance choices.

University owned accommodation

Most universities have their own accommodation (halls of residence) where many first years live. It could include en-suite or shared bathroom facilities or self-catered or catered options. The cost will vary depending on what they choose. They're usually charged a weekly rent, but will pay it termly in line with receiving their student loan payments.

Students usually stay in halls from September to June, sometimes with the option to extend their contract to 52 weeks, e.g. for international, health/medicine, care-leaver students. If a student has additional requirements, it is important they research how the university can support their needs, e.g. accessible rooms, and contact the university directly to discuss this.

Partner accommodation

Some universities partner with local, privately owned accommodation providers to increase their accommodation offering. How universities work with private providers varies and the students' contract could be with the university or the private provider. It is always best that they check.

Private accommodation

Many cities have privately owned halls of residence that are not associated with the university. These typically offer self-catered, en-suite rooms with shared kitchen facilities, and some offer studio apartments. Students apply to the provider directly and they're often housed with a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate students from different universities.

After the first year, students may move into privately owned halls but, more often than not, they'll move into private rented houses in the local area with friends they've made in their first year.

Many universities help students to find this accommodation and can also help them to check contracts with private landlords.

Five top tips for your students when making accommodation choices



Students shouldn't rule out shared bathroom facilities. After all, they're a great way to save money. They might only share with one or two other people rather than the twenty they've imagined – it is more like sharing with other family members at home!



Students should use the Student Finance Calculator to get an estimate of their student loan, so they know what accommodation is within their budget.



Students should check if the university has a guarantee scheme for securing a place in their accommodation. As well as checking if there are any conditions linked to the guarantee e.g., making the university their firm choice and applying by a certain deadline.



Students are usually required to pay a deposit or advanced rent payment. It's worth mentioning this to parents, as it's usually due around exam results day in August – before their student loan payment. Deposits are returned providing the contract isn't breached – and advanced rent payments are deducted from the total accommodation fee.



Students should check what's included in their accommodation e.g. microwave, toaster, Wi-Fi, bedding etc. Most universities have a platform where students can speak to their flatmates before move-in day, which saves everyone turning up with five pots and pans.

A guide to university societies

By Ellie Mace, Student Union President at Harper Adams University

Clubs, societies, groups, associations, networks – you’ve probably heard of them all! But whatever their name, their purpose is the same: to bring like-minded groups of students together to socialise. Whether that’s to take part in the same hobby; play or compete in sports; help the wider community; share knowledge; or develop skills, students will often find a society or club that suits their interests.

For example, here at Harper Adams University, we have a range of societies, groups and clubs ranging from astronomy, cricket, dance and conservation to off-roading, rugby and LGBT+. There’s also political, cultural and academic groups to join – basically, there’s something for everyone. And, as at most universities, if a student can’t find a society for them, they can get together with some like-minded individuals to set up their own group.

While it’s usually the responsibility of a university’s Students’ Union or Guild of Students to provide these groups with the support that they need to run their activity, more often than not, the societies and clubs are run by the students themselves.

At Harper Adams University, members of each society or club vote the next leaders into positions of management for the following year. These positions are usually, or similar in role to a Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and Social Executive. These elected students work together to plan and deliver the activities of the society with support from the

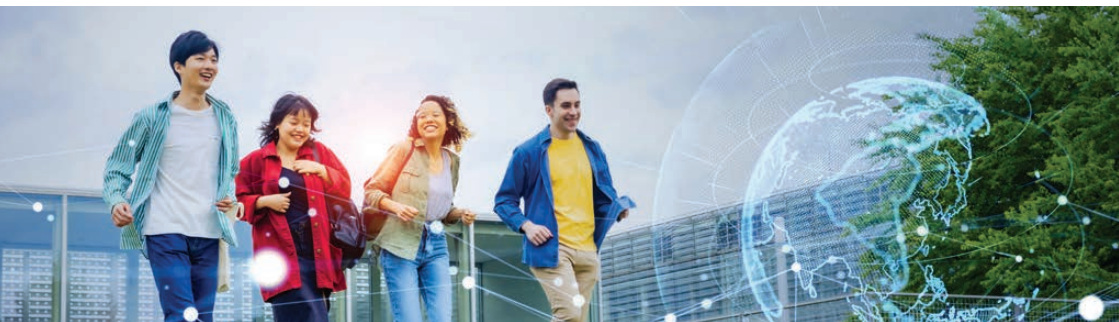
Students’ Union as well as external people such as sports coaches if needed. Societies arrange their own agendas, including when they meet to train or carry out the objectives of the society. Sports teams, for example, will meet during the week to train, to compete in local, regional or national leagues and also to socialise outside of the formal meeting hours. Whereas a non-sport society may have fewer formal meetings and require members to meet less frequently. Not all students want this level of responsibility when they join a society, but if they do put themselves forward, this is a great way to develop future skills and gain new experiences.

Your students don’t have to be part of a club or society but, as a recent graduate, I always recommend that students look to join at least one or two societies that they know they can commit a couple of hours a week to. Having those hours in the week to socialise with others and do something they enjoy will contribute to good health and wellbeing.

“ I was able to relax, get fit, laugh with (and make) friends and compete in a game that I loved by committing a few hours a week to our Netball club. I didn’t have to worry about anything but being in the moment. ”

Freshers’ Fairs are a great chance to sign up for societies. Whether your students try out something new, or continue with an existing hobby, the first few weeks of university are a good time to do a trial run, see what fits, and then maybe take a society forward from there.

Remind them – university is about more than just their studies, it’s about the memories and friends that they can make too.



Why might students consider university?

By Gemma Stead, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Huddersfield

The decision of whether or not to attend university is a personal choice and has arguably never been more difficult for students to make given the rise in the cost of living. Below is some information that's designed to help your students weigh up their options and make informed decisions.

Increased career prospects

In a 2019 report, published by the [Department for Education](#), as many as 38% of jobs required a degree qualification. This suggests that having a degree will most likely lead to better career prospects and increased earnings. [Research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies](#) has also shown that over their working life, graduates are around £100,000 better off by going to university.

Learn from academic and industry experts

University lecturers are experts in their field, many of whom will be actively working and researching in the areas they're teaching. University is an opportunity to learn and be inspired by academics who are leading the way in their discipline. It is also an opportunity to study and delve deeper into a subject they're passionate about and enjoy, through their own independent research, but with the guidance of an academic tutor.

Gain independence and transferable skills

University is a fantastic environment to gain personal and professional independence. Your students will have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to learn new skills, meet new people and build valuable skills that employers value, such as confidence and resilience. Joining a society through a university's Students' Union is also a

great way to meet like-minded people and try out new activities.

Home or away?

To keep costs down, many students are now choosing to commute to university rather than move away from home. This is very much an increasing trend and students would certainly not be on their own should they decide to attend a local university. Whether a student decides to commute or move away, they'll still have plenty of opportunities to socialise and gain independence.

Earn and learn – degree apprenticeships

There are now many ways to get a degree and a popular option is via the degree apprenticeship route. This is where students 'earn and learn' by gaining a degree qualification and working full-time. A big advantage of this route is that there are no university fees involved. However, degree apprenticeships are very competitive and limited in certain industries.

Finally, a word about student finance and debt...

The student loan system in the UK means that attending university is more affordable than many people think and, in most cases, the benefits detailed above outweigh the cost. Student loans are very different to other types of commercial debt and are designed to be manageable; monthly repayments are based on how much a graduate earns, not how much they've borrowed. Loans now get written off after 40 years, even if the graduate hasn't repaid it in full. The debt will also not affect the student's ability to obtain credit.



Note from UniTasterDays

Find out more about the university experience in Episode 18 of The Uni Guide Podcast -

www.unitasterdays.com/theuniguide

A guide to university study skills

By Eugenia Grigorieva, Education Liaison and Outreach Officer at Middlesex University

Preparing for university usually brings to mind the many steps of the university application process – from UCAS and personal statements to interviews and exams. However, a successful transition to university also involves considering the academic shift from studying A-Levels or BTECs to higher education.

For many students, this will be the first time that they're able to focus on one subject and manage their learning independently. Despite this, it is important to remember that students have used many of the necessary skills during their time at school and college, so university will bring the opportunity to develop their learning style further.

Learning their learning style

For students to effectively develop their learning style for university, they need to become aware of how they study and which routines and techniques work best for them. This is the principle behind metacognitive knowledge.

“ When a student becomes more conscious of which techniques work best for them, whether that's certain learning strategies or knowing when they're most productive in the day, their studying becomes more effective. ”

To achieve this, students can be encouraged to think about successful and unsuccessful revision strategies after exams or tests, or how they might approach improving their understanding of areas they're less confident in. By gaining a deeper knowledge of their own study skills, students will go to university feeling more confident that they have the tools to face challenging assignments and examinations.

Reflecting to improve

This ability to self-reflect is also key for students to be able to respond to feedback. Students tend to focus on the grade for a piece of work, rather than the feedback of what went well and how to improve. At university, feedback is even more crucial as it is central to a student's academic development. Particularly for courses that are lecture and seminar-based, comments on assignments can be unique opportunities where students will be able to gain personalised feedback on their understanding of a topic. Going over the written feedback on tests or assignments in detail at school or college can prepare students to respond positively to feedback in higher education.

In addition to this, when students are able to reflect on past feedback and use this to check their own work before handing it in, they're already building up essential learning routines for university. As university work is less scaffolded than A-Levels or BTECs, students will need to be confident in reading over their work, with previous feedback in mind, before submitting their assignments.

Support with learning

Finally, it is important for students to remember that while independent study comes with more responsibility, there's a wide range of support available too, from drop-in sessions and tutor support to transition activities for starting university. For example, Middlesex University offers a Ready for Anything programme, to help students prepare for university, which includes sessions on approaching assignments, academic writing and time management.

Studying at university provides an exciting opportunity for students to take charge of what they're studying. Whether that involves choosing the modules they're interested in, picking their dissertation topic or researching areas they find interesting. By reflecting on their current studies, students will find that they're already on the right path for taking on new challenges at university.



Careers support: what do universities offer?

By Maria Simpson, Careers Adviser at Harper Adams University

University offers so many opportunities to learn, explore and grow. But, for some students, navigating their way through a degree, and the graduate options beyond it, can be challenging. Fortunately, all universities have careers services that can be an invaluable support for students, and many of them offer general and bespoke guidance that's relevant to the course and to the student's needs.

How can careers services help?

A student can access careers resources from the moment they enrol on their course. However, a student can gain expert careers advice ahead of their enrolment at university by attending Open Days and finding out about career options, getting guidance from the careers team. This can be very helpful to students planning their course of study and realising the career pathways.

While many students have a good idea about their next steps, there are many who need additional help and insight. We always

recommend that students make the most of the careers support available during their time at university, as well as continue to use the services available to them beyond graduation.

University careers teams offer help at all stages of the job and career search, whether it's helping them to find part-time work while they're studying or preparing them for their career after graduation. For example, at Harper Adams, we help with CV writing, career planning, volunteering opportunities, part-time work, labour market and employment resources, online applications and applying for further and postgraduate study. The list goes on and on, but not everyone realises the extent to which a careers service can help.

What we can say though, is that students should be signposted to their careers service as soon as possible when they start at university. Encourage your students to see what support is available to them and how they can access the service.

For example, we recently ran a mock assessment centre to prepare some of our students for the various tasks they may face during interview stages. From practicing interview questions to showing them how to share their screen and present PowerPoint via Microsoft Teams, we left no stone unturned. In fact, following the activities and preparation, one of our students was successful in securing a job after being put through their paces at the assessment centre!

Encourage your students to access their careers service, or get familiar with where it is, while they're settling in to university. They never know when they might need us and we're really here to help them every step of the way!

Note from UniTasterDays

Check out Episode 16 of The Uni Guide Podcast - a careers at university special!

www.unitasterdays.com/theuniguide



A guide to the impact of pre-and post-16 option choices

By Carl Griffiths, Head of Student Recruitment at Harper Adams University

Students face a myriad of choices throughout school, making the prospect of deciding their future career paths rather daunting. Meeting parents, students, teachers and advisers, I find there is an increasing anxiety about making the right choices earlier, as well as what the impact of those choices will be.

Pre-16 choices, particularly for GCSE, can have an impact. There may be the fomenting of love and loathing for various subjects, and performance may be indicative of ability to take future options at Level 3. However, most students will tend to find that their choices for post-16 aren't heavily impacted by their pre-16 decisions.

“ I always suggest that if a student shows an interest in a particular subject or career choice, a bit of early research should be done to reassure them about the subject choices needed to achieve that career path. ”

Working at previous institutions, it was disheartening to meet a student passionate about Medicine, for example, only to find that they had none of the pre-requisite GCSEs or A-Levels that a UCAS search would have helped with early on. Post-16 options are, of course, the key decider for most degrees.

Getting the balance right

Research can help students to identify what they're willing and able to achieve, and what their future choices may be. Many may be delighted, for example, to find that at Harper Adams University, our Veterinary Medicine course bucks the trend in its Level 3 qualifications requirements and may lay a

path for those who have had to re-think taking a Veterinary degree. Equally, students doing research may come across career pathways that are much more aligned to their interests, abilities and course preferences than they may have been aware of. Finding the balance between preparing them for their dream career/apprenticeship/degree and the reality of their future is very important and something that early conversations can help with.

You will, of course, have plenty of students who have no idea what their next step will look like and that's equally fine. They should be supported to follow their passions and interests to discover what they enjoy and where they will succeed. The enthusiasm to research as they progress with their interests should still be encouraged, as it helps them to see where their passions can take them. And engaging universities and academics along their journey will help to illuminate those career paths. It may also help to ensure that, as their passions grow, they take the qualifications needed to keep those dreams alive.

Universities are keen to offer guidance where they can and will support students much earlier than Level 3. Connecting with Year 10s and 11s can help them to find their way past their Level 3 choices, possibly sparking their interest about a particular career path, and engaging Year 8s and 9s may help to guide them with their Level 3 choices.

All of this is caveated with the important message that when one door closes, another one opens. With Clearing now a more mainstream route, students will find that there are options available for every outcome along their educational journey. But supporting them so that they see the positivity in these outcomes is key.





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A guide to the different types of university courses

By Ellen Coyle, Undergraduate Course Information Coordinator at Liverpool John Moores University

There are many different types of undergraduate degree programmes, and it can be daunting for students to navigate the options available to them. This article will give you the basic knowledge you need to help your students make informed decisions about their degrees.

Bachelor's degree

A Bachelor's degree is the most common type of undergraduate course. They usually involve studying a single subject, although there are options to combine subjects to create a joint honours or combined honours programme, which is a great option if a student has an interest in multiple subject areas. Bachelor's degrees are typically studied full-time over three years, although many universities offer part-time study options. The most common types of Bachelor's degrees are:

- BA (Bachelor of Arts)
- BSc (Bachelor of Science)
- BEng (Bachelor of Engineering)
- LLB (Law)

Sandwich programmes

Most degrees now have the option to add a sandwich year. They usually take place in a student's third year of study, extending the course length by one year. The sandwich year will take the form of a study abroad or placement year, both of which can provide them with valuable work experience and help to boost their employability.

Foundation year

The first level of study available at university is a foundation year. These can be standalone one-year courses or part of an integrated Bachelor's degree. They are designed to improve academic skills and subject-specific knowledge, as well as prepare students for undergraduate study and life at university. After completing their foundation year, they would progress on to year one of their chosen undergraduate course.

Degree apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships are a great alternative to the more 'traditional' routes into higher education. These programmes still lead to a degree-level qualification, but they are undertaken alongside employment. The student will be employed by a company and receive a salary while they study part-time at university. The length of these programmes can vary in duration between subjects and institutions, so it's important that students research their options.



Higher National Certificates and Diplomas

Higher National Certificates or Higher National Diplomas are vocational qualifications that take between one and two years to complete. These programmes use practical methods of learning to prepare students for the working world, or for further study at degree-level. Qualifications come in a range of disciplines.

Integrated Master's

Integrated master's courses combine undergraduate and postgraduate study to enable students to graduate with a master's qualification. Several subjects offer this kind of programme, such as Pharmacy and Civil Engineering.

As you will know, course titles may be the same at many institutions but vary greatly in terms of module content, accreditations, contact hours and assessment methods. It's important that students do their own research by browsing university websites, looking through prospectuses and attending Open Days before they make a decision about where they want to apply.

Note from UniTasterDays

Students may find making a checklist like the example below helpful when shortlisting courses.

“As you will know, course titles may be the same at many institutions but vary greatly in terms of module content, accreditations, contact hours and assessment methods. It's important that students do their own research by browsing university websites, looking through prospectuses and attending Open Days before they make a decision about where they want to apply.”

	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5
Course and Institution A	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Course and Institution B	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Course and Institution C	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Course and Institution D	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Course and Institution E	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Course and Institution F	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗

Example UniTasterDays Course and Criteria Checklist

A guide to the different types of universities

By Dr Morag Duffin, Head of Access and Participation at The University of Law

The higher education system in the UK is very diverse, and students can study at a wide range of institutions, from traditional universities to further education colleges with higher education provision, to smaller and specialist institutions.

As a result of this diverse range of institutions and their different modes of teaching and learning, your students can choose the setting that best suits them and their individual educational preferences.

When helping students to choose what to and where to study, the 'what' always comes first.

What course do they want to study? Once they know that, they might have the difficult but exciting prospect of deciding where to study it. A primary consideration is what the course is like at each institution, i.e., the content of the course – does the History programme cover the topics they are most interested in?

It is also important to note that different higher education providers might teach the courses in different ways. Some institutions might focus on the more theoretical aspects of the course, whilst others embed more modes of application and research.

Understanding the different types of universities will enable you to best advise your students.

What type of educational setting is your student looking for?

A good way to answer this question is to encourage a student to think about what is most important for them as an individual and marry this with the type of setting.

Some questions for your students to consider include:



Do you have any preferences on location? This may be influenced by family or work commitments. It is important to note that if they would prefer to study online, there are some institutions that provide a 100% online model. This could allow them to remain at home but still study their course of choice.



Are they looking for a traditional academic university or a more vocational/professional one? Everyone has a preferred style of learning, and different types of universities will accommodate these. Going to a university that better suits their style of learning will enable them to better achieve their goals. For example, if they prefer project work as a mode of learning, they can attend a university that does not place significant weight on end of year exams.



Do they like the idea of learning as part of a large cohort of students or as part of a smaller one? Attending a larger university will provide the conventional 'university' experience of being in large groups. Meanwhile, going to a smaller, more specialist institution will mean smaller class sizes where they may receive more individualised attention.



Do they want a traditional residential student experience or a more work-like experience? For instance, if they are looking to study Make Up Artistry, they could study at a specialist institution like the Arts University Bournemouth, or a traditional university like Solent University or at a further education college like Bury College. This variety is not just for more applied courses, for instance the academic subject of Law can be studied at a traditional university, but also a specialist professional university like The University of Law.



The best way to approach supporting your students with choosing where to study their chosen course is to encourage them to keep their minds open to all types of institution, to find out more about them (by reading prospectuses and social media posts, attending Open Days and talking to current students), and then decide which suits them best. ☺☺

Supporting students with their university research and course choices

By Daila Campbell, Recruitment Officer at Brunel University London

When making higher education decisions, it is completely normal to have students who experience various types of emotions, whether that is excitement, anxiety or anything else. Here are a few tips for helping your students make decisions about their higher education choices.

The course or the university – which one should they pick first?

This is often something I hear from students when I ask them about their higher education decisions. And we would always recommend that students pick their courses before their university choices.

Not every course will be the same at every university. Although their titles might be similar, each course may have different module options, teaching styles, learning and assessment methods and work opportunities, which is important for your students to think about.

Over the last couple of years, joint honours degrees, where students can study two subjects as part of the same degree have become increasingly popular, which may be worth mentioning to students who are indecisive about what subjects to study.

What should students think about when choosing a university?

Once a student has decided on a course, the next step is to think about the university. There are so many factors to consider when thinking about a university, such as location; type of university, city or campus; transport and accommodation costs; work opportunities, which can include part-time work; placements and internships; and the various support services and social opportunities available at the university. To consider all of these areas fully, your students need to do as much research as possible.

Research

In addition to my previous point, research is so important at all stages of a student's decision-making and we're always trying to encourage students to do this. The earlier they start with their research, the better and more at ease they'll feel with their choices.

University websites are the most popular way students can research a university and course, but attending Open Days are great too.

Open Days and Taster Days

Throughout the year, universities provide Open Days and subject-specific taster days where students can take a campus tour, learn more about their course of interest and speak to staff and students.

Although the students will not be able to visit every university, we encourage them to visit at least two or three of their top choices. If they can't attend on a particular date, see what the university provides outside these. Here at Brunel, we provide weekly campus tours for students who would like to visit the campus or have maybe missed an Open Day. Many other universities do the same, just ask!



A myth-busting guide to supporting disadvantaged students applying to competitive universities

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

‘Those kinds of universities aren’t for people like me.’

There are many myths and misconceptions that create this mindset: academic, social, financial and deeply personal. However, it only takes one supportive, knowledgeable person to dispel them and give disadvantaged applicants the confidence and tools they need to pursue their ambitions.

Myth one: Competitive universities don’t want applications from disadvantaged students

For years, competitive universities have been setting themselves increasingly ambitious goals to broaden their student body. These include contextual offer policies which outline the characteristics and circumstances that may qualify a student for an offer below the standard grades set by a university. This is something that can make an immense psychological, as well as academic, difference to a worried applicant. These policies also cover guidance on non-standard or less common qualifications, which a student with a complex or disrupted academic history is more likely to hold.

Access and Participation plans can also be found on university websites and provide an overview of their commitments to widening participation; key targets; strategies; demographics and more. This may include links to published social mobility commitments or partnerships with local communities, such as schools, charities, council and government initiatives and more.

Explore the policies and plans of different universities to understand their commitments to your students.

Myth two: ‘I won’t get the support I need at a competitive university’

In truth, competitive universities often have the means to provide a wide range

of supportive resources - from dedicated, targeted student disability and wellbeing support, to peer networks, student helplines and a range of bursaries, scholarships, hardship funds and specialist grants. This information is often hosted on a university’s bespoke web pages and will often include contact details for staff who can provide confidential and supportive advice to interested applicants ahead of their application. Encourage your applicants to get in touch!

Myth three: ‘I won’t fit in at a competitive university’

“ **There’s more to university than an appealing module selection. For this reason, competitive universities set up dedicated outreach offerings to build insight, confidence, and social links for disadvantaged applicants.** ”

Some of these offerings are bespoke to certain student demographics and offer access to additional application support and consideration, contextual offer criteria, bespoke grants and bursaries, and more. Most of all, they allow students to meet others in similar situations – who have similar ambitions – and form friendships and communities to support one another on their journey to application. And, in a few years’ time, on their last-minute sprint to meet their dissertation deadlines. Research these outreach offerings and encourage your students to apply.

Myth four: I’ll have to do all of this on my own

Teachers and advisers play a vital role in supporting student journeys. They’re often the ones that know the students best and have the insight and experience to guide them with where to look and what steps to take.

Universities, trusts, unions and UCAS itself provide professional development resources to advance your knowledge of universities’ offerings, priorities and processes, and the challenges faced by specific groups of disadvantaged students.

Research the opportunities available to you and bring your knowledge and expertise to your students.



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RUSSELL
GROUP

A guide to studying in Wales

By Matt Lloyd, Student Recruitment Officer at Aberystwyth University

For students from elsewhere in the UK, studying at a Welsh university is both reassuringly familiar *and* just a little bit different! We offer the full range of courses found elsewhere, including Veterinary Science, Medicine and Dentistry, and students' satisfaction with their course is amongst the highest in the UK at several Welsh universities.

Welsh universities are also engaged in high quality research, pushing back the frontiers of knowledge with scholarship that has a global reach.

Employers value the focus put on graduate employability skills in Wales and we have over 90% of Welsh university graduates being employed or going on to further study six months after graduation.

Our students come from throughout the UK, Europe and the world, with most of the universities seeing the majority of their students arriving from outside Wales.

So what're the differences? What are some of the distinctive features of going to a university in Wales?

Diverse university environment

Though a relatively small country, Wales' universities offer a diverse student experience. From large urban centres and seaside locations to small towns in the heart of the countryside. As we know, there isn't a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to finding the 'right' university, but Wales offers students an environment that'll suit them, whatever their taste.

Financial benefits

Living costs for students, such as accommodation, travel, food, entertainment and shopping in Wales are lower than average. For students studying allied healthcare subjects, they could receive the Welsh NHS bursary which means they'll have little to no student debt (terms and conditions apply).

Culture

Wales has a rich cultural heritage, including more castles per square mile than anywhere else in Europe. It boasts a host of distinctive institutions, including its own government and the magnificent National Library in Aberystwyth. Studying in Wales will also bring students into contact with Welsh, one of Europe's oldest languages. It's not a requirement to speak Welsh, but there are plenty of opportunities to pick up the language as an extracurricular interest at university.

Welsh universities have a lot to offer and I would always recommend that your students come to visit us!



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A guide to studying in Scotland

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

Your students may have visited Scotland on holiday, watched a world-class sporting event or attended one of the many cultural events and festivals held here throughout the year. Scotland has a huge amount to offer students, including a fantastic university education.

So, what do they need to know about studying at a Scottish university?

With 600 years of excellence in education, Scotland boasts four out of the six oldest UK universities, as well as many modern institutions. In fact, the quality and structure of the education system in Scotland is renowned and has been replicated by many countries around the world.

The differences start in secondary school where Scottish students sit a range of qualifications suited to their ability. Most students sit up to five Highers over one year of study in S5 (equivalent to Year 12), compared to the three A-levels elsewhere in the UK. Academic students can then take up to three Advanced Highers in their final year (S6) or study a mix of Highers and Advanced Highers. Students, therefore, have access to a broad range of subjects which increases their options after school.

Typically, a degree in Scotland is four years long and is designed for students coming to university with Highers. The first two years, that usually offer a breadth of study, are followed by two final years which allow the student to specialise in their chosen subject.

Although A-Level students can study many degrees over three years, just as they would elsewhere, the four-year degree structure is a very popular choice and it offers some advantages:

- The first year of study can provide A-Level students with flexibility on entry requirements as subject requirements may not be as restrictive.
- The breadth of subject choice in the first two years of study provides students with the chance to explore academic areas before committing to their degree specialism.
- The knowledge gained before specialising in their later years of study enables students to improve and develop study skills. This is highly valued by employers.
- A four-year degree provides time to mature and develop as a young adult. Students can get to grips with university life and living independently while making the most of the student experience.

Your students may also have questions about tuition fees, particularly if they're considering a four-year degree option. Don't worry, the application process for tuition and maintenance loans are the same as they are elsewhere in the UK.

Lastly, you might wonder if your students will fit in. They absolutely will.

“ Scottish universities are diverse and inclusive, offering a warm welcome to over 50,000 students from more than 180 countries each year. ”

Scotland also boasts some of the safest cities in the UK to be a student. And it's not all haggis and ceilidhs! There's something for everyone with easy access to vibrant cities, beaches and the great outdoors. Students under the age of 22 can take advantage of free bus travel within Scotland to make the most of their leisure time and our cities are well connected by rail and air to the rest of the UK.



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Advice when supporting students interested in studying medicine

By Leah Brooks, Medical Student at the University of Sheffield; Mental Health and Well-being Content Creator @wellnessmedic and Chief Operating Officer at Future Frontline

Applying to medical school can feel very overwhelming for students – they have personal statements, UCATs, BMATs, interview prep and interviews to do, not to mention studying for their A-Levels so they can meet their grades! However, with organisation, it can be a fairly smooth and exciting journey. Here are my top tips for tackling the application process, for you to share with your students.

1. Work experience can be valuable, but it doesn't have to be medical

Work experience can be an insightful experience to understand the duties and role of a doctor, but it can be highly competitive to acquire. Fortunately, it is absolutely not necessary. Interviewers want to know that your students possess the qualities of a doctor, including communication skills, empathy and working under pressure. Voluntary work in a caring or educational environment can demonstrate these skills and help students to apply them to how they'd make a good doctor. Part-time employment also allows students

“ Many medical students are happy to find time to meet with your students and discuss the process or be a listening ear. We can talk them through common interview questions and provide insight into the degree! ”

to develop skills they can apply to a medical career too. Hospital work is great for exposure, but it's not required.

2. Be organised with all aspects of their time

Time-management is essential. I would recommend that your students make a brief timeline of your deadlines and weekly timetables to visualise the time they have. This will include all their tasks. It'll also include time just for them, which is vital. They need to be able to unwind, have fun and let their brain rest and recover.

I would recommend a timetable like the one at the bottom of the page, but your students should bear in mind that it's not recommended that they study everyday!

3. Use social media

Social media can be your students' best friend when it comes to gaining an understanding of the medicine school application process. Why? Because social media is full of medical students with Instagram pages talking about medicine! There are many of us who have recently been through the process and want to help – we've been in their shoes!

My biggest takeaway is that nothing is more important than your student's mental health during this time. This will be the last year with their school friends, many will be moving away from home and it is a time of big changes. They should make the most of every opportunity, be adventurous and make plans! But, importantly, they should take days to lay on the sofa with chocolate and Netflix too. It's just as important to rest their mind as it is to try and understand the mind-boggling concepts of Chemistry.

Example timetable for a student applying to medical school:

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9:00am-4:00pm	School	School	School	School	School	Free	Free
4:00pm-5:00pm	UCAT prep	Interview prep	A-Level study	Interview prep	A-Level study	Free	Free
5:00-6:00pm	Home-work	After school club	UCAT/ BMAT prep	Catch-up time	Relax	Free	Free
6:00pm onwards	Meet with friend	Self-care	Movie night	Reading	X's Birthday	Free	Plan for next week

The key to an effective application is balance, taking time to enjoy time with their support group, time to relax their minds, and of course distinguished time to study both for their exams and the medical school application process.

Subject in spotlight - the future is creative

By Paloma Shakouri, Marketing Manager at Escape Studios

“The games and film industries are vibrant, ever-evolving spaces with endless opportunities for growth and success - now is the time to seize those opportunities and make your mark! ”

- Lasse Rasmussen, Principal Technical Animator at Creative Assembly

The demand for artists with technical skills is growing at a rapid rate across the Creative Industries, especially in Character Creation, Games Design and Technical Art, and within virtual reality, interactive entertainment and virtual production environments.

For students with a love for video games, movies and animation, and who enjoy both art and maths, this is particularly good news as they consider their career options.

So, what does a creative and technical career look like? There's a variety of job roles to suit technical creatives. I will provide some examples here, which you may wish to share with your students.

Character Creators

The creative industry is now bigger than ever, and we're always asked to create characters for films, animations, advertising, games, TV and more. The role of a character creator is to bring characters to life, which involves developing models, character rigs and FX (effects). Students should ultimately gain the transferable skills to work and support teams in both technical and artistic capacities across different outputs. This includes complex character simulations and real-time and interactive production environments, such as virtual reality and other forms of interactive entertainment.

Games Designers

Games are everywhere, from mobile phones, tablets, handhelds, consoles and of course computers - even Netflix develop their own

games. The role of a games designer has never been so varied or exciting!

“There are so many different avenues you can go down when doing game design. Everything from narrative design, level design, UI (user interface) and UX (user experience). ”

- Simon Fenton, Dean of Interactive and Real-Time at Escape Studios

Technical Artists

Technical artists are the bridge between code and art, they're the people who innovate solutions, write scripts and who use code and maths in software packages and game engines. They enable artists to make great graphics or help to ensure that FX (effects) simulations not only look amazing but are efficient. Technical Artists are highly sought after in the industry and there are great employment opportunities across games, animation and visual effects (VFX).

What skills are needed?

If you feel this skill set would resonate with some of your students, there are many undergraduate degrees available via UCAS. Speaking from experience at Escape Studios, we require 32-120 UCAS points (based on predicted grades) and an online portfolio, with the option to add a supporting statement. This portfolio can comprise of work they've completed as part of their college, sixth form or Level 4 equivalent, or from their extra-curricular interests.

“You need to be able to converse with people and be quite sociable. You're not going to be working in solitude because you're essentially a problem-solver. So, communication, problem-solving and a wide knowledge base. ”

- Juriaan Van Váli, Senior Technical Artist at Framestore

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League tables - are they giving the full picture?

By Andy Long, Undergraduate Student Recruitment and Access Manager (UK) at Keele University

League tables are usually one of the first things that students look at when comparing different universities. Their individual rankings are usually displayed in their prospectuses, on their campuses or shared with students at events or higher education fairs. But are they truly reflective of a university's standing?

Typically, the main tables that students look at as part of their research are the Complete University Guide, The Guardian University Guide and The Times Higher Education Rankings. As well as these UK focused tables, there are global ones for students who are thinking of studying overseas, including QS World University Rankings and The Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

Each league table places a different weighting to its criteria, which is why there are three. If they all considered everything the same, there wouldn't be a need for all three of them. It is important to help students understand which criteria are most important to them and compare those across them all. The areas typically common across all three include student satisfaction, entry standards (the percentage of students who achieved level 3 results) and career prospects/graduate outcomes.

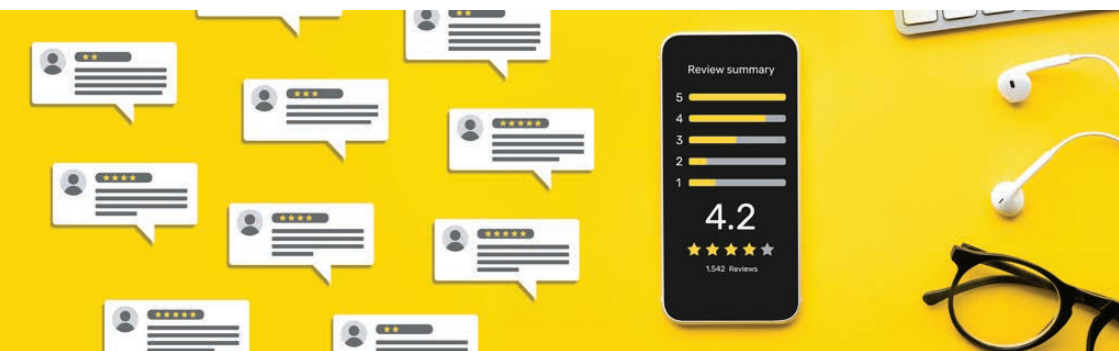
There are many other league tables that focus on different areas and source their responses from other locations. One of these is the

National Student Survey (NSS), which gathers feedback from final-year students on their time at university. The survey provides feedback on areas such as teaching, support, access to resources and student engagement.

League tables are a fantastic way of comparing universities against each other, but it shouldn't be the only thing to consider. Encourage your students to attend Open Days and visit taster sessions at their selected universities to help them understand what is most important to them. Different universities will have different teaching styles as well as different facilities, so visiting in-person will help them to get the full picture, rather than just looking at a ranking on a league table website.

Having had hundreds of conversations with students, parents, and advisers in my many years of working in higher education, my top tip for league tables would be - "is it best to attend a university ranked fifth for the 55th best course, or the 55th best university for the fifth ranked course?" If a student is constantly thinking like this, they'll be able to wade their way through the murky world of league tables to hopefully make the best and most informed choice.

“As well as ranking the university as a whole, league tables also rank subject areas, so it is important to consider the full picture. These subject-level comparisons are really important to help a student understand the differences between universities and will help with their shortlisting. ”



A guide to degree apprenticeships and sponsored degree programmes

By Vicki Davies, Project Coordinator Network 75 and Degree Apprenticeships at the University of South Wales

Post-education choices can be a daunting prospect for many students. With so many options to choose from beyond sixth form or college, university remains one of the most diverse options available to students.

A university degree can offer a wealth of employment opportunities and the skills and experience students need to take their career in any direction. There are now more ways than ever for students to achieve an undergraduate degree and higher apprenticeships or sponsored degrees offer an alternate route to traditional university study.

Degree apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships are a fantastic way for apprentices to benefit from on-the-job experience, gain a degree and graduate with no student debt.

What is a degree apprenticeship?

Degree apprenticeships are becoming increasingly popular among students. They combine work-based-learning with studying a degree part-time. Apprentices can learn professional skills and gain real-world industry knowledge and experience while simultaneously working towards a degree qualification.

What are the benefits?

Earn while you learn. Students will be employed and paid a working wage throughout the duration of their course.

Nationally recognised qualifications

Upon the successful completion of an apprenticeship, students will gain a full degree that's recognised nationally.

Real-world work experience

Students will acquire the expertise, knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in their chosen career path, as well as improve their employability by connecting with businesses and other students.

An example of a university sponsored degree programme: Network75

What is Network75?

Established in 2000, and unique to the University of South Wales, Network75 is a five-year combined work placement and part-time study route to a degree qualification that allows students to work, earn and learn. Network75 trainees can apply their academic knowledge to real-life work within their host company, gaining the necessary skills, experience and qualifications that are highly sought after in industry.

Students attend university two days per week and their host company three days per week during term time. In return, the host company pays the students tuition fees and a bursary. Upon completion, the students graduate with no student debt, five years of relevant work experience and a degree.

What are the benefits for students of a sponsored degree?

Work, earn, learn

Students are given the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice alongside their degree. All students benefit from some of the best degrees on offer, state of the art learning facilities and excellent teaching.

Sponsored degree = no student debt

Students have their tuition fees paid in full! Students on the scheme can choose to graduate with no student debt.

A degree apprenticeship or a sponsored degree is not for everyone. Studying and working simultaneously will require a high level of dedication, self-motivation, maturity and initiative. However, if a student is keen to get a head start on their career, graduate with no student debt and gain valuable industry experience, then the options above could be their perfect choice.

How to book a university event for your school

By Susie Kilburn, Student Recruitment and Schools Liaison Officer at City, University of London

The first step when booking a university event for your school or college is to find the correct contact for the university (or universities) you'd like to invite. This will vary by institution, so it's best to do some research beforehand.

Where to look?

- Most universities will have dedicated web pages about how they work with schools and colleges. These should signpost the best individual or team to contact.
- You may have already received communications from the university contact beforehand, so it might be worth checking your previous emails. A lot of these teams also have mailing lists, so you can stay up to date with their activity.
- You can also make the most of the [UniTasterDays.com](https://www.unitasterdays.com) platform to not only see the type of events universities can support you with, but to also find the best contact or request bespoke support for events like careers fairs.

How to identify the best contact?

The best team or person to contact may depend on the type of event you're running. For example, some universities will have different contacts for pre-16 or post-16 activity. Some teams may deal more with higher education fairs, while others more with one-to-one support such as mentoring.

If you're looking for subject-specific support, such as a talk from an academic, some universities will have recruitment and outreach teams that are based within an academic

school or faculty. We recommend going through the relevant outreach team in the first instance, rather than directly contacting an individual academic or general department email. Outreach teams will likely know who is best to contact for these requests and will be able to liaise on your behalf.

Although it may take a bit of time to navigate the various institutional set-ups, the work you do beforehand will ultimately save you time in the long run and avoid your request being passed around by multiple teams or departments!

When's best to book an event?

“ When booking an event, it's best to provide as much notice as possible, even if it's just a placeholder date. The more notice you can provide, the better chance you have of securing staff availability. It also gives the university more time to plan accordingly and arrange any necessary logistics with you. ”

September, October, March and June are often the busiest months for outreach teams. Universities may be attending various events across the UK, all in one day. If your event falls within these peak periods, it's best to enquire as early as possible before diaries fill up.

Key takeaways

Every university will have a different way of working with schools and colleges, so if you'd like to organise a university event, we'd suggest:

1. Booking as far in advance as possible
2. Signing up to mailing lists to stay up to date with the team

Note from UniTasterDays

You can browse events offered by universities UK-wide at [UniTasterDays.com](https://www.unitasterdays.com). As well as request bespoke event support through the request an event platform!



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A school and college guide to organising online and physical events

By Oliver Rossetti, Outreach Manager at the University of Leicester

A successfully organised event can go a long way to supporting the achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks and ignite that lightbulb moment! Whether it's your first or your hundredth, planning an impactful event can seem daunting, but you're certainly not alone and as higher education institutions, we're here to advise.

Do you want an online or physical event?

Largely, events are back to being face-to-face and the value of interpreting non-verbal cues and engaging in a more meaningful career conversation is high on the list of reasons why. However, it's still worth considering whether an online event could better serve your students.

“**Going digital allows you to broaden your reach to institutions from further afield and really get your students thinking.**”

Logistically, it could be easier to beam representatives in and have resources sent beforehand to have the same impact. For example, could parents and carers meet

universities from the comfort of their own home, which may support attendance if they have other responsibilities and commitments.

Don't forget though, many universities now have regional contacts, so you may discover a university from afar is actually closer to home than you expect.

Above all else, make sure students feel connected to the session by being interactive. Slido and Mentimeter are two platforms that work great on mobile and are worth incorporating. It's also an easy way to gain some instant evaluation data to show off to senior management!

Organised chaos is better than no organisation

Universities receive multiple requests, so research into the date and check whether it conflicts with local or national career exhibitions. You could also consider linking up with another school within your trust, or a local school, to boost pupil numbers and encourage a larger variety of providers to attend.

Alternatively, if the time of year is unavoidable, then you could reap some benefits and schedule your event either side of a large exhibition. Universities reduce their carbon footprint and resourcing while you secure a wider pool of providers and further broaden your students' horizons. It's a win-win!

If this works for you, be sure to send in good time so providers can factor in your event before booking their travel. The more detail, the better.



I suggest including the following details in your first email and also in a confirmation email two weeks before the event:

- date, times and location
- schedule of the day
- expected size of audience*
- safeguarding information
- refreshment details, including dietary requirements
- car parking, including alternatives if likely to be busy**
- the main organiser's contact details
- accessibility requirements – for the provider and your students if appropriate
- for talks, include the key learning outcomes of each session. This will ensure the content delivered is what your pupils require
- anything that may impact the day such as construction work or the weather (are warm clothes needed if exhibitors are going to be in a drafty school hall?)

*We appreciate that audience size can fluctuate, so approximate numbers are fine. It just helps universities bring the correct quantity of literature.

**What3Words is a great tool to use when you have multiple entrances!

Maximise speaker efficiency

Avoid booking multiple institutions to deliver the same talk to a handful of students. Universities have a finite amount of resources and we try to cover as many events as possible to support knowledge gaps.

Consolidate classes to increase the likelihood of a provider being able to support for half a day, rather than a full day – speakers may begin to forget what they have and haven't said by the seventh talk of the day!

Refreshments - to be or not to be, that is the question?

This will always be budget-dependent! As a general rule, tea, coffee and water goes a long way, particularly for those colleagues who may have left at sunrise. Food is always welcomed, but if this can't be provided, just let exhibitors know in advance to bring their own lunch or evening snack.

Visiting campus?

The above applies here too, but my most important piece of advice is to communicate regularly with your lead contact. Whether plans change last minute and you need to shorten the day, or you need to ensure accessibility needs are best met on your trip, keep in touch. We want your visit to be tailored so we can maximise positive impact.

A passionate event will make a world of difference!

Be creative and don't be afraid to ask for feedback on your events from both your pupils and universities.

I hope you find these tips useful and whether it will be your first or your hundredth event, I wish you the best of luck in organising a successful one!



What are online university events?

By Selena Lockett, Student Recruitment Officer at Swansea University

The popularity of virtual university events spiked during the pandemic and has continued to hold significance ever since. There's now a catalogue of online engagement opportunities to access at the click of a button. While it's useful to experience a university in person prior to accepting an offer, online events provide a plethora of benefits to all who engage with them. From Virtual Open Days to educational webinars and Q&As, online university events allow students to connect with institutions worldwide. They've proven to hold their value and longevity in helping students to research, explore, and narrow down their many higher education options.

Where to find them?

Universities host online engagement activities throughout the year, designed to answer the pressing questions students will have throughout their application journey. While these events are readily available, students should be encouraged to actively research their institutions. You'll find that they're primarily advertised on university websites and social media accounts, [UniTasterDays.com](https://www.unitasterdays.com) and in email communications that come your way after you've interacted with a University.

Virtual Open Days

An online Open Day is not dissimilar to an on-campus visit. Students can access campus tours, speak with staff and students, attend online lectures and access a wealth of resources regarding finance, disability and well-being support. Online Open Days are a great way for students to connect with multiple institutions from the comfort of their home or school, especially if they're interested in exploring options further afield. Virtual events are cost-effective and can combat the issue of planning travel arrangements around a busy academic schedule.

Webinars

Webinars are video streaming sessions where universities can deliver topical presentations and Q&A panels. They may be offered individually or as part of a series. Subject-specific talks are one of the more popular webinars. Formatted as an online academic taster lecture, they're a fundamental aid for students during their research and it allows them to explore numerous subject areas. Universities often provide student ambassador Q&A panels so that current and prospective students may connect online. They may also host student life presentations and 'preparing for university' sessions.

The benefits of online events



Free and Flexible: Many universities hold their Open Days on the same dates, putting students in conflict as to which university to prioritise. Online access means that students don't have to compromise and can explore more university options conveniently and at a low cost.



Unlimited Resources: It's often difficult for teachers to arrange for a university representative to deliver in-person sessions that appeal to the entire student cohort. Online events are a complementary addition, providing varied and accessible content that can be enjoyed live or on demand through recorded video. With that in mind, they make for excellent content for teachers and advisers to use throughout the application process.



Communication is key: Online events are a great opportunity to follow up with any specific queries or concerns after attending an in-person Open Day/event. Building relationships with universities and accessing all available resources results in greater student satisfaction and a knowledgeable outlook on their university options.

“ There's now a catalogue of online engagement opportunities to access at the click of a button. While it's useful to experience a university in person prior to accepting an offer, online events provide a plethora of benefits to all who engage with them. ”

Booking a subject-specific university event for your school

By Chloe Bird, Events Coordinator and Caitlin McEllenborough, Education Liaison Officer at Edge Hill University

When students start their higher education research, the biggest decision they need to make is choosing a course that is suited to their interests and ambitions. This can be a difficult choice with so many degree options available, which is why it is important for students to engage in subject-specific events as much as possible before they apply.

Universities offer a range of activities which are designed to help students engage with their subject-level research, often listed under the following names:

- subject taster days
- masterclasses/taster lectures
- bespoke subject-specific sessions
- subject residential/summer schools.

You can search activities by subject area and key stages on [UniTasterDays.com](https://www.unitasterdays.com). It is worth having a look at what's there so you don't miss anything – the title may not stand out to you as universities may have different names for their subject events.

Subject-specific events offer students the opportunity to visit a university, explore facilities, meet current university students and take part in university-style lectures and workshops related to their area of interest. Many universities can also arrange for guest lecturers to visit your school or college and deliver a subject session in person, whenever suits your term timetable.

What to request and how to arrange it

We recommend thinking about what you want your students to get out of the day. Is it to

support a particular topic they are covering or assessment they're preparing for? Will it help them research their future prospects? You may have contacts with an academic area if you're a graduate of the university, but booking through a central team such as a school liaison or recruitment team allows you to receive a more structured visit that could also include broader UCAS and student finance advice.

To ensure that you select a date that works for you, make sure that you speak to universities in advance as these events often get booked up quickly. To help these teams organise a visit that meets your needs, make sure that your initial email includes information detailing:

- the activity you want to book
- your estimated group number
- a date/s for this event
- any additional requirements.

Arranging subject-specific events can be mutually beneficial for teachers and students, as these events give teachers the opportunity to meet experts in the subject they teach and create further links with universities at subject level. Encouraging students to attend these events is the perfect opportunity for them to explore their subject of interest and get closer to their final decision.

Our top tip for students..

Make sure they know why they're attending the subject event and how the advice they receive is transferable for other post-18 pathways they may wish to explore. It is important to bring staff who can reiterate this throughout the visit to help keep students focused.

Our top tip for you...

Keep in touch with us! Let us know about changes to confirmed arrangements such as your arrival or departure time. If universities know about these changes in advance, they can make alterations and ensure that your students' visit isn't affected.

“ Subject-specific events offer students the opportunity to visit a university, explore facilities, meet current university students and take part in university-style lectures and workshops related to their area of interest. ”



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Deciding where to study can be hard, and we want every student to feel like they're in the right place. Open days are a great starting point. They offer students a chance to explore campus, ask questions and meet tutors and current students.

Tell your students about our upcoming open days. Scan the QR code for dates and to book online.

Our Student Recruitment team can also help with impartial advice around higher education provision, and what we can offer at Edge Hill.

Find out about the outreach we can deliver at ehu.ac.uk/studentrecruitment or contact the team: educationliaison@edgehill.ac.uk



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A guide to hybrid university events

By Jonny Atkinson-White, Hybrid Delivery Manager at the University of Liverpool

You'll no doubt all have a mix of students: those who diligently attend anything and everything to do with their future prospects and those who apply late – maybe even after they've left your school or college.

The commonality between these students is the need for information that is timely, accurate and, ideally, personalised. Yes, websites are great for information gathering, events offer an experience and conversations make it personal, but combining all of these elements and packaging them appropriately creates great hybrid engagement.

Hybrid events: a tale of two audiences

Hybrid events have long focused on a standard approach; focusing on entertaining two audiences simultaneously, such as an in-person lecture that is also broadcast live online.

It is not impossible to make these events successful. Plan, practice and resource them well and both audiences will feel engaged. However, splitting a presenter's attention across audiences is rarely as effective as giving them one or the other.

Understanding hybrid engagement: Heroes, sidekicks and supercharged support

Having run online, in person and hybrid events over the past six years, I've tried and tested numerous engagement techniques to help support students and their supporters.

Giving students the choice as to how they discover their options allows them to control their journey and feel empowered about their future.

On campus events are the **heroes**, the crown jewel in getting a student to connect to the right university or course. Planning to visit at least three is ideal, dates are shared on [UniTasterDays](#) and individual university websites year-round. No other activity will give students the sense of belonging or excitement. But we live in a world of rising costs and time commitments, so while they're best, the number of hero events such as Open Days or Offer Holder Days will be fewer than the number of online or on demand activities.

Live, online events are the ever-important **sidekicks** in the hybrid journey. Plentiful, convenient and easy to access. These events will often be listed in the 'visit and events' areas of university websites, or you can contact your local university and ask what their webinar plans are for 2023/24. You'll find plenty of support sessions covering student finance, student life, accommodation and more. Some universities will also offer a full range of academic-led talks.

The best events should include:

- time for questions
- current students sharing their thoughts
- insights into study that can't be gained from static web pages.

Sometimes, even the best plans don't work out and that's where **supercharged** support such as dedicated on-demand pages come into their own. Here, students can browse video-based information and access additional resources, to bring the text-based subject pages to life. Virtual tours, student life clips and student chat 'widgets' all create great resources that are online 24/7.

Individually, these three opportunities offer good sources of information. Combining two or more creates hybrid engagement which supports students to create better connections with universities and helps them to make more informed decisions.



How to prepare students for UCAS fairs and events

By Carly Outerbridge, Undergraduate Student Recruitment and Access Officer at Keele University

Talking to students in advance about what to expect during a UCAS exhibition is key to helping avoid the grab and run or “errmm...I don't know what to say” conversations that we sometimes experience.

We recognise fairs can be quite intimidating, a hall or exhibition centre full of teenagers, teachers, and unfamiliar faces. If students do not know what to expect on the day, they are bound to feel even more unsettled. We would recommend a preparation session in advance and following the steps below can help prepare your students.

It is all about options

Try to get students to think about their next steps and provide reassurance that they do not need to go with an exact picture of what they want to study or where they want to go. It might be handy to produce a shortlist of individual universities that are a must to speak to on the day.

No question is too big or small

The chances are, we have been asked the same questions hundreds of times before. It is important to remind students to not just lean on friends to be the designated university questioner, as the fair is a fantastic way to help build independence and ask questions that are important to them. Feel free to pass on a few conversation starters about courses, entry requirements, accommodation, facilities, location, extra opportunities, Open Days and whatever else that interests them!

What to expect

Share a map in advance with your students to help gain familiarity and allow them to prepare their trail and plan for any scheduled talks. Universities are labelled alphabetically,

which makes planning a whole lot easier! Some universities may provide physical or digital prospectuses, either way, it is best to be prepared with a strong bag and wear comfortable shoes. Teachers... wear your Fitbits!

Students will be asked by universities if they would like to have their individual QR code scanned to keep up to date with university updates. Some students find it beneficial to temporarily set this as their phone ‘lock screen’ or have it easily accessible. Providing their QR code does not commit students to go to that institution – they will not be bombarded with emails and can unsubscribe if they choose.

Previous images can help provide familiarity with the day. Most importantly, remind your students to enjoy every minute, this is one step closer to their future.

Universities also want to hear from teachers and advisors on the day too – so do not forget to come and introduce yourself!

After the event

After you step back on the coach, there will be lots of worn-out students (and teachers). It can be good to ask the students to make notes and write down the universities that stood out. Revisit the day at your next available opportunity and encourage students to continue the conversation. This might be a chance to explore what action has been taken since, and you might notice a few students who were inspired to start their personal statements early!

Note from UniTasterDays

Check out Episode 12 of The Uni Guide Podcast - a careers fair special!



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shu.ac.uk/open



Making the most of university Open Days

By Kate Nelson, Marketing Coordinator at Teesside University

Whether you're planning on bringing a group of students to an Open Day, or advising them on how they can make the most of their Open Day experience, we're here to help.

It's all in the prep

Encourage students to think about what they want to see and do. It's easy for them to enjoy a day out with their friends and not focus on getting the information they need.

Ask them to consider the courses they're interested in studying and what information they need to help them make their decisions.

Some examples of great questions to ask are:

- 💡 Do they know the entry requirements for the course, or if they need to have studied a particular subject at college?
- 💡 Do they know what modules are offered and how they'll be assessed?
- 💡 How much is the accommodation and is it on campus?

Help with costs

Visiting lots of Open Days can be costly, especially if students are interested in universities further afield. Information on travel contributions isn't always available on university websites, so encourage them to get in touch to ask if they offer any help towards the cost of travel. If a few students are travelling to the same Open Day, encourage them to consider pre-booking group train or bus tickets or organising a car share to save money.

If you're planning on taking a group to an Open Day, most universities will offer some form of contribution towards the cost of your travel, so contact them to find out what's available.

Book your group

Universities manage school and college group bookings differently. Some will ask your students to register individually and ask that they pre-book talks and tours, while others may be more flexible, with tours available to book on the day and no booking required for additional activities. All this information should be accessible on a university's website, but you can always get in touch to check what you need to do.

Time management

Open Days are busy and it can be a squeeze fitting everything in. Ask your students to make a list of their priorities and what they'd find helpful in terms of making their UCAS choices. Is it how much the university has invested in their facilities, accommodation and campus, or the course and teaching staff? Getting them thinking about these things in advance will help them to plan their day and focus on what matters most to them.

If available, request a copy of the Open Day guide in advance. This can help them to make the most of their day as well as provide a good overview of what's happening when and where.

Make the most of it

Subject talks and tours are normally offered as part of the Open Day experience. Consider making the most of your visit by asking the university if they'd deliver a practical subject taster session. They're a great way for your students to really understand how a subject is taught at university.

“**Your students might attend numerous Open Days so, while it's fresh in their minds, get them to reflect on their experience and make some notes. Who did they speak to and what did they like? This will really help when it comes to making their firm and insurance decisions later down the line!**”



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20 JANUARY 2024
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tees.ac.uk/teachers

What is a university taster course?

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

Taster courses are a fantastic way for learners in school or college to get an insight into studying a particular subject and demonstrate practical engagement with universities.

Learners in Years 11, 12 and 13 are able to apply for a range of short courses available in different subject areas, from music and mathematics to philosophy and politics. These courses are often the first opportunity for pre-18 learners to engage with participating universities, talk to staff members and current students and find out how the whole process works. By attending a taster course, learners gain valuable insight into the subject before making a commitment. They're often free, such as those offered by the University of London federal members.

Taster courses are now more accessible than ever, with courses hosted both virtually and

on campus. Virtual taster courses can be attended by students from the comfort of their homes, whereas face-to-face sessions can enhance user experience and engagement.

An example of what to expect at a university taster day

Taster course events delivered by University of London Federal members typically consist of a welcome talk from the faculty and a mini lecture followed by hands-on activities. Problem solving exercises and group discussions often feature as part of the day, so learners can interact with peers and build connections. Learners can demonstrate their interest by asking questions and obtaining advice on applying to the course, the different pathways available and possible career options.

Additionally, by the end of Year 13, Gatsby Benchmark 7 advises that learners should understand the range of learning opportunities and have had two interactions with higher education. A taster course will help meet this requirement, so please encourage your learners to apply for a taster course in their chosen subject areas and ensure they add the experience they've gained to their UCAS application form, should they choose to apply.

Note from UniTasterDays

You can find university events for all year groups on UniTasterDays - or even request something bespoke, for the year group of your choice!



Supporting you: a guide to Teachers Conferences and CPD opportunities

By Rachel Brookes, Widening Participation Officer at Harper Adams University

With guidance and advice from teachers and universities playing an integral role in young people's future decisions, we're always keen to create spaces and events that can bring teachers together and enable you to share knowledge, experiences and insight.

Some teacher conferences are a full-day affair, packed with guest speakers, workshops and networking opportunities. Whereas others might be a smaller, more personalised event, perhaps involving a dinner, university showcase and/or campus tour. No matter what the event involves, universities aim to shape something that benefits you, as teachers and advisers, and your students. And sometimes, this means that universities join forces and collaborate on events to give you a fuller programme.

There are plenty of these events across the UK, but we know that you can't take the time to attend them all! It's worth seeing which of your local events are running at a time of year, and distance, that suits you and your school or college schedule best. You may find some virtual events, but now things are back to normal, universities are keen to host

conferences and CPD events in person to give you the best chance to network with colleagues across the sector. There may also be particular sessions or speakers that match your priorities or training interests which justifies taking time out to travel further afield for CPD opportunities.

Another benefit to attending CPD events is their focus on the curriculum. Knowing how certain subject areas can be applied to niche career paths can be hugely important to opening up options for your students. For example, a student may love biology – plant biology, let's say – but where can they take it at university? One option could be an agricultural degree in crop management, leading them to a career in agronomy! Or maybe they hadn't considered the connections it could have to the food industry. To gain this level of insight, many universities provide the opportunity for teachers and advisers to connect with academic teaching staff at CPD events. And, in return, academics usually like to find out how they can better prepare for the next cohort of students.

How do I find opportunities?

Most universities will offer at least one event for teachers during the academic year, typically their annual conference. But, some larger institutions offer regular events and meetings.

You can find CPD events on the [UniTasterDays.com website](https://www.unitasterdays.com) and in their newsletter. Some universities will also let you know what's coming up via email if you're on their mailing list, or you can head to their events web page for more information.



A guide to fair access and widening participation

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

Anyone who works in education can likely recognise that it is far from an even playing field. Students experience varying levels of support and challenges throughout their educational journey. We all know stories of students who have the odds stacked against them through no fault of their own; students with additional caring responsibilities who simply can't prioritise their studies; students who don't have access to a quiet, safe space to complete their homework; or students who've been at numerous education establishments before they get to secondary school.

Widening Participation (WP) teams exist to recognise and address these barriers. We recognise that there is a huge loss of potential, simply due to the systemic barriers that exist in the education system. WP teams come in many shapes and sizes but, broadly speaking, they comprise of practitioners who work with local schools and colleges to raise expectations and attainment, so that all students have the ability, knowledge and confidence to progress to higher education should they wish to. WP teams are impartial – we aren't here to recruit your pupils to our

institution or even to higher education. We're all about informed decision-making and ensuring pupils have the tools to make the right decisions for their future. WP teams across the country are collectively working towards:

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

It's worth noting that while there's a moral imperative behind this work, there's also a statutory obligation. Universities can only charge the maximum tuition fees if they have an approved plan detailing how they'll invest in widening participation work. Each institution will target their activity in a slightly different way, but will generally target schools based on deprivation measures, for example, Pupil Premium eligibility. The [UniConnect website](#) is a good place to find out what your school is eligible for.



What can you expect from your local university partner?

- **Outreach programmes:** most WP teams will have a programme of in-school and on-campus activities, designed to provide information and signpost your pupils to further support. This can vary from assemblies and workshops and mentoring programmes to long-term subject-specific programmes.
- **Financial support:** scholarships and grants are essential to making higher education affordable for students that are economically disadvantaged. There's often funding available for you
- **Flexible admission criteria:** some universities have contextual admissions criteria that take a more holistic look at university applications and don't just focus on grades.
- **Community partnerships:** collaborating with non-profit and community organisations can help universities access pupils outside of the school environment. For example, the University of East Anglia is partnered with IntoUniversity, which takes a place-based approach to community outreach.

“Over the next few years, the focus for widening participation teams will be to further adapt to the evolving educational landscape. This will likely involve a greater focus on attainment raising; the use of technology for broader outreach; the development of more nuanced and targeted programmes, and monitoring of the systemic issues that create educational inequalities. It’s a challenge that requires ongoing commitment and innovation from everyone involved, but one that the widening participation sector is ready and willing to take on. ”



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A guide to contextual university admissions

By Laura Whitelock, Access and Outreach Officer at the University of York

Universities work hard to support fair access to university and create inclusive, safe and welcoming student communities. It is widely recognised that a student's potential isn't solely measured by the grades they achieve and that these grades can be affected by a range of factors.

That's why universities offer contextual admissions – to support students in their progression to higher education, no matter their background or circumstances.

So, what are contextual admissions?

Contextual admissions aim to form a more holistic picture of a student's journey throughout their education. In particular, universities may look at barriers students have faced in their life or educational journey and use this information to make appropriate offers. We know barriers shouldn't define student success and that's why contextual admissions support students from a wide range of backgrounds, who may be facing other challenges alongside their post-16 qualifications.

Contextual admissions are not in place to suggest that students facing barriers cannot achieve top grades. Instead, their purpose is to support students who may be less likely to progress to higher education.

Who's eligible for contextual admissions?

Different institutions may have different criteria for contextual admissions, so please check for specifics before sharing information with your students.

Many universities will check whether applicants live in an area with a low

progression rate to higher education, which is usually measured by the student's home postcode (you can [check student postcodes online](#)).

In addition, [UCAS have recently introduced some new questions](#) as part of the student application that has a focus on contextual information. Hopefully, this data will give institutions a fuller picture of the student's background and an idea of how to support them accordingly.

The new questions ask students to outline if they meet any of the following criteria:

- are they in receipt of free school meals, or were in receipt of free school meals during their secondary education?
- have a parent or carer who currently serves (or has served) in the UK armed forces
- are estranged from their parents
- have caring or parent responsibilities
- have refugee or asylum seeker status in the UK
- have experience of local authority care.




Despite these new UCAS questions, students may be required to apply for contextual admissions at their selected institutions. At the University of York, we have the [York Access Scheme](#) that students need to apply for on top of their UCAS application. The scheme allows students to share more details about their background, such as some of the above criteria, but it also includes:

- students with a disability or long-term health condition
- students who are from an under-represented background in higher education, such as Black, Asian, minority ethnic, Gypsy or Traveller students.

There's no 'one size fits all' when it comes to contextual admissions. That's why it's really important to raise more awareness of the policies, and ask students to do their own research as to what support may be available for their particular circumstances.

“ Universities work hard to support fairer access and create inclusive, safe and welcoming student communities. It is widely recognised that a student's potential isn't solely measured by the grades they achieve and that these grades can be affected by a range of factors. ”

How can you support your students?

-  Raise awareness of contextual admissions in school. Students may need to do their own research on their eligibility, so the sooner they hear about it, the better!
-  Look at university websites to check their eligibility criteria and processes. You may wish to focus on the needs of your student cohort. For example, if your school has a high-proportion of students eligible for free school meals, you could check which institutions include this in their contextual admissions criteria.
-  Continue to develop your understanding of contextual admissions to ensure you can support as many of your students as possible. It can be useful to receive updates from universities directly, or through general communications, such as [UniTasterDays](#).



A guide to university widening participation and access programmes

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

As an ex-teacher that worked both pre and post-pandemic, I found that an increasing number of my students were reluctant to apply to university. While I saw patterns in the issues they faced, no two journeys were the same. Some found the mere thought of applying daunting as they didn't think higher education was for 'people like them' and others were worried about the financial implications. There were also some who, having struggled with remote learning, could think of nothing worse than further study. I constantly sought ways to support my students with their next steps and wish I'd have been more aware of the support available through university widening participation access programmes.

What are access programmes and what are they designed to do?

Widening participation is a government strategy designed to tackle the obstacles that disadvantaged and underrepresented students face on their journey to higher education. Integral to this are the programmes developed by university outreach teams. They help students at each stage of their university journey by providing assistance with the application process, ongoing support to remove barriers and additional advice and guidance after graduation.

What opportunities are available?

There are a range of activities available to students, but these will vary from institution to institution:

- **In-school support** including presentations about university, subject-specific talks and workshops with current students.
- **Virtual support sessions** such as virtual mentoring and online courses.

- **Campus visits** to help students explore where they might study and allow them to experience taster lectures.
- **Residentials and summer schools** to provide a more in-depth student experience. Students can access university facilities, meet current students and gain insight into the university's careers, academic and wellbeing support.
- **Continued guidance** throughout their time at university, including financial support, enhanced induction programmes and personalised support from named contacts at the university.

What are the benefits?

Being exposed to these opportunities enables students to approach their next steps with confidence as well as help them to develop key transferable skills that will strengthen their applications. As an added incentive, lots of universities offer added benefits upon completion of their access programmes, such as contextual offers, guaranteed consideration of applications or enhanced support packages upon arrival.

Who's eligible?

While the eligibility criteria will depend on specific programmes, opportunities will be available for the following groups of students:

- students eligible for Free School Meals
- young carers
- care experienced students
- care leavers
- estranged students
- asylum seekers/refugee students
- students from areas with low participation rates in higher education
- students from areas of deprivation.

Where can I find out more?

The best way to find out what's available is to contact your local university's outreach team. They'll be able to advise you about opportunities exclusive to local students, and signpost you to relevant activities, as well as national programmes. [UniTasterDays](#) is also a brilliant resource, as universities will post direct links to their events throughout the year and provide contact details should you wish to enquire about bespoke events for your students.

What is university event targeting?

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

An important aim for universities is to help remove barriers to higher education and ensure that every student can apply, should they wish. Research shows that those from certain backgrounds including lower income, care-experienced and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boater (GRTSB) communities are less likely to go to university. Many universities offer accessible and targeted events to these groups, amongst others, to help raise aspirations and offer a level playing field.

Bespoke activity is often planned throughout the year to help support applicants who may have additional queries or needs when making their university choices. For example, events may take place specifically for Special Educational Needs (SEN) students. Here, they can also find out about additional support and funding options available to them through the university.

Bespoke events

Events aren't just for school leavers either. Universities run events from primary school up to sixth form to engage children with higher education. At the University of Sunderland, we recently developed a bespoke programme for a local primary school, where almost 25% of students are from the GRTSB community, to show them what university life is like and what opportunities it can lead to. Having this impact at different stages of the student journey is a key goal for most universities.

There may be events for those who have applied to specific subjects too. For example, at the University of Sunderland, we offer

Medicine outreach experiences to those who meet certain widening participation criteria so they can get to know our campus, accommodation and facilities before starting their academic year.

While events such as Open Days are targeted at the broader student population, sometimes universities will run subject-specific Open Days or run open events for certain demographics, such as postgraduate students or students from families within the armed forces. Some students and schools may not be able to afford to travel to universities for these events, which is why many universities offer travel bursaries to help ease the cost.

Universities also offer targeted, long-term support through a series of events to support widening participation. For example, the University of Sunderland has a two-year progression scheme for students from backgrounds where there is a low university attendance rate. Through skills workshops, university visits, school visits and a residential summer school, students can experience university life and be better prepared to decide whether to apply. Schemes like this often offer UCAS points on completion, giving students a head start with their applications.

Through targeted events, universities can help students feel more confident navigating the application process. It is also important for students to state any additional needs, care leaver status or caring responsibilities on their UCAS application, so universities can provide them with additional support from the start.

If you can't find the type of event you're looking for on a university's website, but you feel your students would benefit from tailored information or guidance, you should contact the university's student recruitment team. They would be happy to shape the right event for you.

“An important aim for universities is to help remove barriers to higher education. To ensure that every student can apply, should they wish. ”



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Supporting care experienced and estranged students into higher education

By **Liz Ferguson, Widening Participation Officer at the University of East Anglia**

Young people with experience of care or family estrangement may have extra questions or concerns when they're considering higher education. As advisers, you can provide lots of encouragement and practical advice to help them feel confident and prepared. I will provide a guide to some of the opportunities here.

Taster Days and Summer Schools

Encourage students, of any age, to look out for opportunities to visit their local or preferred universities. Outreach and Widening Participation teams will often deliver daytime and residential visits for students with limited family support. These visits are a brilliant opportunity to ask questions, explore facilities and gain confidence before students apply to university.

Financial support to visit universities

Some universities have their own transport funds which students can apply for, to help with travel costs and accommodation as part of their university visit. Encourage your estranged or care-experienced students to ask universities about travel or transport funding, so they can make the most of what is available.

Young people in care may be able to access financial support from their local authority to attend these events too, so talk to the relevant local authority to find out if this is offered. Open Days and Applicant Days are a fantastic opportunity to meet university staff and students, ask questions about courses and get a feel for whether the university is right for them.

Comparing the options

Applicants are likely to encounter a wide variety of support packages at different universities and may need your support to examine the options in detail. Universities are keen to ensure students have a smooth and confident start

to their studies and they often publish details online about their support packages and dedicated key staff.

A great source of information for care-experienced students is the [Propel website](#). Students can search for a university and get easily-digestible information about their support package for care-experienced students.

For estranged students, there's [Stand Alone](#). Their pages have up to date contact details for key staff – a great place for gathering details of who your students can contact before they arrive at their chosen university.

The support varies at each university but can include contextual admissions offers, non-repayable funding, pre-arrival events and information, year-round accommodation, guarantor support and much more.

Extra financial help

Encourage your students to research bursaries and scholarships at the universities they're interested in; some institutions offer thousands of pounds in non-repayable additional support!

Students who are estranged from their birth or adoptive parents can apply for Independent Student status with Student Finance England, which means their parents' household income won't be used to calculate their living cost loan. The application form is available online and students should be encouraged to submit their form as early as possible. This will ensure the funds they need are available at the start of their first term.

Being visible

Your students will have the opportunity to identify themselves as care-experienced and/or estranged on their UCAS application, during the Student Finance application process and possibly at the point of registering at their new university.



My final key message to teachers and advisers

Encourage your students to tick the relevant boxes on these forms as this information is crucial to ensuring that they get the funding, or any other support, that they're eligible for.

Event evaluation - why is it important?

By **Al Blackshaw, Widening Access Manager at the University of Strathclyde**

If you've worked with university widening access teams for a while, you'll know that we love an evaluation. Whether it's an on-the-day evaluation, a follow-up email or a survey asking what has/hasn't worked for you, we thrive on feedback and data from the people we work with. But why are we so obsessed with evaluation and why is it important? The ins-and-outs will vary depending on who is doing the evaluation, and for which event(s), but here are some key reasons as to why we evaluate so often and so rigorously.

Measuring success (or lack thereof)

Perhaps the most obvious reason is because we want to know what participants think of our events. If something is well received, we know that it's a good idea to keep offering it. If something doesn't go down well, we'll look at any qualitative feedback to identify what needs to change.

Demographic engagement and impact

Evaluations often ask for demographic information such as home postcode or sex. Full information on how this is used will be detailed in a privacy notice but, broadly speaking, these help us to identify whether we're reaching appropriate groups. For example, will the feedback from our engineering outreach events help us to encourage more girls into engineering if only boys completed the evaluations? How can we increase the interest in teaching careers amongst boys if the only insight we get is from girls? Do our activities reach pupils who live in areas where few people traditionally go to university?

It's this type of demographic information that helps us identify if we need to make any adjustments to our promotional strategies for future events.

Securing funding

University outreach teams are great at being creative to make funding stretch as far as possible – allowing us to engage with as many under-represented groups as possible – but that money still has to come from somewhere. Whether it's from institutional funds, funding councils, private donors or businesses, we want to evidence to our funders that what we do works. Not just so they'll continue to fund us, but also so they may give us a bit more to allow us to increase our scope!

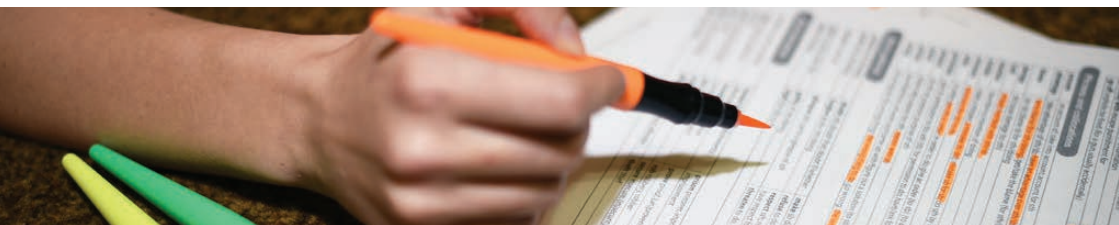
“ **Evaluation is a great way for us to show the value and impact of what we do and it can also help us to keep our events at a low cost or free for participants.** ”

Complement, not replace!

We want to make sure our events make sense. We know we can't replace or replicate the value of school-based education – and we don't want to! We value everything that you do to prepare your young people for life after school. So, if it turns out that one of our events was a bit too similar to something covered in school, we need to know so that we can adjust it. Our aim is to always complement, instead of replace the school experience.

So, a request...

If you're aware that your pupils are being asked to complete an evaluation, or if you're asked to complete one as a teaching professional, please support us with the process! We use the information to improve the ways in which we can support you and your young people.



Qualifications: what will universities accept for entry?

By Rici Krieger, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at Nottingham Trent University

British universities accept a range of qualifications for entry, however, as with many other areas of higher education, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Traditional A-Levels remain the most common Level 3 qualification universities accept for entry, but as the nature and offer of universities has diversified, so have the qualifications they accept.

While some universities continue to primarily accept A-Levels and are requesting a certain sequence of grades to be met, many are now considering a range of Level 3 qualifications and are looking for a total sum of UCAS Tariff Points to be achieved. As universities set these requirements themselves, on a course-by-course basis, it is important to consider each university, course and its requirements individually, to ensure that students are studying suitable qualifications for acceptance.

Qualifications outside A Levels

BTEC, OCR Cambridge, City and Guilds Technical, T-Levels and Access to HE Diploma – these are just some of the alternative Level 3 qualifications that carry UCAS Tariff Points and are accepted by many universities. At times, they can even fulfil a university's subject specific A-Level requirement, although this is dependent on the curriculum studied as part of the qualification and the individual university's discretion.

One thing to keep in mind when it comes to alternative Level 3 qualifications, is that universities often accept a variety of these to meet the required UCAS Tariff Points,

but there are limited combinations. Usually, the number of qualifications accepted is limited to the equivalent of three A-Levels. For example, if an applicant studies a BTEC Extended Diploma which is equivalent to 3 A-Levels, as well as a BTEC Extended Certificate (equivalent to 1 A-Level), they're likely to receive an offer which asks them to gain the required amount of UCAS Tariff Points from their Extended Diploma only, not taking the Extended Certificate into consideration. This is comparable to a student who studies four A-Levels but receives an offer asking for certain grades to be met by only three of these.

Yet, we recommend mentioning all Level 3 qualifications an applicant is working towards or has already completed on their application, including Extended Projects (EPQs) and vocational qualifications such as graded examinations in music or dance. While many universities might not include them in their initial offer, they may be able to consider the UCAS Tariff Points they carry on results day if an applicant is slightly short of meeting their offer.

How about pre-16 qualifications?

While there's understandably a focus on Level 3 qualifications when it comes to university entry requirements, it is important to keep in mind that universities also require specific grades at Level 2 (GCSEs) from their applicants. Some universities may ask for a certain number of GCSEs to meet a particular grade point, while others will only require Maths, English and, at times, Science at grade A*-C/9-4. Some will even accept GCSE equivalents such as Functional Skills Level 2 in lieu of GCSEs.

However, it's always worth contacting universities and their admissions offices directly to ensure that you're aware of any changes, updates and limitations to their entry requirements or to the qualifications they'll accept for the courses your students are interested in.

🗨️ British universities accept a range of qualifications for entry, however, as with many other areas of higher education, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Traditional A-Levels remain the most common Level 3 qualification universities accept for entry, but as the nature and offer of universities has diversified, so have the qualifications they accept. 🗨️

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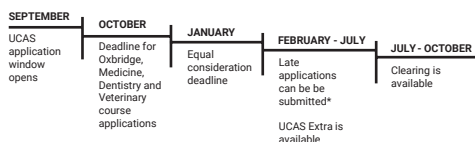
www.lancaster.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges

A guide to the university admissions process and offer-making

By **Alexandra Diaconescu**, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Salford

We understand that the process of applying to university can seem daunting at times, so we have put together a short guide which we hope will help alleviate your students' concerns. Providing an overview of the admissions process, key deadlines and details on possible application outcomes, the information below aims to assist you when supporting students through their university application journey.

Submitting the application



**Late applications will only be considered if spaces are still available once the on-time applications have been reviewed*

***for exact dates please check the UCAS website*

The application is in – what's next?

Once submitted, applications will be reviewed against course specific entry criteria by the university admissions teams. In some cases, additional information may be required, for example, applicants may be invited to an interview or to submit a portfolio. Students should be advised to monitor their UCAS Hub and their emails closely. We recommend that they use their personal email address to ensure they always have access to communications.

Waiting for a reply can be stressful, however, reassure your students that each application is reviewed individually. Most universities have different admissions procedures, so some responses may take longer than others. If, however, you have a student who needs to follow-up with an institution directly, we'd always

recommend that they include their personal details such as: name, UCAS ID number and the course they applied for, to ensure a swift response.

Unconditional / conditional offers

Decisions are communicated via UCAS Hub and, if your student has been made an offer, they'll see 'unconditional' or 'conditional' displayed.

An unconditional offer means that the student has secured a place on the course. Whereas a conditional offer means the student will be accepted if they meet certain conditions, usually related to their academic results. Students must respond to their offers by the date they've been given by selecting their firm (first) and insurance (second) choices. If their last offer was received by mid-May, the UCAS deadline to reply is three weeks, but if it was received by mid-July, they must reply within one week.

Unsuccessful outcomes

If the outcome of a student's application is 'unsuccessful', it means that the university has decided not to offer them a place on the course. The reasoning can be indicated on UCAS Hub, and students can also contact the universities directly for feedback. While they may feel distressed, we encourage you to remind them of the many options ahead.

Further options – UCAS Extra and Clearing

If the applicant has not secured a place at any of their initial five choices, they can apply to one additional course at a time, between late February and early July, via UCAS Extra. From July, applicants can also take advantage of Clearing, when universities will advertise their remaining course places. It is best to advise students to call the institutions they're interested in to discuss their personal circumstances.

We recognise that applying to study at higher education can feel stressful, but universities will always be there to support you and your students through this process. There are lots of resources available, and you can also contact us directly for advice and guidance. From group presentations and individual guidance to CPD talks and workshops, we're one email away!

Applying to universities outside of UCAS

By Gráinne Sharkey, Content Marketing Manager at The London Interdisciplinary School

As you start to prepare your students for university applications, it is important to be aware that UCAS is not the only option. Although UCAS is a helpful, centralised system that makes the process of researching and applying to multiple universities much easier, applying directly to a university can have benefits too.

Applying directly to universities will also allow students to have more options beyond their five choices on UCAS. Not only that, but there could be a university perfect for your student that isn't on UCAS, which was the case for the London Interdisciplinary School until very recently.

What are the benefits of applying directly to university?

Smother process: Applying directly to the university allows students to have more control over their application. You may also expect a quicker response time from the admissions department as well.

Easier to complete: UCAS is a tricky system and can sometimes be overwhelming for students. When applying directly, some universities allow uploads to their system, making adding personal statements or any previous qualifications much easier.

More affordable: Most direct university applications are free, saving your students

money in comparison to the UCAS application fees.

Personalised connections: many universities will have an amazing admissions and recruitment team, who can support students before they've accepted their place on a course

If your student decides they'd like to apply directly to a university, here's a checklist for you to guide them through the process.

1. Getting started!

- **Research:** They should begin by researching universities which interest them and offer programmes relevant to their field of study.
- **Application deadlines:** They should note down the application deadlines for each university they're considering. Deadlines can vary significantly between institutions.
- **Financial information:** They should understand the tuition fees, scholarship opportunities and any financial documents required for their application.

2. Preparing

- **Personal statement:** They should write a compelling personal statement which highlights their academic achievements, extracurricular activities, motivations and how they would contribute to the university community.
- **Letters of recommendation:** They should request letters of recommendation from teachers, mentors, or employers who can speak about their qualifications and potential.

“Remember that each university may have its own unique requirements and processes, so be sure to advise your students to thoroughly read the instructions provided by each institution they're applying to.”

3. Applying

- **Apply early:** They should submit applications well before the deadlines to avoid any last-minute technical glitches or issues.
- **Contact admissions:** If they have questions about the application process, they should not hesitate to contact the university's admissions office for clarification.
- **Keep copies:** They should make copies of all their application materials for their own records. This includes application forms, documents and correspondence.

4. Staying on top of it

- **Follow-up:** If they haven't received acknowledgement or confirmation of their application, they should not hesitate to follow up with the admissions office.
- **Plan for Interviews:** Some universities may require an interview as part of their application process. They should be prepared to discuss their motivations and aspirations.
- **Acceptance:** Once accepted, they may need to go through steps to remove themselves from UCAS (if applicable) to avoid causing any confusion or jeopardising their application.



Preparing for university - what happens after results day?

By Catherine Brabin, Student Recruitment Assistant at Lancaster University

After a year of hard work, you and your students will have earned a fantastic summer holiday. The summer is the perfect time to rest, relax and regroup ready for the autumn. With that in mind, this guide will look at how students can prepare for their next steps during their break.

Enjoy the summer

One of the best ways for your students to prepare for the new academic year, is to have a truly relaxing summer. Students should take time after results day to rest and reflect on their college or sixth form experience, so that they're ready for further study. How do they work best? What habits would they like to set in motion before starting university?

Packing

Bringing home a haul of university supplies is an exciting rite of passage for new students.

Watching packing videos is a great way to see what current students have to say about what they wished they'd brought with them and, equally, what they could have left at home. There are some great top tips on what to buy based on a university budget. In my first year, I bought my plates from a charity shop for £3!

Top tip:

I also brought a door stop so my flatmates felt welcome to pop into my room and have a chat when they were walking by.



Getting ready for student life

Most universities will have a Freshers' Facebook group and other pages for new students to start connecting with other first-years before arrivals weekend. This will

hopefully ease some nerves and help them to make friends. Students may also want to browse their university's societies page and have a think about what they want to join. The summer is also a good chance for students to learn how to cook a few key meals! Confidence in the kitchen and saving money on takeaways is always a plus.

Academics

While it's not essential, students may want to do some pre-reading before their first term. Universities usually publish their reading lists in advance e.g. I found it useful to read a couple of the set novels for my English Literature course before the autumn.

Many universities also provide short courses for students to complete before they arrive. These may be specific to the student, or could be a more general 'preparing for university' guide. For example, students could receive further information on their degree modules or on courses to complete, such as health and safety or security on campus.

Top Tip:

It is a good idea for students to note down any key student support contacts they may need before they arrive.



Explore the city

If students have the time and means, they may want to revisit where they're moving to and explore further. City or campus, it never hurts to feel more confident getting around a new place.

Final words

Going to university can be nerve wracking, so it's important to remind students to take the summer at their own pace.

“Relaxing, enjoying the break and making gentle preparations are the best ways to make the transition into their first-year as smooth as possible.”

Supporting students with their personal statement

By Ella Sancassani, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Essex

During the UCAS application process, students are required to write a personal statement. This is their opportunity to personalise their application, impress universities with their enthusiasm for their chosen subject, discuss previous experiences and explain why they're keen to study at university.

Students are only allowed to submit one personal statement as part of their UCAS application, so if they're applying for a joint-honours degree, or for more than one subject, they should make sure it covers them both. It is also worth noting that personal statements are limited to 4000 characters or 47 lines, whichever comes first.

What to include in a personal statement?

Two thirds of the personal statement should be about the course that your student is applying for. Students will want to mention where their interest started; how their current studies relate to the subjects they wish to study at university; and what they've already learnt about the subject that has inspired them to take it at higher education level.

They should also demonstrate the personal qualities and skills that make them well suited to their chosen area of study – qualities and skills they may have gained through relevant work or academic experience, volunteering or awards. Admissions teams and course selectors also like to hear about a student's future career plans and how the skills they'll acquire throughout their university education will help them achieve their future goals.

The remaining third of the personal statement should be focused on the student. This section is their opportunity to say what makes them interesting and unique. Everyone has aspects of their personality that make them interesting; it's just a case of putting them into words! Activities they've undertaken recently

will certainly carry more weight and should draw out their transferable skills. It could be teamwork skills that they've gained through volunteering or sports, demonstrating their ability to work with others. They should also draw up any skills gained through positions of responsibility and leadership.

This can be demonstrated throughout their personal statement, but also by concluding with a strong, positive final sentence.

Guidance on gap years

Your students should also mention if they're planning on taking a gap year before they head to university. Encourage them to explain what they're planning to do during that time and how (if at all) their plans are related to their course or their future prospects.

Drafting for success

We encourage students to produce several drafts of their personal statement on Microsoft Word or another programme. This will allow them to get feedback from friends, family and tutors. This will help them to perfect their personal statement before they submit it as part of their application.

If you think your students could do with some additional guidance, or an external perspective, universities frequently deliver sessions to support students with personal statement writing, so please do reach out to us.



“ **Remind your students to relate everything back to the course and their motivation for studying at university.** ”



Personal statements: an evolving role in university admissions

By Steven Lawrence, Head of UK Undergraduate Student Recruitment at the University of Bath

The personal statement is synonymous with the UCAS application process; mention it to a graduate and they're likely to still remember the work they put into perfecting it. Most students dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to crafting their best statement, but it is important to understand that universities have adopted different positions and placed different weight on the personal statement as the years have progressed.

Where the personal statement may be less important

Some institutions clearly state that the personal statement does not form a core part of their decision-making process, for some, or all of their courses. This may be because the university expects to make offers to a relatively high proportion of applicants or, in the case of more selective courses, because they feel it is fairer to make decisions based on factors such as predicted and achieved grades, admissions tests or interviews. In some cases, universities may categorically state that for certain courses, the personal statement won't impact the chances of a student receiving an offer.

Where the personal statement is key

Other institutions, including the University of Bath, look at a student's personal statement in detail when assessing their application. At Bath, we recognise the time and effort that students invest in drafting and completing their statement, and the work of teachers and advisers in encouraging students to produce an effective statement to support their application. Our Admissions team consider all aspects of the applications they receive,

including the personal statement which is read, in full, by two members of the team.

If a university indicates that the statement forms an important part of their decision-making process, it is likely to hold significant value if:

- a) a student applies for a particularly competitive course
- b) their predicted grades are similar to – or lower than – the majority of applicants.

Writing a strong personal statement

While different universities take different approaches to the personal statement, it is highly likely that at least some of the universities in a student's UCAS choices will use their personal statement to help them decide whether or not to make them an offer. UCAS publishes advice on writing an effective statement, but it's also important that students research specific guidance from universities (often found on course pages or in Admissions policy documents) to understand what each institution is looking for.

If a student is applying for a range of courses across different academic disciplines – perhaps medicine and biology, or chemistry and chemical engineering – they could also contact some of their choices to see if that institution would consider an alternative statement tailored to a specific course.

The proposed personal statement reform

In 2023 [UCAS highlighted the personal statement as an area of potential reform](#). Although the change is not expected until the 2026 cycle, and while the exact format of the reformed personal statement is still to be determined, UCAS have indicated that there is a consensus among stakeholders that personal statements should highlight a student's motivation for applying, preparedness to study their chosen course, and showcase the relevant experience they've gained outside their studies. We'll soon see what's around the corner.

“ Most students dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to crafting their best statement, but it is important to understand that universities have adopted different positions and placed different weight on the personal statement as the years have progressed. ”

Writing a standout university reference

By Helen Mercado, Head of Admissions at the University of Derby

Academic references are a key part of a student's application to university. Here's how you can make sure you're supporting your students at this critical stage in their journey.

UCAS references provide an academic assessment of an applicant's suitability for a course. They provide an unbiased but positive account of a student and their abilities, in addition to their own personal statement. References should be written by someone who knows the applicant academically, such as a current teacher, tutor, principal or head teacher.

As a referee, you'll need to provide your contact details. This includes an email address, phone number, school or college name and your relationship to the student.

For 2024 entry, UCAS has made some changes to the format of references, as a result of feedback from higher education admissions teams. Some things remain the same – there's a 4,000 character limit, for example. However, the previous free text approach has been changed to a more structured format, with three distinct sections. The idea behind this is to make it easier for institutions to access key information about applicants.

Outlining the UCAS Reference Sections

General statement about your school/college/centre – this is where you can provide context about your school, such as the performance,

intake demographics and progression rates to higher education. Include information about the school which might affect the student's performance or opportunities – have there been significant staff changes or damage to buildings, for example? And are there any restrictions on options for study?

Extenuating circumstances – this is your opportunity to highlight any individual circumstances that have impacted the student or caused disruption to their study. This could include illness or a family bereavement. It is important that this is discussed and agreed with the student before being disclosed. If you've shared this information with the exam board, you should make this clear in this section.

There might be circumstances that don't need highlighting with the exam board. For example, if they occurred earlier in the student's journey, but would still be relevant for UCAS. It is not compulsory to include anything in this section.

Supportive information specific to the applicant – short, clear, factual statements about the student's suitability for the course; work experience, or barriers to work experience; and other achievements/skills.

“ It is important to get to the heart of what you believe the higher education admissions team needs to know about the student, rather than trying to craft perfect paragraphs. ”

Three top tips when writing a university reference



If you don't know the student very well, it's a good idea to interview them to get to know them better.



Research the course the student is applying for so you can explain why they would be suitable as an applicant for it.



Make sure everything is clear and concise to make it easy for admissions teams to access the information they need.





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