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Parents' Guide to University 2026

The key higher education facts for parents and supporters

Produced in collaboration with **HELOA**

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Welcome to the UniTasterDays Parents' Guide to University 2026

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

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

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

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

In reality, it was a mental block, rather than a financial block. The student loan system ensures higher education is affordable to all (page 71). Even so, the rise in tuition fees gave students pause for thought. University now needed careful consideration.

After all, if your child is paying (or repaying) that kind of money, they'll want maximum value for

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

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

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

Higher education has never been more varied. The traditional three years on a campus is one path amidst many. Your child now has endless choice on how, where, when, and what they study. This freedom can be overwhelming. But help your child reframe their thinking. Choice isn't a burden. It's a gift.

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

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



Simon Fairbanks,
Associate Director
Community Engagement,
UniTasterDays

 UniTasterDays.com

Helping you support your children with university

- Search university events:
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- Watch subject guide videos:
www.UniTasterDays.com/SubjectVideos

- Read university advice:
www.UniTasterDays.com/ParentBlog
- Listen to our podcasts:
www.UniTasterDays.com/Podcasts

My advice for parents by Baasit Siddiqui

Director of Siddiqui Education



Encourage your child to reflect on:

- Times they've worked through challenges
- Moments they've shown initiative
- Experiences where they've worked with others.

As a parent, carer, or supporter, guiding your child through their journey to university can feel both exciting and overwhelming. It's a significant milestone both academically and personally.

I have spent twenty years working across education, supporting young people with their qualifications, progression routes, and UCAS applications. In doing so, I've seen first-hand the important role that you play in shaping their confidence, choices, and mindset.

What often amazes me is how young people view their achievements. Many see success simply as a grade, a certificate, or an outcome. But rarely do they recognise the skills, attitudes, and behaviours that led them there. That's where your support becomes vital.

Help them see their value

Early on, one of the most valuable things you can do is shift the conversation from "What did you get?" to "What did you learn about yourself?"

Every assignment completed, every exam revised for, every challenge overcome... these are all evidence of deeper skills. Things like curiosity, creativity, collaboration, compromise, communication, community, and above all courage.

These are what I refer to as 'The 7Cs to Thrive.' This is a framework I use to help young people recognise and articulate their strengths. In reality, universities and employers aren't just looking at grades. They're looking for individuals who can contribute, adapt, and grow.

Helping them to name these skills builds confidence and prepares them for applications, interviews, and beyond.

Support without taking over

The UCAS application process can be stressful, for both young people and the adults supporting them. It's tempting to step in and take control, especially when you want the best outcome. Do your best to remember that your role isn't to lead the process, but to guide and reassure.

I recently spoke to a student about the idea of compromise, one of the 7Cs. She shared how she and her father had very different views on university. He strongly believed in higher education, not just for the qualification, but for what it represents: discipline, resilience, collaboration, and critical thinking. Through open conversations, they found common ground.

That's the key, creating space for dialogue.

Ask questions like:

- What excites you about this course?
- What are you unsure about?
- What kind of environment would help you thrive?

This helps young people feel heard, whilst also benefitting from your experience and perspective.



Attend university open days

University open days are often the first real glimpse into what life could look like next. They can be both inspiring and intimidating.

I've had the privilege of working closely with universities and attending many of these events. What stands out every time isn't just the facilities or the courses, but the atmosphere. The sense of possibility. The nervous excitement that is felt by both young people and, often more so, by their family and friends who come along to the visit.

Encourage your child to look beyond the buildings and ask:

- Can I see myself here?
- Do I feel comfortable in this environment?
- What support systems are in place?

Universities put significant effort into creating a sense of community, from student societies and networking events to wellbeing services and peer support. These are just as important as the academic offering. Use open days to discover the nuanced support offered by the university.

Prepare for the transition

Once applications are submitted, a new phase begins. Preparing for independence.

University life is exciting, but it also comes with challenges:

- Making new friends
- Managing time independently
- Adapting to new ways of learning.

Through my work with young people, including projects like 'Get Ready for Uni' with the University of Derby, I've seen how important it is to prepare students for the academic and personal experiences offered at university.

This is where your role evolves again, from guide to support system at a distance.

Continue to:

- Check in regularly
- Encourage independence
- Remind them of their strengths.

Most importantly, tell them it's okay if they don't figure everything out straight away.

Build belief

As well as education, university is about growth, identity, and discovery. As someone who has worked with thousands of young people, I can confidently say this: young people are far more capable than they realise.

But often, they need someone to help them see it. By supporting them to recognise their skills, articulate their value, and approach this journey with confidence, you are giving them something far more important than guidance. You are helping them build belief in themselves. Done right, this trait will stay with them long after their time at university.



Reasons to consider university

By Gavin Spoons, Schools and Colleges Engagement Officer at Norwich University of the Arts

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

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

Industry skills

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

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

Personal and social development

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

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

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

Employment potential

Universities are often well connected with international businesses, companies, and brands. This opens the door for students to access the professional world (page 114). Your child may have the opportunity to learn directly from employers in a lecture and even work with them on a client project.

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



Understanding fair access and widening participation

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

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

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

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

2. Summer schools - several institutions advertise residential summer schools for learners considering higher education. Participants can stay overnight in student accommodation and experience university teaching and learning. You and your child can recognise a widening participation summer school because it will often be subsidised and have a specific eligibility criteria.

3. Open days - it can become challenging for you and your child to visit universities, especially when arranging trips to multiple venues across the region or country. Widening participation will recognise this challenge by scheduling virtual visits, alternative dates, bespoke campus tours, and sometimes financial reimbursement for travel and accommodation.

4. Mentoring - the amount of information that applicants receive when deciding between their options can become overwhelming. Therefore, having a mentor can be incredibly valuable, especially one who has recently experienced the same process and shares similar lived experiences. Many universities and Uni Connect partnerships deliver mentoring programmes that provide impartial, tailored advice to best equip your child towards making their decision.

5. Contextual offers - the entry requirements for your child's chosen course will be advertised. However, institutions will recognise the context in which grades have been achieved, particularly where significant barriers or disruption to education are evident. A reduced entry requirement may be applied. Whilst commonly available, this process is not standardised. Each institution will outline their eligibility criteria and conditions for a reduced entry requirement.

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

7. Ongoing support - once your child is registered and enrolled, they will receive continued support and information relevant to their student experience. For eligible learners, additional widening participation support may be available through academic, financial, social, and professional development opportunities.

“Having a mentor can be incredibly valuable, especially one who has recently experienced the same process and shares similar lived experiences.”

Opportunities offered by Uni Connect

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

Uni Connect is a national programme funded by the Office for Students that brings together universities, colleges, and schools to help young people make informed decisions about their future.

Delivered through 29 regional partnerships across England, it provides locally relevant opportunities in collaboration with nearby institutions. Parents and carers can find their local partnership and explore opportunities through the Uni Connect website.

Uni Connect offers structured and reliable support. Activities are free, delivered by trusted organisations, and follow safeguarding procedures. They focus on helping students explore a range of pathways including university, apprenticeships, and employment, rather than directing them towards a single option.

Uni Connect impact

Not all students have equal access to information about higher education or career pathways. Uni Connect helps address this by working with schools and communities to provide reliable guidance and meaningful experiences.

Students may visit university campuses, take part in subject tasters, and speak to current students. This makes future options feel more accessible, while also introducing alternatives such as apprenticeships.

Activities such as summer schools build readiness for university life, while mentoring supports goal-setting and informed choices.

Uni Connect benefits

- Increased awareness of post-18 options
- Greater confidence and independence
- Clearer understanding of future pathways
- Increased engagement with learning
- Access to opportunities and networks

Uni Connect opportunities

Uni Connect partnerships offer a wide range of activities, often delivered over time to support students at different stages. Across all partnerships, students can typically access:

- Campus visits and subject taster sessions
- Workshops on study skills and career planning
- Summer schools and extended programmes
- Information and advice on applications and student finance.

A recent example is the GEAR UP Easter School at the University of East London, attended by over forty Year 10 students from across Essex. Many applied independently after discovering the opportunity through their schools, demonstrating increased confidence and engagement.

Uni Connect access

Students usually access Uni Connect through their school or college, often through invitations to take part in activities. As a parent or carer, you can encourage your child to:

- Speak to a teacher or careers adviser
- Take part in opportunities offered throughout the year
- Ask about upcoming Uni Connect activities.

To help your child, you may wish to ask their teachers the following questions:

- What Uni Connect activities are available at this school?
- How is my child selected or invited?
- What universities or organisations are involved?
- How will this support my child's future decisions?



Support for first-in-family students

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

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

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

Understanding the journey

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

Financial challenges

Explore the financial considerations with your child. Discuss budgeting and student loans (page 71). Additionally, practical advice like helping with housing arrangements or commuting can be invaluable.

Taster days

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

Outreach programmes

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

Careers advisers

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

Networking

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

Emotional support

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

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

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

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

Support for students on free school meals

By Linda King, Deputy Head of Outreach and Widening Participation at the University of Birmingham

Universities are required to develop Access and Participation Plans. These explain how they support students from under-represented backgrounds to access, succeed in, and progress beyond higher education. Eligibility for free school meals (FSM) is one of the most widely used indicators in these plans. This means students from FSM backgrounds are often prioritised for additional support, outreach opportunities, and financial assistance.

If your child has received FSM during their schooling, they can benefit from a strong range of financial and academic support to help them progress into higher education and succeed once they get there.

UCAS fee waiver

Applying to university normally involves a UCAS application fee. However, this fee is waived for students who received UK government-funded FSM during the last six years, up until the end of their final year at school or college. This ensures that financial circumstances don't limit a student's ability to apply to university.

Contextual admissions

Many UK universities use contextual admissions, which consider a student's academic achievements alongside their personal circumstances. FSM eligibility is one of the clearest indicators used in this process.

Students may benefit from:

- Contextual offers with slightly reduced entry requirements
- Additional consideration during the admissions process
- A fairer assessment that recognises both potential and achievement.

This approach helps create a more level playing field and acknowledges the barriers students may have faced.

Outreach programmes

Universities offer a wide range of outreach, support, and widening participation programmes. Many of these specifically prioritise students who have received FSM, as well as other criteria.

These programmes raise aspirations, help students understand their options, and offer additional support during the application process. They may include:

- Campus visits and university experience days
- Tutoring, mentoring, or academic skills workshops
- Support with UCAS applications, interviews, and personal statements
- Summer schools or residentials, often with travel, accommodation, and food covered
- Reduced or guaranteed offers for students who complete schemes
- Support with the transition to university
- Access to additional scholarships and bursaries through scheme participation.

These opportunities help students explore university life, build academic confidence, and access extra layers of personalised support.

University support

Once at university, students benefit from comprehensive support designed to help them settle in, succeed academically, and prepare for their future. This includes:

- Careers and employability services, offering guidance, employer events, internships, and skills workshops
- Mentoring schemes, such as peer mentoring, alumni mentoring, and industry-linked support
- Wellbeing and pastoral support, including counselling, dedicated wellbeing advisers, and specialist support teams
- Scholarships and bursaries.

This wrap-around support ensures students have the academic and personal guidance they need to thrive.

Research your options

Universities are committed to helping students from all backgrounds access, enjoy, and succeed at university. Exploring university support pages, attending open days, and speaking directly with admissions or student support teams can help you and your child feel confident about the opportunities available.



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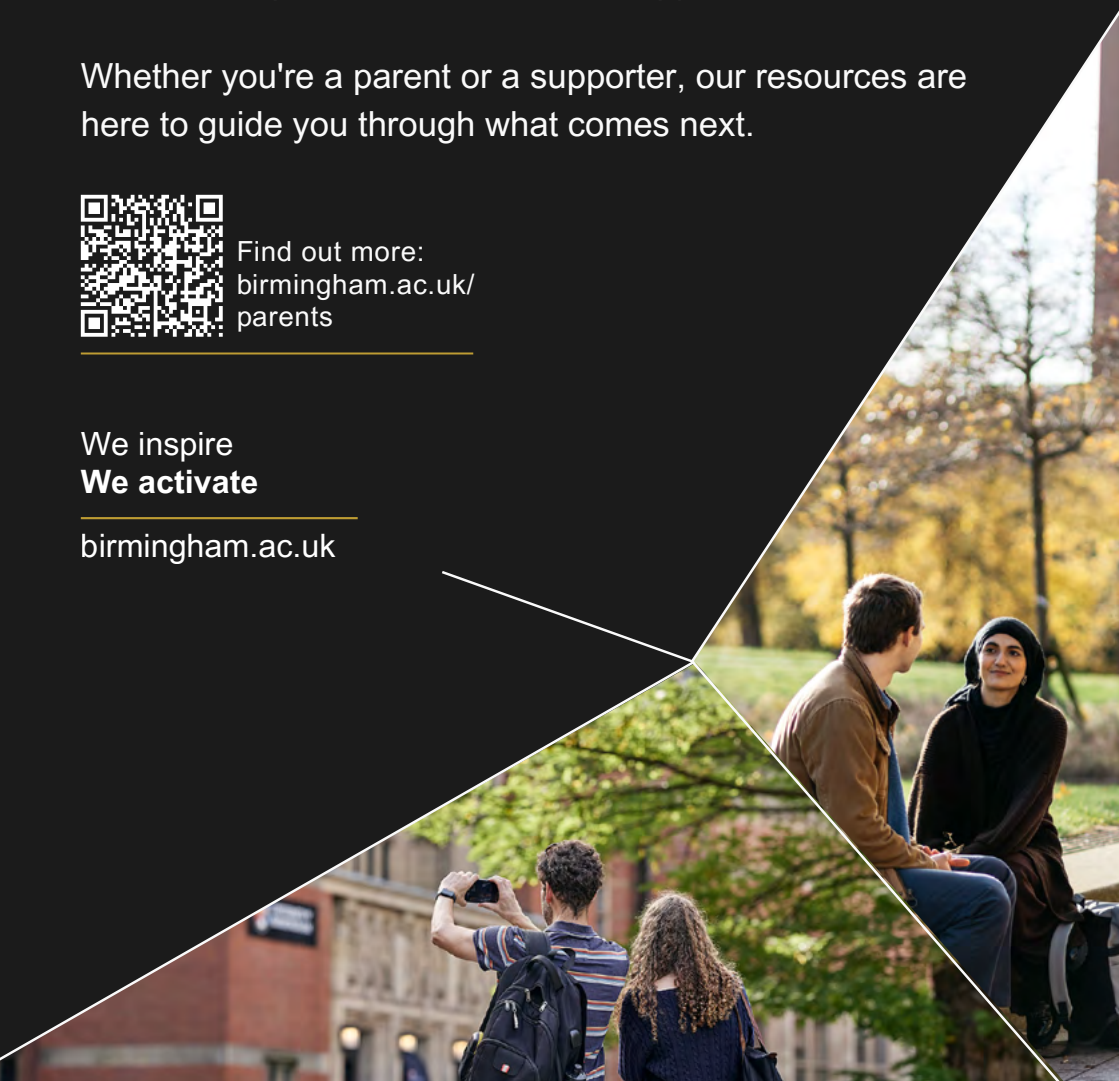
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Support for mature students, parents, and carers

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

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

Mature students

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

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

Balancing life and study

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

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

Support available

- Flexible study options – this can include part-time routes, online learning, and blended courses that combine in person and virtual teaching (page 41).
- Childcare support – some universities have onsite childcare, such as nurseries, and offer guidance on applying for financial support with childcare costs.
- Academic writing support – one-to-one support is available for things like essay writing, referencing, and time management. This can be helpful especially if you have taken a break from education.
- Financial support – there are a range of bursaries and grants, including support for student parents and carers that universities can offer. Research the options available to you. Bursaries and grants don't have to be paid back, unlike your student loan.
- Carer support – dedicated services are in place if you care for someone with an illness, disability, or mental health condition. This includes extra funding and personalised advice.

A welcoming community

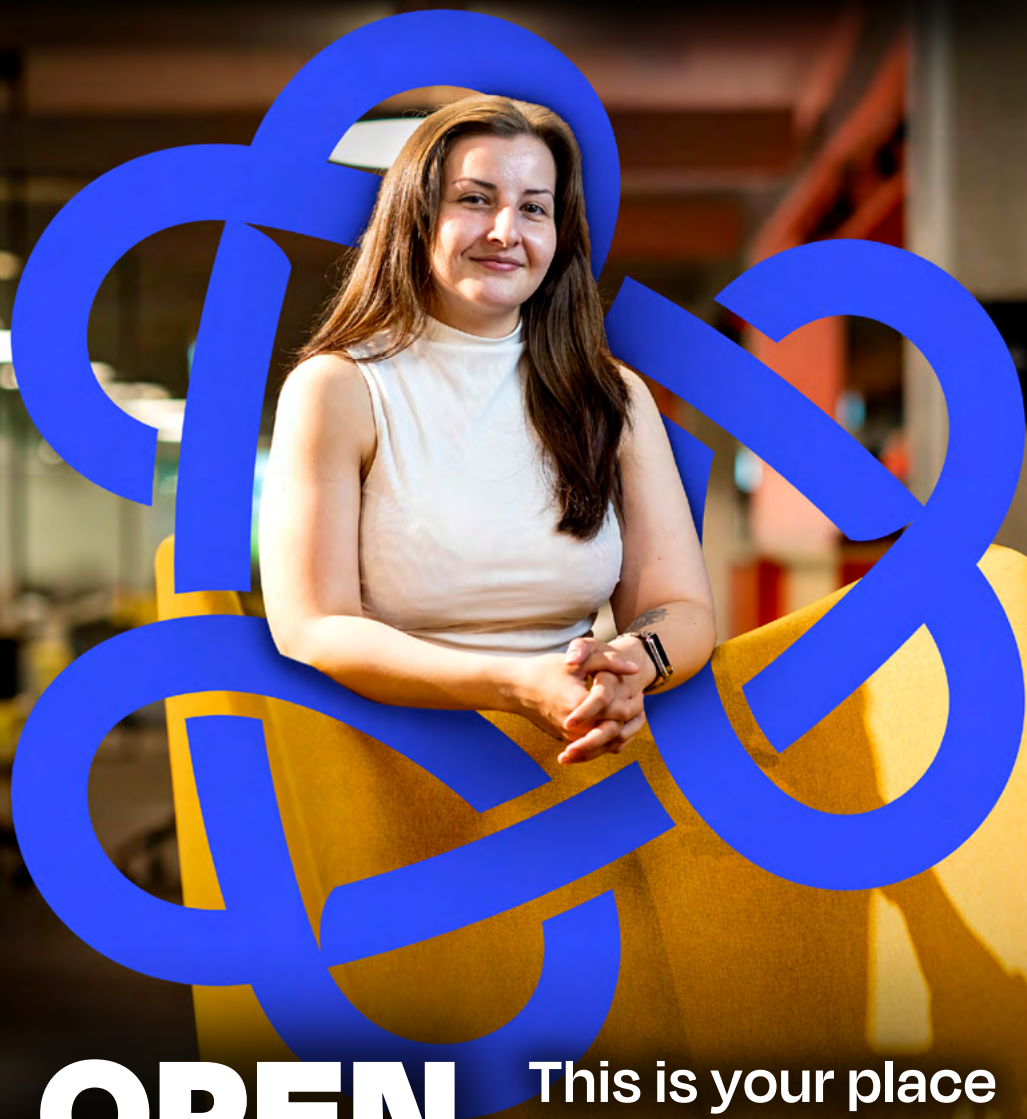
University of Staffordshire is proud of its inclusive, supportive environment. As a mature student, you'll find others who have taken similar paths. You will also have the chance to join student societies, attend mature student gatherings, and connect with people who understand your journey.

Start your journey

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

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

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



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Support for service children

By Louise Meredith, Senior Outreach and Transition Officer at the University of Portsmouth

A recent report for the Service Children's Progression Alliance found that students with serving or ex-serving parents face several challenges when trying to access higher education. If you're a serving parent yourself, or you support a service child, you probably know this already. But what are these challenges? And what can your family (and our universities) do to support these students?

Challenges faced by service children

Service children often face a more disrupted education than their peers. Regularly moving schools affects their academic attainment and has a high impact on their ability to maintain friendships. Equally, if a parent has been deployed away from home, this may have a negative effect on the child's wellbeing and mental health. Often, they've taken more responsibility in the house to support the remaining parent, especially if they are the oldest child.

University support for military families

Universities are working to increase the support available to these students and recognise the unique challenges they may have faced. Many universities have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, pledging their support to service children, serving personnel, and veterans. Look for this when helping your child decide where to study.

Personal statements for service children

Since 2023, UCAS has included a question in the application form for students to indicate their status as a service child. It's important for your child to disclose this information to a university. We don't get this information from anywhere else, so letting us know allows us to share the available support as soon as possible.

When writing their personal statement, your child may choose to talk about their experience as a service child and the effect it has had on their education. If they do, encourage them to write about the strengths and skills this has given them. Universities want to hear about their unique experiences and how they have overcome setbacks, as it demonstrates how they will deal with challenges when studying with them.

Financial support for service children

For many families, the financial support available to students is a major concern. There are specific schemes for service children, through all branches of the armed forces. For instance, if a student has lost a parent who was serving, the Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme can help with both tuition fees and maintenance support. There are also exceptions to the usual student finance rules for students who live abroad with a deployed parent. This means they can qualify for help, even if they aren't living in the UK.

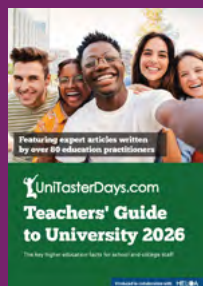
The potential of service children

If you support a service child, you'll already know that they show a huge amount of resilience and maturity because of the unique challenges they've faced. As universities, we understand that too and want to make sure we help them achieve their full potential.



Did you know we have two other university guides?

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





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Support for ethnic minority students

By Simone Simmons, Senior Access and Outreach Officer at Southampton Solent University

My son is in the midst of his journey toward university: open days, applications, personal statements, student finance. It's a lot for parents to take in as we try to support our children through the process. It has made me reflect on my own path to higher education and realise just how much has changed.

Studying at university

Growing up as a British child of colour in London, nobody in my family had ever been to university. It felt like something meant for "other people," not for me. Yet I applied anyway, despite having nobody at home who could explore the option with me, attend open days, or feel confident enough to check my UCAS application. I was accepted and moved far from home.

Those first months were daunting. Things I had taken for granted in a culturally diverse city were suddenly missing. I found myself wondering where I could buy my favourite food, where I could socialise with people who understood my cultural references, and (most urgently) where I could find decent 22 inch yaki texture hair in a 1B!

However, Solent University soon became home. I discovered communities that felt like my own through friends, academics, and student societies.

I found shops serving scotch bonnet heavy curry goat and rice. I found salons that transformed my hair from an impressive afro to back length tresses, intricate cornrows, and perfectly crafted box braids.

These communities helped me settle, thrive, and fully embrace the university experience. It gave me the sense of belonging I needed to achieve my first class degree with honours.

Working at university

When I returned to work at the same university, one of my favourite activities was supporting open days. I would watch young prospective students of colour step onto campus wearing the same slightly bewildered expression I must have worn two decades earlier, the look that quietly said, "I'm not sure about this."

I'd notice how their eyes darted around, searching for someone who looked like them. I'd see the subtle but unmistakable relief when they spotted me: another black person, someone who would understand the feeling of being out of place, the imposter syndrome, or the weight of parental expectations.

“I would watch young prospective students of colour step onto campus wearing the same slightly bewildered expression I must have worn two decades earlier. ”



Almost every time, once we got talking, a student or parent would lean in and quietly ask, “Are there any Black people in Southampton?” or “Where can my child get plantain or ackee and saltfish?” I always smiled and reassured them that Southampton is not so different.

Over the years, I've supported many initiatives designed to ensure students of colour feel a genuine sense of belonging: contributing to the university Race Equality Charter, supporting Roots, Rhythm, and Recipe events, and shaping the Not Just Accepted But Welcomed webpages. I also led conversations with applicants from non white backgrounds and spearheaded a £1,000 scholarship specifically for students of colour.

Each of these efforts aims to bring that “sigh of relief” earlier for prospective students, even before they arrive. It helps them feel confident that university can be a true home away from home.

Supporting my child

As a parent now supporting my own child through this transition, I realise how vital that sense of belonging is when choosing a university. Open days and the way institutions communicate with young people matter just as much as entry requirements or accommodation fees.

The welcoming atmosphere and sense of community at university open days strongly resonates with the next generation. For them, it's not just about league tables, accreditations or awards. It's about identity, representation, having a voice, and feeling like they belong.

On a recent visit, my 17 year old son stood on the first floor balcony of the impressive Spark Building, looking down at the energy and diversity of students from all walks of life. He turned to me and said, “You know what, Mama? I can see myself here.”

**Simone and
her son**



My advice for parents by Rosie Glover



Law student at Durham University

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rosie and her parents



Support for care experienced and estranged students

By Emma Vance, Arden Cares Wellbeing Advisor at Arden University

For many care-experienced and estranged young people, getting to university is a huge achievement, but the path there isn't always easy. If you are supporting someone who has been in care, you will likely understand that they haven't always had consistent guidance about their future.

That is why your role as a parent, carer, or trusted person is so important. It isn't only about helping them to reach university, but about enabling them to feel confident, safe, and able to succeed once they are there.

Universities across the UK are becoming more aware of the needs of care-experienced students. Many now offer care-experienced bursaries, year-round accommodation, and named staff members who will provide a steady point of contact. This can make a real difference, especially for students who lack a stable home during the holidays.

Before university

Early conversations about housing, finances, and support can ease uncertainty and help students feel more in control. Visit universities together and explore their care leaver support. Some universities now provide VIP visits for care-experienced young people, which include travel, overnight stays, and one to one conversations with support staff.

Be a calm, consistent source of reassurance to help them feel more confident. Encourage them

to disclose their care-experienced status, if they are comfortable doing so. This ensures the right support is in place from the start. Practical steps can prevent later issues, like making sure they have ID, a bank account, and student finance.

During university

Many care experienced students are used to being independent, which can mean they don't ask for help. Reassure them, it is okay to reach out for support when they need it. Your gentle encouragement can make a meaningful difference.

Stay connected with their named contact, wellbeing team, and academic staff. This can help them feel less alone during stressful moments. Sometimes, just knowing who to contact can make the entire process feel far less overwhelming.

A sense of belonging is also essential. Encourage them to connect with peer networks, mentoring opportunities, and other care experienced students. This can build confidence and help them find a community where they feel understood and supported.

After university

Care-experienced students can face a more uncertain transition after university. Encourage early planning to help ease this "cliff edge" into graduate life. Introduce them to the university career services, explore housing options, and look into graduate support.

Supporting a care-experienced young person through university is about persistence, compassion, and understanding. Simply being a steady, encouraging presence in their corner can make a real difference. With the right support, they can find their feet, build confidence in their student identity, and thrive throughout their university journey.

“Care-experienced students can face a more uncertain transition after university. Encourage early planning to help ease this ‘cliff edge’ into graduate life. ”

Support for neurodivergent students

By Amy Harvison, Access and Participation Administration Officer at Arden University

Starting university is a big transition for any student and their family. If your child is neurodivergent, it's natural to have additional questions about how they will settle and what support will be available.

Neurodivergent is a broad term used to describe differences in how people think, learn, and process information. This can include autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other cognitive differences. Every student will have different strengths and challenges. There is no one-size-fits-all experience.

The positive news is that universities are much better equipped than they once were to support neurodivergent students. With the right preparation and support in place, many students will thrive.

Understanding disclosure

Disclosure is when a student chooses to share information about a disability or condition with their university. This is always the student's decision. Support is student-led, and your child is in control of what they share and when. It is also protected under the Equality Act 2010, which means universities have a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments where needed.

Disclosure can feel like a big step, but it makes it much easier for students to access the support available to them. It's important that students learn to advocate for themselves to get this support.

Available support

Most universities offer a range of support services. This includes disability or inclusion teams, wellbeing services, and sometimes neurodiversity networks or peer support groups.

Support can be both academic and pastoral. This might include adjustments to assessments, additional time in exams, access to specialist software, or one-to-one support. Encourage your child to explore what is available early to help them feel confident about starting.

Funding and adjustments

Many disabled students are eligible for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) (page 74). This is a government-funded scheme that helps cover the cost of support such as equipment, software, or specialist mentoring. You can apply as part of your student finance application.

Universities can also put reasonable adjustments in place, depending on your child's needs. These are designed to remove barriers and support them to succeed in their studies.

Supporting transition

To help build familiarity, you can visit campus during quieter times, attend open days, or arrange to meet student support teams before starting university. If possible, seek a named contact within the disability support team to gain reassurance. Virtual tours and online resources can also be useful.

Explore societies, sports clubs, and networks linked to your child's interests. These offer a natural way for them to meet others. Joining social media groups before starting can also help. I did this myself and found it made those first interactions much easier.

Supporting your child

Your role will shift as your child becomes more independent, but your support remains important. Agree what support looks like from home. This might include regular check-ins or simply being there to listen. I had a weekly catch-up call with my family at the same time each week, which gave me a sense of routine and reassurance. Adjusting to university can take time, but with the right support in place, neurodivergent students can and do succeed.

“Disclosure can feel like a big step, but it makes it much easier for students to access the support available to them.”

Support for students with special educational needs and disabilities

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

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

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

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

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

Disability support

The two levels of support for students at university are:

- Reasonable adjustments
- The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

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

The second level of support is the DSA (page 74). The DSA is a government fund which should be applied for when applying for tuition fee support through Student Finance England.

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



These additional costs might include:

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

Applying for disability support

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

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

Final considerations

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

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



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Support for international students

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

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

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

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

Academic success is just as important. Universities provide English language workshops on academic writing and communication to build confidence in coursework (page 26). Study skills sessions cover essay writing, referencing, and critical thinking. These are especially useful for students from different educational backgrounds. Personal academic advisers and tutors are a go-to support system, making students feel more prepared and less overwhelmed.

Money matters. For international students, it can get trickier with changing exchange rates. Bursaries and scholarships ease financial pressure, while budgeting workshops help students make the most of their money. They help students find cheap transport, discover student discounts, and shop without breaking the bank. On-campus jobs or part-time work provides extra cash and valuable experience (page 79). We help students find jobs, understand work hour limits, and learn about benefits.

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

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



Support for students who have English as an additional language

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

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

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

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

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

English support

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

In-sessional support continues throughout the academic year and may include:

- Free English language classes
- One-to-one tutorials with language tutors
- Credit-bearing modules focused on academic communication
- Language development workshops tailored to specific courses.

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

International community

Feeling part of a community is essential for a positive university experience. UK universities create welcoming environments for students from around the world. Global cafés are informal meet-ups where students can relax, enjoy refreshments, and connect with peers from similar backgrounds.

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

Library support

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

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

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

- Virtual learning environments (Moodle, Blackboard)
- Online grammar and writing tools (Grammarly, Write & Improve)
- Interactive study apps and language learning platforms (Quizlet, Voxy)
- Recorded lectures and captioned learning materials.

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

Bilingual superpowers

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

My parent story by Amanda Southworth

**Student Experience Manager at
the University of Sheffield**

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

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

2. How did they decide what to study?

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

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

3. How did they decide where to study?

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

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

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

4. Did you attend many open days?

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



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

5. What advice would you give to parents?

Do your own research

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

Hold back your opinions

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

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

Ask about wellbeing support

I created and delivered an open day presentation for parents and carers to help alleviate their

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

Advise on independent living

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

Establish a communication system

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

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



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How to choose the right university

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

Choosing a university is one of the first big life choices a young person will make. As a parent, your guidance can make the process far less overwhelming. It's important to allow them to make an informed choice that is right for them, but you can play a vital role in helping them explore their options. Here are a few things to consider.

Start with their goals and interests

Encourage them to think about:

- The subjects they enjoy
- The type of learning they prefer
- The careers that interest them.

Reassure them: they don't need a fixed career plan. Many students explore different paths at university. What matters the most is choosing a subject that motivates them, which they'll enjoy studying for three or four years.

Explore course content

Two universities offering the same degree can deliver completely different experiences. Review:

- Module options
- Assessment methods
- Placement opportunities
- Study abroad options.

This helps your child choose the right course at the right university for them.

Consider location and lifestyle

A campus that feels right can make a huge difference to wellbeing and success. Talk through questions like:

- Do they want a campus environment or a city-based university?
- How far from home feels comfortable?
- What kind of social or extracurricular activities matter most?

Encourage them to attend open days or virtual tours so they can picture themselves living there.

Check the support services

Good universities offer strong support for:

- Mental health
- Academic skills
- Careers and employability
- Disability and wellbeing.

Ask universities how they support students transitioning to independent study and adult life. These services often define a student's experience more than they expect. For instance, at Durham University, we have a dedicated Durham Centre for Academic Development which supports students in their transition to university learning.

Understand the costs

University is an investment, so have open conversations about:

- Tuition fees
- Accommodation costs
- Living expenses
- Travel and equipment
- Bursaries and scholarships.

Be honest about what you can contribute. Encourage your child to budget realistically.

Look at graduate outcomes

League tables shouldn't be your only criteria, but they can offer useful insights. Consider:

- Graduate employment rates
- Industry links
- Internship and placement provision.

A strong careers service can help your child build confidence and secure future opportunities. For instance, Durham University's Careers Service supports students from Year 1 to beyond their degree.

Support, don't steer

Perhaps the most important role you can play is being a calm, supportive presence. Listen to your child's thoughts, help them weigh up the pros and cons, and explain there isn't a "perfect" choice. They should simply find the right fit for them at this stage of their life.

The different types of university

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

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

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

Campus vs city

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

There will usually be student accommodation and social spaces on campus too, like the students' union, student bar, and café.

This means your child will rarely leave campus for anything other than social activities, shopping, or visiting home. Examples of campus universities include Loughborough, Bath, and Lancaster.

A city university is typically located in a city centre. It will usually have departments, teaching

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

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

Russell Group universities

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

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

Research your options

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



The different types of university courses

By David Metcalfe, Student Recruitment Coordinator at Newcastle University

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

Degree abbreviations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Module choice

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

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



Engaging with universities online, on campus, and on demand

By Kathryn Elliott, Head of Partnerships at Teesside University London

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

Engaging online

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

Universities often offer virtual or online open days (page 68). These are the closest you'll get to an in-person event without physically visiting the university. Online open days can provide an opportunity to meet course teams and student support staff, allowing you to ask questions in real time.

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

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

Engaging on campus

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

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

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

Engaging on demand

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

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

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Understanding university league tables

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

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

University league tables

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

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

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

Understanding league tables

League tables offer a snapshot of a university's strengths, but they aren't the full picture. A higher ranking doesn't automatically mean a better

experience for your child. Some things can't be measured, like the sense of community, support services, or whether a course truly sparks their interest.

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

- Course content and how it matches your child's interests and goals
- Location, accommodation, and campus facilities
- Opportunities like placements, internships, or study abroad (page 111)
- Support for wellbeing, mental health, and academic skills.

Starting with league tables

Here are some ways you can support your child:

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

Beyond league tables

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

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

My parent story by Sara Quinn

**Schools and Colleges Engagement Officer
at Leeds Trinity University**

1. Who did you support?

When my eldest son went to university, it was the start of an exciting journey - not just for him, but for our whole family. Now, as my daughter begins her own application process, I've been reflecting on what we learned the first time around and the advice I can share with other parents going through this stage.

2. How did they decide what to study?

My son is currently in his second year studying Particle Physics. He was space-mad from a young age, so his passion for physics naturally led him toward university. It made choosing a course easy but deciding where to study took more effort.

My daughter is in Year 12, so we are starting the journey again. She has always loved sport. She explored options on websites like UCAS and Prospects. In doing so, she discovered that a Sport and Exercise Science degree would perfectly match her passion for sport and her career aspirations.

3. Did you attend many open days?

For my son, we took an active role by attending numerous open days. We split the visits between my husband and I to avoid dragging our younger children along each time. We mixed up traveling by car and public transport to give our son a sense of distance, costs, and commuting logistics.

Open days were an essential part of his decision-making process. At that time, I worked in the accommodation team at Leeds Trinity. I found it fascinating to compare different styles of student housing across universities. Open days

also provided invaluable opportunities to interact with current students and staff.

For my daughter, we have already attended two open days. She's planning more visits over the summer, fitting them in around her part-time job. She is keen to ensure she's well-prepared before the busy autumn term begins at sixth form.

4. What advice would you give to parents?

Encourage organisation - suggest they create notes or spreadsheets to track universities they're considering. Include open day dates and identify inevitable clashes, so they can prioritise visits.

- **Prepare questions** – help them brainstorm questions for open days but let them take the lead in asking. They should talk to students too. They're experts on campus life and provide honest insights.
- **Consider long-term costs** – research accommodation costs for the first year but also for later years. Some cities have shortages or high prices.
- **Let them decide** – support their gut instincts about where they want to go rather than pushing your preferences. They'll thrive if they feel ownership over their decision.
- **Car-share or pre-book travel** – save money by car-sharing or booking family train tickets if friends are visiting the same open days.
- **Support their wellbeing** – balancing exams, assignments, teen life, and big decisions can be overwhelming. Emotional support is vital.

It's amazing how quickly time flies. Watching your children make big life decisions can feel daunting, but it's also incredibly rewarding. Try to enjoy this exciting chapter together. It's not just about finding the right course. It's about helping them take their first steps toward independence, whilst offering your support every step of the way. You've got this!

“Support their gut instincts about where they want to go, rather than pushing your own preferences.”

How to research postgraduate courses

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

Choosing a postgraduate course is a big step for any young person, and for their parents and supporters. Knowing how to guide them through the process can make all the difference. Postgraduate study is demanding academically, professionally, and personally. Decisions should be informed rather than instinctive. It's important to research thoroughly, attend events in person where possible, and look beyond a Google search.

Explore teaching and assessment styles

Open days and taster sessions are the best way to see if a course suits your child. Encourage them to find out whether assessments are traditional exams and essays or more applied, experiential tasks. Experiencing the pace, depth, and style of teaching first-hand at open days and taster events provides clarity and helps them assess whether they'll be challenged and inspired.

Investigate campus facilities and everyday life

Campus life matters beyond the classroom. Walk through study spaces, libraries, labs, seminar rooms, and accommodation. Ask questions like, "Can I see myself studying here?" and "Are the everyday spaces comfortable and practical?" Even small details affect whether a student can thrive, such as where to work between sessions and grab a coffee.

Assess community and peer groups

Postgraduate study can feel isolating without a strong community. Encourage your child to research whether other postgraduates are

present, if there are dedicated study areas, departmental drop-ins, or societies. Meeting current students and attending networking events gives insight into how connected and supported they'll feel.

Understand the available support

Support for postgraduates often differs from undergraduate provision. Check what academic guidance, supervision, careers services, and wellbeing initiatives are available. Open days let you speak directly to staff about the support your child can access, especially if they're returning to study, balancing work, or joining straight from an undergraduate course.

Attend events together

Postgraduate decisions are rarely made in isolation. Attending events together allows you to ask questions, gain reassurance, and help your child sense-check whether the course and university feel right. Your perspective can provide confidence and clarity, making the decision more informed.

Focus on what matters

Careful research will ensure your child is making a choice that truly suits them. Encourage them to think about:

- **Community** - will they feel part of the peer network?
- **Environment** - can they picture daily life there?
- **Expertise** - does the teaching and supervision match their ambitions?
- **Balance** - are teaching and assessment styles right for their learning?

Your child can find the answers through open days, taster sessions, and conversations with current students and staff. In doing so, they can move from uncertainty to confidence.



Studying HE at a specialist institution

By Ryan Crawley, Marketing Manager, and Hayley Jordan, Campus Manager, at SAE Institute

“Networking is your net worth” is a well-worn maxim, often repeated by those looking to develop successful careers. There is some truth to this phrase. Connecting with like-minded individuals and innovators can help your child progress their ambitions within the creative industries.

Your child might be an aspiring music industry professional, film maker, or web developer. Either way, studying within a higher education community at a specialist institution will help them nurture their contact book and source opportunities to fit their talents.

Vibrant learning environments

Specialist institutions offer vibrant learning environments. Your child will be surrounded by aspiring professionals all working towards similar goals. This can lead to opportunities for collaboration and ensure learning feels authentic. From the classroom and lectures to corridors and break out areas, these institutions offer multiple avenues for collaborators to come together.

These spaces act as hubs with their own creative ecosystems, and this networking is critical. At least 80% of jobs are filled through professional networking connections. Equally, a larger network can have a positive impact on salary. It can also help your child tap into the so-called ‘hidden job market’ – roles that aren’t advertised, but filled through referrals or networking.

State-of-the-art facilities

Many specialist providers focus on specific disciplines in music, film, or computing, so they are likely to offer state-of-the-art facilities and equipment for your child to hone their skills.

From recording studios and editing suites to music production software, having access to the latest equipment can help your child develop much sought-after practical knowledge. In a crowded job market, an understanding of the latest industry kit, marketplace, and trends can give them the edge when approaching employers and looking for roles.

Expert speakers

Tutors working at specialist institutions are experienced practitioners who have enjoyed success in their respective fields. Your child will be able to learn from those who have real-world industry experience.

Many of these providers will invite experts and leading professionals to speak with your child, so they can take gain insights and advice from those who have been there and done it.

Coupled with personalised, one-to-one mentorship from tutors, your child can create a clear and well-informed career path into their desired industry.

Forge a career path

Many students carve out their own career path using a personalised learning experience. There is no one-size-fits-all approach at specialist institutions. Instead, your child has the chance to follow their own unique path with a final destination defined by them.

If your child is looking to specialise in their studies and career, then joining a degree with a dedicated provider can provide a platform to thrive. Good luck!



Studying a foundation year

By Leah Green, Head of Schools and Colleges Liaison at the University of Hull

Your child might be considering a university foundation year, but perhaps they are unsure about what it involves. To help, we spoke to History student Max and his mum Tracy, who later studied Criminology, about their own foundation years.

What were you expecting?

Max: Honestly, I had no idea what to expect. I thought it would be a bit of a tick-box exercise to get me up to speed before starting a degree.

Tracy: I had no preconceived ideas. People recommended it and past students said how much it improved their university experience. It exceeded everything.

What were your first impressions?

Max: It quickly became obvious that the foundation year had real value. I felt more prepared when I started my degree. My research skills and knowledge of university meant I could focus on my work, rather than learning how university study works.

Tracy: It was nerve-wracking, but it didn't take long to settle in. I found it exciting to learn new skills and meet new people. I felt proud to be at university.

What was your high point?

Max: I met people who stayed with me throughout my degree. I also had the opportunity to delve into a subject I'd been wanting to research for a long time.

Tracy: My grades and skills improved as I progressed through the year. This resulted in achieving an award for best performance in the introduction to the social sciences module. It was a massive surprise!

Did you have a low point?

Max: I honestly don't recall a "low point." I do remember the collective struggle on the data analysis module, but the teaching team

supported us well. Everyone got through without major stumbles.

Tracy: About two weeks after starting, I had a wobble and felt like an imposter. I thought I'd made a massive mistake. But I spoke to the other students, my son Max, and the tutors. I realised it was totally normal. My insecurities soon passed.

What kept you going?

Max: The people I met. We were good at sticking together, keeping in touch, and nudging each other on. I also told myself that a smaller number of productive hours with no burnout is better than unproductive long slogs.

Tracy: The tutors were enthusiastic, encouraging, and approachable. The rest of the students, all mixed ages, were like a little family.

What would you tell your past self?

Max: Take it at your own speed. Go with your gut and tell imposter syndrome to do one.

Tracy: Have faith in yourself. Don't doubt your ability and ambition.

Which three words would describe your experience?

Max: Year well spent.

Tracy: Exciting, confidence-building, fun!



Tracy and her son Max



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Studying a degree apprenticeship

By Sophie Craven, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Huddersfield

A degree apprenticeship provides the opportunity to combine paid work with study, much like any other apprenticeship. However, this specific type of apprenticeship is taught at a higher level, leading to a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. The split between work and study is usually 80% work to 20% study. It takes between 3 to 5 years to complete the programme and gain a degree.

Benefits of degree apprenticeships

Tuition fees - currently £9,790 each year for 2026 entry - are covered by the employer and the Government through the Apprenticeship Levy. Not only that, but the apprentice will receive a salary for the duration of their training. According to the Department for Education, the salary will be at least £20,000 and likely to be much higher.

Understandably, for your students thinking about university, the idea of gaining a debt-free degree seems extremely appealing. But what's the catch? Is it too good to be true?

Challenges of degree apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships have grown over the last decade, but they are still relatively short in supply. This means they are extremely competitive. Based on the latest Government statistics, only 13% of degree apprenticeship starters were 18-year-old school leavers. More than half of the vacancies go to over 25s. In many cases, employers look for candidates with prior employment experience, often recruiting from their existing workforce.

The field is also dominated by specific sectors, most notably business, administration, and law. Recently there has been a large increase in health and social care degree apprenticeships. However, candidates need to be employed to apply for one of these, such as working in the NHS as a healthcare assistant or similar.

Many of your students will see degree apprenticeships on university websites, alongside other courses, and think they can apply direct. However, your students will need to be employed by the company or organisation offering the apprenticeship in the first instance. The company will then release them for study with a university partner.

Advising on degree apprenticeships

74,990 students under the age of 19 started a degree apprenticeship in the 2024-25 academic year. They are still an option to consider, despite their limited number and popularity.

As teachers and advisers, you can:

- Assist your students with the research and application process
- Encourage your students to secure work experience
- Visit apprenticeship and careers events
- Speak to potential employers.

Thankfully, many universities can support you with a range of workshops and activities, including CV writing and interview skills.

Finally, remember that degree apprenticeships are very competitive. As such, you should advise your students to consider applying for university courses at the same time. They could also consider lower-level apprenticeships, from which they can often progress.



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

www.UniTasterDays.com/JargonBuster



Studying an online university course

By Becky Sandford, SEO Specialist at Falmouth University

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

Flexibility that fits around your life

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

Study at your own pace

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

Learn without leaving home

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

space that's familiar to you. For many students, learning at home better suits their personal study style. It allows them to focus without the distractions of a busy campus environment.

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

A more affordable way to study

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

Stay connected and supported

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

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

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

Studying a part-time university course

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

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

What is a part-time course?

Part-time university courses are structured to spread study over a longer period. This allows students to balance learning alongside work, caring responsibilities, or other commitments.

While a full-time degree often takes three years, a part-time route might take between four and six years, depending on the subject and university.

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

- Foundation degrees
- Undergraduate degrees
- Professional qualifications
- Higher National Diplomas or Certificates.

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

Why choose part-time study?

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

- **Flexibility** - it offers the chance to fit learning around work, family, or other priorities.
- **Earning while studying** - they can continue to work, which may help with finances (page 79).
- **Building experience** - combining study and work can give them valuable skills and experience.

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

Things to consider

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

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

How you can help

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

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

Earning and learning

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

“Balancing study with other responsibilities takes planning and commitment.”

Studying a creative university course

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

Many parents want reassurance that their child's university choice will lead to strong career prospects. If your 17-year-old is considering a creative subject, it may help to know this is one of the UK's fastest growing sectors. Research from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport shows employment in the creative industries increased from 1.6 million to 2.4 million between 2011 and 2023. Choosing a creative degree isn't simply about following a passion. It's a practical step into a thriving professional field with real demand for skilled graduates.

Creative careers rarely follow a straight, predictable path. Many graduates work freelance, take on varied roles, or build portfolio careers across different projects and organisations. This flexibility appeals to students who value independence and variety. For teenagers who are still unsure about their exact career direction, creative courses can keep options open while developing transferable skills in communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and project management.

Creative courses

There are thousands of creative courses listed on the UCAS course finder, so there is something to suit all creative types. Some degrees are highly specialised, such as BA Hand Embroidery, while others allow students to explore several disciplines before choosing a focus. A foundation year is particularly helpful for students who want to strengthen their skills before committing to a specific pathway. Creative subjects include:

- Animation and illustration
- Architecture, landscape and interior design
- Computer games design
- Creative writing
- Fashion and textiles
- Fine art
- Film and television
- Journalism

- Media and communications
- Music, performing arts, and production
- Product design.

Advantages of university

University offers clear advantages for students pursuing creative subjects. Your child will:

- **Learn from experts** – lecturers and technicians bring years of industry experience, offering practical insight alongside technical teaching.
- **Access industry-standard equipment** – students work in professional studios, use specialist software, operate printing presses, and gain experience with broadcasting equipment.
- **Experiment** – university provides a supportive environment where students can take creative risks, explore new ideas, and develop their own style.
- **Enhance employability** – briefs, competitions, portfolio development, and work placements help students when applying for jobs. Many courses carry professional accreditation.
- **Build a personal brand** – students learn how to promote themselves, network effectively, and manage clients. These are essential for freelance or entrepreneurial careers.

Practical steps

Encourage your child to:

- Build a portfolio of their best work, including school projects, personal pieces, and sources of inspiration.
- Visit final-year exhibitions, performances, and student showcases at local universities to understand the quality and style of work produced. They could test a demo computer game, enjoy a photography exhibition, or watch a student play. These experiences can support personal statements and interviews.
- Attend creative taster days. Explore what's on offer on the [UniTasterDays website](#). These are typically free, and provide extended, hands-on time in university facilities, which offers deeper insight than a standard open day.

“Many graduates work freelance, take on varied roles, or build portfolio careers.”

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Join us at our next **Open Day** and discover Arts University Plymouth, with the chance to explore courses, facilities and student life.

**Daily Mail University Guide 2025 & 2026*

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Studying medicine at university

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

Choosing to study medicine is an exciting opportunity. As a parent or supporter, you may wish to understand what the course really involves before your child applies.

Course structure

The degree is called Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery. It is often shortened to BMBS, which is a standard medical degree. At the end of the five years, students receive a recognised medical qualification. This allows them to apply for the first stage of doctor training in the UK, where they continue learning while working in a clinical setting.

Students don't spend the first few years in lectures alone. The course includes clinical experience, learning with real patients in healthcare settings from the first month. This can take place in hospitals, local doctor surgeries, and community health services.

In the early years, students focus on the science behind medicine and begin learning practical skills. Later in the degree, the balance shifts towards working in clinical environments. By the final year, students spend more time in hospitals and other healthcare settings as they prepare for their career.

Teaching location

Students usually begin their first year at their university, then spend their later years undertaking clinical placements in different regional locations. For instance, at Exeter, students spend their first year at our St Luke's Campus, then undertake placements

across Devon and Cornwall. Students should be prepared to travel and adapt to new environments during the degree. For many families, this is one of the biggest differences compared with other courses.

Entry requirements

Entry requirements are quite specific at most universities, so check the requirements, interview styles, and expectations. Students must complete the UCAT assessment and prepare for a potential interview. These additional steps can be stressful. They require preparation and organisation.

Students apply by the earlier deadline of 15 October. Shortlisted applicants will be invited for interview between December and March. All applications are considered on an individual basis, with offers made by the end of March. Compared to other degrees, students are often waiting longer to hear back. This can be unnerving when making decisions about their future.

Supporting your child

Medicine is a demanding degree, both academically and personally. However, the course structure is designed to help students build confidence step by step. Teaching often takes place in small groups, and students learn using real-life clinical examples rather than solely traditional lectures.

Studying medicine is a long-term commitment. It's normal for families to have questions about workload, pressure, and future careers. Reading course information together and discussing expectations can help students feel more confident about their decision.

Finally, it's important to understand that the degree isn't only about academic study. It also focuses on communication skills, empathy, and working with patients from diverse backgrounds.





University
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Discover University in Exeter and Cornwall

The University of Exeter is ranked in the top 15 of all UK universities and our graduates are in the UK's top 15 for most targeted by leading employers.*

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

- Bookable events, such as our Discover University virtual webinars, including webinars specifically for parents and supporters.
- Advice on how to explore their chosen subject
- Academic competitions to strengthen their supercurricular activities
- Subject Q&A panels
- Higher Education Jargon Buster
- Advice on their application and personal statement
- Advice and insights from our current students



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To find out more about visiting our campuses either virtually or in person, visit: exeter.ac.uk/visit

* Top 15 in the Complete University Guide 2026 and The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2026 155th in the QS World University Rankings 2026. Top 15 most targeted by leading employers according to "The Graduate Market in 2026" report by High Fliers Research.



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How location can enhance the university experience

By Frankie Perren Smart, Student Recruitment Officer at The University of Law

When choosing a university, there are lots of factors to consider, including course content, rankings, and reputation. Whilst these elements are all important, location is a vital factor that can significantly shape a student's overall experience.

Known vs unknown

For some students, remaining at home and commuting to university offers comfort and stability during what can feel like a big life transition. This can enable them to maintain existing routines, stay connected with their family and friends, and feel confident in their support system whilst navigating a new place, location, and institution.

Others may find it beneficial to stay close to home, whilst still choosing to move into student accommodation. This can provide the best of both worlds, enhancing independence and integration into the university community, yet being able to return home whenever needed.

Alternatively, moving to a completely new city can be a real adventure. This pushes students out of their comfort zone, helping to develop resilience, adaptability, and confidence, whilst having the reassurance they'll be surrounded by a community of students who are also new to the area.

Careers and relationships

Access to career opportunities and industry exposure can also come from choice of location,

and this is not limited to major cities. Universities based in or near economic hubs, such as London, Manchester or Birmingham, can provide a wider variety of access to internships, placements, networking events, and part-time roles.

In smaller cities or towns, such as Bath, Exeter and York, students may find strong relationships between universities and local employers. This can lead to tailored opportunities and hands-on experiences. Your child could consider placement years, study abroad years, and moving between campus locations in different cities. These can offer the chance to explore other locations whilst building career experiences!

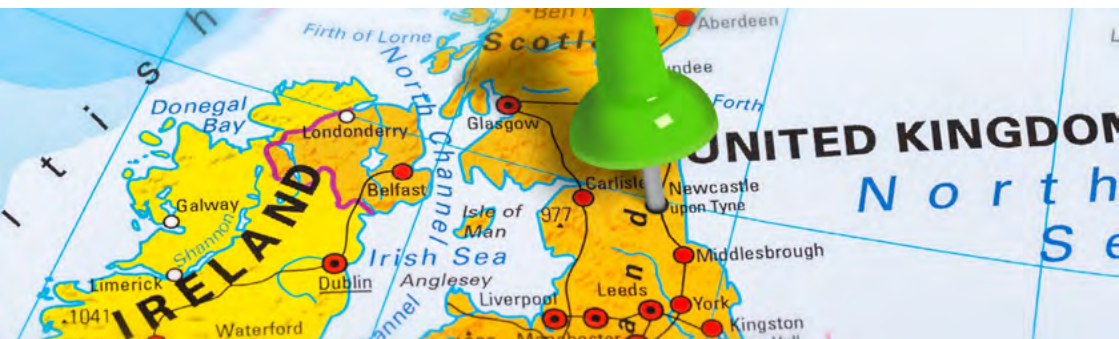
Culture and fun

There are plenty of opportunities to help your child develop interests beyond their course: museums, theatres, sports, music, social events. Engaging with local culture can help them meet new people and learn new things. Experiences outside of the classroom, whether performing at Edinburgh Fringe or enjoying Bristol's International Balloon Fiesta, can be where the best memories are made.

Environment and wellbeing

The surrounding environment can have a huge influence on a student's wellbeing. Location can shape an experience, whether they enjoy the energy of a bustling city, the calm of a rural campus, or easy access to green space. It can also help students feel that they're in a home away from home by allowing them to enjoy a favourite activity: hiking in the Peak District, visiting the beach, or shopping in central London.

Choosing a location that fits a student's lifestyle can transform their university years, support their personal wellbeing, and enrich their experience!



The benefits of studying in Scotland

Jack Brown, Student Recruitment Officer at Glasgow Caledonian University

Helping your child decide where to study at university can feel daunting, especially with over 200 providers listed on UCAS, including 19 in Scotland. Choosing the right course and university is crucial, but selecting the right location is equally important. Scotland offers a compelling destination for higher education. You'll find some of the UK's oldest institutions and innovative modern universities, set amidst stunning landscapes and vibrant cities.

Degree structure

In Scotland, the honours degree takes 4 years, compared to 3 years in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This structure allows students to spend their first two years exploring a broader range of subjects within their chosen field before specialising in the final two years. As a result, students benefit from greater flexibility and a more tailored academic experience. Scottish degrees are globally recognised and place a strong emphasis on developing employability skills, helping to produce career-ready graduates.

National and international connections

Scotland is highly accessible, both within the UK and internationally.

- **Air** - students can easily travel to a wide range of destinations thanks to Scotland's five international airports, including major hubs in Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- **Train** – rail connections link Scotland to the East and West Coast Mainlines. Providers such as LNER, Avanti West Coast, TransPennine, and CrossCountry offer routes to Newcastle, Manchester, London, and Wales. The rail network within Scotland

is extensive, with connections across the Central Belt, and services as far as the Highlands in the north and the Borders in the south.

- **Coach** - national coach services provide affordable travel to cities such as Belfast, Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff, and London. Students under 22 living in Scotland may be eligible for free bus travel, making day-to-day journeys more affordable.

Affordability and funding

Scotland generally has a lower cost of living than many parts of the UK. It also offers financial benefits such as free NHS dental care for those under 26 and free prescriptions. Rent can also be more affordable.

Students from the rest of the UK pay the government-capped tuition fee of £9,790 per year, although many Scottish universities offer bursaries and scholarships to help with tuition and living costs. These can range from one-off payments at the start of a course to annual bursaries and a final-year fee waiver. It's always worth checking what individual universities provide.

Graduate prospects

Scottish universities have strong links with industry and a clear focus on graduate prospects. Many courses include work placements or practical experiences, giving students valuable insight into their chosen field while they study. Combined with the skills and knowledge gained throughout their degree, these opportunities help ensure graduates are well prepared for their future careers.

Scotland is more than a place to study. It's a place to thrive. Students living in Scotland will benefit from a different education and an excellent student life. Visit us to discover for yourself the benefits of studying in Scotland.



The benefits of studying in Wales

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

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

A welcoming community

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

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

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

Affordability

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

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

Language and culture

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

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

Events and traditions

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

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

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

Stunning scenery

If your child enjoys the outdoors, they'll be spoiled for choice. Wales offers a spectacular natural environment, from the rolling hills of Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park to the awe-inspiring summit of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon).

With its castles, rivers, beaches, and hiking trails, it's a fantastic place for students to explore, unwind, and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

“The country has a strong reputation for its warm, community-focused culture, where people are willing to support one another.”

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The benefits and challenges of studying in London

By Chantelle Lee, Student Recruitment and Outreach Officer at London South Bank University

Studying in London can provide your child with some fantastic opportunities and experiences, but it's not without its challenges. To help them make an informed decision, this article considers the advantages and drawbacks of university in London.

Employability

Getting a good job is more important than ever. London is a fantastic place for your child to boost their career prospects. Many London universities have strong careers support and excellent industry links, giving students a head start on securing placements and internships. There are plenty of networking events for students to attend, which helps them make connections before graduating.

London also has many part-time jobs available, meaning your child will have lots of options to work alongside their studies!

Student life

London will cater for whatever your child is interested in. The activities are endless, no matter whether they are keen to try new sports, experience the nightlife, or make the most of the capital's cultural hotspots.

One major benefit to studying in London is the amount of cheap or free things to do. Your child could visit the array of free museums, enjoy discounted student theatre tickets, check out the comedy or music scene, and explore the many green spaces.

Diversity

London is a truly diverse city. There are students from hundreds of different nationalities across the many London universities, so there will be plenty of people for your child to meet. Studying in this diverse environment will allow your child to broaden their horizons and gain exposure to many different cultures, which culminates in a fantastic food scene!

Cost

There are challenges to studying and living in London. Rents are high. University halls often provide cheaper options than renting privately, but they still cost more than other parts of the country. Your child should be aware of their budget and consider options for financial support. For many students within easy access of London, commuting to university is a more viable option to save money (page 52).

Adjusting

Living away from home for the first time is a daunting experience. Adapting to a city as big and busy as London can be especially challenging. Explore the universities and the city itself during your research to ensure London is a good fit for your child. It will give you a better idea of what their university experience could look like. This should help you both feel more confident in your child's decision.



The benefits and challenges of commuting to university

By Emily Dale, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of Essex

Preparing for university life as a commuting student can feel daunting: new travel routines, navigating campus, entering the next phase of the academic journey. Balancing travel, coursework, friendships, and a social life can seem like a lot, especially in those early weeks. Yet, you can feel comfortable knowing that commuting is an increasingly common choice. Universities are responding with better support, more flexible options, and a growing understanding of what commuting students need to thrive.

Benefits of commuting

Commuting can offer a reassuring blend of independence, stability, and financial ease, something many families value in challenging economic times. Your child can enjoy the comfort and support of home, while still fully engaging in university life. Reduced living costs, familiar routines, and being close to friends and family often help them feel grounded and confident as they settle into their studies.

Commuting does involve extra travel time, but this often becomes surprisingly useful. The journey can provide space to prepare for lectures, review notes, listen to something uplifting, or simply unwind. Your child may need to leave earlier or return later than peers living in halls, but many find this routine keeps them organised, focused, and intentional with their time on campus.

Developing independence

There's a common misconception that living at home limits independence, but independence

is built in many ways. Your child will learn to manage money, budget for travel or car costs, and take responsibility for their space while staying in a familiar environment. Contributing to the household and respecting shared areas are important steps to becoming a confident adult. Domestic skills like cooking, cleaning, and organising will grow through practice. Both living in halls and commuting offer valuable opportunities for learning, responsibility, and personal growth.

Commuting students also develop strong life skills that serve them beyond university. Managing travel, academic commitments, and social activities encourages excellent planning and time management. Your child will use their time on campus more purposefully, so they will engage in the activities and societies that matter most. This allows them to form friendships and build their network, while benefiting from the stability of home.

Campus and community

More students commute to university than people realise, so it's not unusual to meet someone travelling a similar route. Friendships form through shared journeys and regular coffee shop visits. With that in mind, universities are creating spaces designed for commuting students, such as social areas with microwaves and fridges, multi-faith rooms, lockers, and cafés with combined study spaces. At the University of Essex, these facilities are already well established, which helps commuting students feel supported, connected, and part of the wider university community.

Universities are improving support to enable commuting students to thrive and stay engaged with campus life. Visiting open days, exploring university websites, and hearing from current commuting students can help you see the range of opportunities this choice can unlock for your child.



My parent story by Emma Jubbs

Director of Marketing Performance and Planning at the University of Lincoln

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

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

2. How did they decide what to study?

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

3. How did they decide where to study?

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

4. Did you attend many open days with them?

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

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

Accommodation visits were also an eye opener. They might prefer more expensive and comfortable accommodation than you

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

5. What advice would you give to parents?

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

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

Equally, prepare a plan for the night before A-level results day. My son found himself in Clearing (page 97). It was a tricky experience. The Clearing process was seamless on the day, but he still ended up in a university and city that wasn't the first choice he had dreamed of throughout Year 13.

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

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



**Emma and
her son**

The different types of university events

By Hope Nightingale, Student Recruitment Manager at Aston University

Universities offer a variety of events for parents and supporters to help with the decision-making process. This article outlines some of the opportunities available.

Summer schools (Yr 10-12)

Summer programmes enable students to get a flavour of university life. Your child will stay at the university for a few days in student accommodation. They'll take part in academic workshops in the day and social activities in the evening. All summer schools are supervised by staff and trained student ambassadors. They offer a fun way to engage with a university and make new friends. You can discover summer schools near you by using the [UniTasterDays event search](#).

Subject tasters (Yr 11-13)

Subject tasters and masterclasses are subject-specific workshops. These can be a couple of hours or a full day. They include activities that first-year students typically do. This means your child can gain a deeper insight into a subject to see if it's right for them. Students usually attend on their own. They can book on individually, or through their school.

Open days (Yr 12-13)

Open days are large-scale events where universities open their entire campuses for visitors. Generally, there are three or more dates each year. Expect them to be busy! You can

attend subject sessions to learn more about the academic courses, join a campus tour, and visit accommodation. These events are a brilliant opportunity to get a flavour of student life and see if a university is the right fit for your child.

Campus tours (Yr 12-13)

Campus tours run throughout the year. Universities typically offer set dates, although you may discover ad hoc events too. You'll see campus facilities such as learning spaces, sports facilities, accommodation, and the students' union. Tours are usually delivered by students. Academic and subject content isn't typically included. Instead, they allow you to explore a university in a quieter setting than an open day and quiz a real student on their experience.

Virtual events (Yr 12-13)

Don't worry if you can't attend a university event on campus. Universities host webinars on relevant subjects such as student finance, writing your personal statement, and student life. There are even events specifically for parents and supporters to help you guide your child through the UCAS process. Virtual open days may also be available.

Offer holder days (Yr 13)

Offer-holder days are often hosted between February and May. Your child will be invited to these if they have been offered a place at university. They might have previously attended an open day, but visiting again for an offer-holder day will help your child make a final decision on where to study. They can ask more in-depth questions and explore their chosen course in further detail.

We hope to welcome you at an event soon!



The benefits of attending a university event

By Adam Hall, Associate Director Global Student Recruitment, Partnerships and Access at Keele University

Experiencing a university in person is the best way to see whether those polished marketing messages match the reality. It lets you explore the university in a more meaningful way and gain answers to your practical questions.

Most importantly, a visit will help your child decide whether they can imagine themselves living and studying there. It also offers reassurance for you as their parent or carer. Seeing the campus, meeting staff, and observing student life helps you feel more confident that they've explored their options fully before enrolling.

There will always be surprises (good and bad) but knowing you did your research together will help you relax during their first term away from home.

Advice when visiting

- **Visit the unexpected options** – for instance, your child might secure a place through Clearing. This is why universities offer special Clearing open days in August.
- **Talk to staff** – speak to the academic and support staff who will help your child through their studies. Treat these

conversations like a two-way interview. Are they approachable, passionate, expert?

- **Talk to students** - student ambassadors will happily share their honest insights. They'll tell you the positives, but they'll also mention the challenges of student life.
- **Attend parent and carer sessions** - at Keele, these popular sessions offer a space to ask questions, compare notes with other families, and get clarity on anything you are unsure about.
- **Follow up afterwards** - it's common to think of more questions once you're home. Don't hesitate to contact the enquiries team. That extra bit of information may make the final decision easier.

Questions to ask

- Is it clean and safe?
- Would commuting be realistic?
- Are there places to eat, drink and relax nearby?
- Does the course feel like the right academic fit?
- What study facilities and equipment are available?
- What do current students really think, warts and all?
- How far is accommodation from study and social spaces?
- What support services exist, and how accessible are they?

One final piece of advice: go with an open mind. You might be surprised which university wins you over. Even ruling one out is a valuable outcome. Either way, you walk away knowing much more than you did before.

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How to prepare for a university fair

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

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

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

Seek clarity

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

Gain clarity on their intended subject, whether they desire to move away from home, and the overall experience they want to have.

Understanding their wishes before attending a fair is imperative. It will make your day much more enjoyable.

Create lists

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

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

Remember your...

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

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



Top questions to ask at a university fair

By Sarah Shingleton, UK Recruitment Coordinator at Northumbria University

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the breadth of higher education options, with thousands of courses offered across the UK. Thankfully, university fairs are a fantastic one-stop-shop to help your child explore the variety of opportunities available for the next stage in their education.

The secret to making the most of a university fair begins before the event itself. A small amount of preparation will ensure your child leaves with the information they need. Attending with planned questions will enable purposeful and informative discussions, allowing them to make the best decision for their future. So, what should your child be asking universities?

The course

The first question to ask universities is if they provide your child's course of interest, as each university will have a different list of courses. This initial question offers a springboard to ask follow-up questions, delving deeper into the course structure.

They should ask about module content, because this will differ across universities even when the course title is the same. Your child should also ask about entry requirements, how the course is taught and assessed, and if there is a placement or study abroad opportunity.

The university

Simple questions about university location and campuses are often the most influential in decision-making. Understanding location can clarify expectations on travelling to university, the campus environment, and the size of the university.

Beyond location, your child will benefit from asking about university rankings, graduate employment statistics, and student satisfaction scores.

The lifestyle

Maximising university involves more than just the course and campus. Your child should ask about the lifestyle at university to visualise if an option is right for them. This category of questions could explore accommodation (and prices), sports, societies, and the city.

If you know you'll be attending an open day, ask the staff at the university fair where you should grab coffee or lunch to make the most of your visit!

The application

If all boxes have been ticked, the last thing to ask about is the application process. University fairs are a brilliant opportunity for your child to learn how to make their personal statement stand out. Equally, they can gain advice on preparing interviews or portfolios, if required. These top tips can really help to boost student confidence in their applications!





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How to prepare for a university open day

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

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

Check entry requirements

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

Prepare your travel

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

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

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

Explore the area

After the open day, it's worth investigating the local town or city. Talk to current students about

their experiences living both on and off-campus. They will often give you very honest answers. Would your child feel happy living there?

Plan your day

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

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

Questions to ask

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

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

“Check entry requirements on the university website before your visit to see if they are achievable. Be aspirational but also realistic.”



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regularly.



Making the most of a university open day

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

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

As a parent, carer, or general supporter, you are essential in helping your child make this decision. You are the person rooting for them to become the best version of themselves. So, how can you help them make the most of these days?

Register for newsletters

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

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

Attend supporter sessions

Most open days offer specific sessions for parents and supporters to attend. They focus on finance, support, and applying to university. These sessions can give an excellent overview of key steps in the university process, delivered by people who work in these areas daily. If you cannot attend due to a clash with another session, you also have the option to visit the open day advice fair to ask your questions... which nicely leads to the next point!

Ask questions

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

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

Explore the area

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

Debrief afterwards

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

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

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

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

“Talk to current students about their experiences living both on and off campus. They will often give you very honest answers.”



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What to do immediately after an open day

By Marica Shelbourne, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Huddersfield

Attending a university open day is an important step for students. Your child can only get a feel for a place if they visit for themselves. They should explore each university in their shortlist. It will take some time, but it's an important decision, especially considering your child will study there for years.

Following each open day, it's helpful to reflect on the visit whilst impressions are fresh in their mind. As a parent or supporter, you can facilitate this reflection with your child.

Start with a simple conversation

Ask questions such as:

- What did you think of the campus?
- Did you feel engaged during the talks?
- Could you imagine yourself living and studying there?
- Is there anything you didn't like?

Listen to your child and let them reflect before giving your opinion. I know it's tempting to offer your input but letting them speak first will ensure they make an independent decision.

Visiting multiple campuses

If you visit multiple campuses, it's easy to forget key points from each open day. Write down highlights, lowlights, and practicalities after each open day. For example:

- What were the lecturers like?
- What was the general atmosphere like?
- Did the campus feel safe?

It's equally important to look at the practical side. Make a note of:

- Travel distance and cost
- Accommodation options and cost
- Course structure and content
- Available support

Comparing universities

Your child can compare their options after visiting their chosen universities. This doesn't need to be complicated. They can create a simple list of pros and cons for each institution, mixed in with a bit of good old gut instinct!

They can prioritise the factor they deem most important when comparing their scores. For instance, ask your child what matters most to them: location, course content, overall environment?

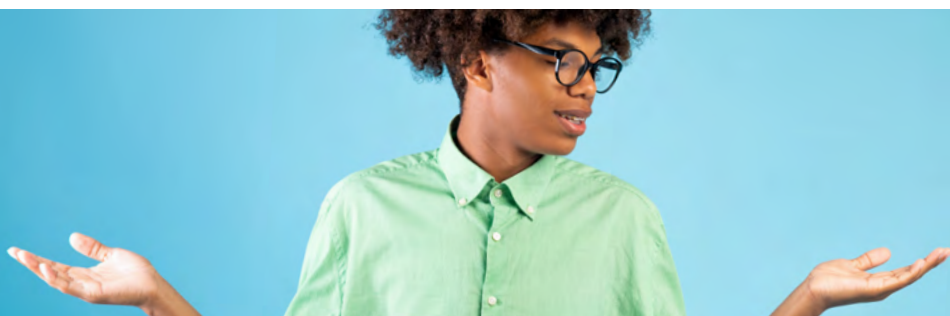
It can be tempting to make quick decisions after a positive experience, but they should take their time. Encourage your child to reflect over a few days before forming strong conclusions.

Next steps

Visit their favourite universities for another open day or offer-holder day, so you can fit in the activities they missed on the previous visit. A clear plan can maintain momentum without feeling overwhelming. Speak to lecturers, ask what they value in personal statements, and dig down into course content. Also, spend the day in the town or city to discover what the area can offer your child.

Event incentives

Some universities offer incentives such as travel reimbursements and refreshment vouchers. You can discover these on the [UniTasterDays event incentives platform](#). This can help keep costs down. Every little helps!



The benefits of attending a summer school

By Sophie McMullan, Outreach Officer at Aston University

As a parent or carer, watching your child figure out their next steps can bring a mix of excitement and worry. You want them to feel ready, confident, and genuinely excited about what's ahead. Summer school gives them a taste of university life, new experiences, and the chance to grow in confidence before they make any big decisions. It's a brilliant way to help them consider university at their own pace, in a supportive environment, whilst having plenty of fun along the way!

Discovery

Summer schools are the perfect place to explore, regardless of whether your child has a clear passion or absolutely no idea about what they'd like to study. Sessions are hands on, enjoyable, and designed to spark curiosity, so they'll come away knowing themselves a little better.

Learning

There'll be no copying off the board or exam stress. Instead, summer schools offer interactive and engaging sessions where your child can ask questions, share their ideas, and get stuck in. It's the type of learning which inspires them to come home and talk about their day, which is a win!

Friendships

Young people often talk about the people they met after returning home from their summer school.

They'll mix with people from different places and backgrounds which builds their social confidence and broadens their outlook. Many leave with new friends and memories they won't forget.

Skills

The benefits go well beyond the classroom. Your child will quietly gain valuable life skills: how to communicate, work as a team, think for themselves, and keep going when things get tricky. These skills will help them thrive long after summer is over.

Independence

Summer schools do wonders for a young person's confidence and independence. They will manage their own routine, make decisions, and take responsibility for themselves. The summer school environment is safe, nurturing, and supportive, so your child can grow without feeling thrown in at the deep end.

Reassurance

If anything is on your mind, please reach out to the university hosting the summer school. The team will happily answer your questions, put your mind at ease, and make sure you and your child feel excited and ready for the experience ahead.

Summer school is a rare opportunity with no strings attached. Your child will discover something new, grow in confidence, and have an experience they'll never forget. You can find university summer schools all in one place on the [UniTasterDays website](#).



The benefits of visiting a university when an event isn't happening

By Selena Lockett, Student Recruitment Officer at Swansea University

Universities host a variety of opportunities for parents and students to visit throughout the calendar year, from open days to offer-holder tours. However, with scheduling issues, life commitments, and so many institutions to explore, attending an organised event isn't always feasible.

As a parent, carer, or general supporter, it is important that you visit the universities that your child is considering as a potential choice for their future. This article explores the benefits of visiting a university when an event isn't happening, and how to make the most of this experience.

Authentic representation

Visiting a university during normal operating hours offers insight into the realities of the campus and student life in a more relaxed and organic environment. Open days are busy and bustling, so experiencing a dialed back environment can help you and your child visualise the everyday pace of student life.

This approach provides your child with space to reflect on whether the university is a viable choice for their undergraduate degree. They will be embarking on their next chapter, academically and socially, so they must feel confident in their selection of university.

Bespoke experience

Universities are here to help, even outside the organised structure of a planned event. We understand it isn't always possible to attend a particular date, and we know that large-scale events can sometimes feel overwhelming. Most universities will accommodate requests for bespoke tours, provide opportunities to speak with representatives one-to-one, and answer your queries, provided you give them enough notice. Email the university in advance with your preferred dates, and what you want from your visit, so they can accommodate your expectations reasonably.

Explore surrounding areas

Sometimes it's difficult to muster the energy, or find the time, to explore the surrounding areas after a packed organised event, especially if you want to beat the traffic home. You will have more time if you visit outside of organised events. You can scope out local attractions, housing options, ease of transport links, and the general environment without added time pressures. You can even turn it into a holiday by booking an overnight stay or visiting friends who may live nearby.

Resources

Universities have useful resources on their webpages to make your visit more informative. This includes virtual accommodation tours, self-led campus tour notes, and on-demand subject talk recordings. Accessing these resources can plug your knowledge gaps if visiting outside of a planned university event. You can even use these resources to refresh your memory on key information when helping your child evaluate their university choices.



Accessing university events on a budget

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

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

Attend school-organised trips

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

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

Explore your local options

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

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

Lift share and travel smart

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

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

Save on snacks

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

Visit virtually

Nothing beats being there in person, but online experiences are better than ever (page 68). Many universities offer virtual tours, online open days, and real student stories through social media. Register for mailing lists to stay in the loop and access everything from video walk-throughs to subject Q&As.



Do you need financial support to attend an open day?

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



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

Advice for attending an online university event

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

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

Types of events

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

Narrowing down

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

In the pre-application stage, online events are a good way to discover more about a course and

get a feel for the staff. If this makes your child want to apply for that university, they could later attend an in-person applicant day.

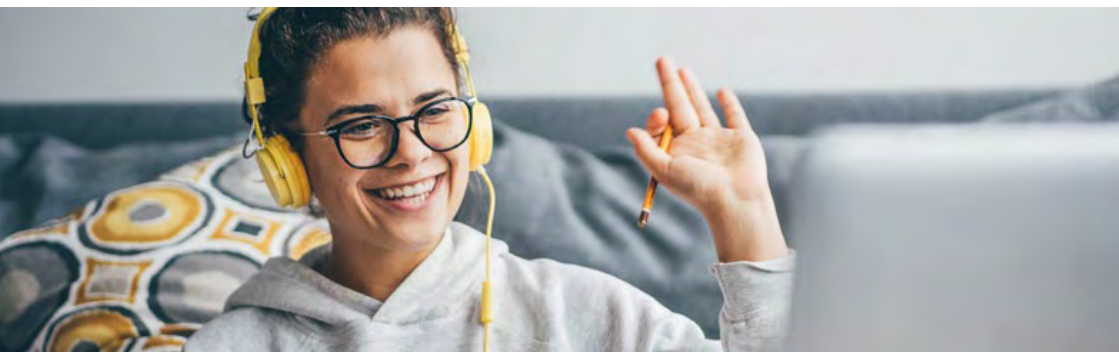
In the post-application stage, if they have already visited in person, then an online event could help them decide between their five choices. The event could remind them of a key factor that helps them to decide their firm and insurance choices.

What to do at online events

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

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

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



My advice for parents by Tami Okubote



Student and co-host of The Uni Guide Podcast

1. Who supported you in your university journey?

Thankfully I've had the privilege of having both my family and friends support me for the duration of my applications towards university, but both served different purposes. My family helped me choose my subjects by connecting my interests with my long-term ambitions and goals.

My friends helped recommend the best educational institutions to consider, based on their own research and debates around employability. They also offered thoughts about each city and its way of life, including upcoming events and nightlife.

I have received guidance from mentors on LinkedIn, and older students at school in the second year of sixth form. They guided me through the process, explaining the different parts within the application process, from entrance exams to teacher references to interviews. They made sure I could head into university applications with confidence.

2. Did they support your decision to apply to university?

Their support commenced very early when I made my decision to apply. It was something that had been discussed previously. It was the expected move. But other pathways like apprenticeships were equally encouraged, and I'm glad I had that flexibility of support. I very

much advise parents and supporters to help their children evaluate several options in case they are interested in multiple avenues.

3. Did they attend any university events with you?

Plenty. Open days help you get a feel for the university, the city, and the "vibe" of the place. However, I also suggest attending summer schools, research programmes, and work experiences too. These allow you to gain a deeper insight into the research and industry-leading work undertaken at the establishment.

Some of these opportunities take place across several days, so you get an unfiltered view of the average student day. Push your child to consider these programmes. It allows them to gain an independent feel for the university and how they teach their courses, but also what it's like to spend time there.

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

It's imperative you remain supportive. University applications are one of the many incurring processes that occupy students in their last year of college. Offering them consistent support will go a long way. To be a helping hand, seek insights about their personal and professional interests. Use this insight as your baseline when researching the top universities that offer their courses of interests.

Lastly, make sure you look out for things they might have missed or not thought to ask about. For instance, research the fiscal costs of moving to another city, the safety of the city, and the local and international reputation of the university. Offering informed expertise on each will help your child reach a better decision, and leave everyone satisfied with the outcome.





YOUR FUTURE



YOUR WAY

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WHATEVER YOUR AMBITIONS,
WE'LL HELP YOU GET THERE YOUR WAY.**



Find out how at an Open Day

A university made for what matters



**ROYAL
HOLLOWAY
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON**

Student finance in England - three handy facts for parents

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

Student finance is one of the biggest worries for students thinking about university. It can feel confusing, intimidating, and full of unknowns.

I support thousands of students, teachers, and parents every year. I often find that once students understand the basics, the system is far more straightforward than they expect. As parents and carers, you can play an important role in helping them feel confident about how it all works.

Student finance rules change over time, so always check the latest guidance. The information in this article applies to students starting university in England from September 2026 onwards. Different systems apply in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. For details, please explore the excellent guidance from Martin Lewis.

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

1. Students only repay when they earn over £25,000

Students don't start repaying their student loan until they earn more than £25,000 a year.

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

For example, if a graduate earns £30,000 a year, they will repay 9% of £5,000. This is roughly £37.50 a month. It may be lower in the future if the repayment threshold rises with inflation. This is expected, and something to watch closely given the financial climate. However, this article focuses on what is in place for students currently.



Top tip

Student loan repayments are based on what a graduate earns, not how much they borrowed. Earn less, repay less. Earn below the threshold, repay nothing.

2. Loans are written off after 40 years

Graduates may make repayments for up to 40 years after leaving university. Any remaining balance after that time is written off.

This means many graduates will never repay the full amount they borrowed. For some people, student finance works more like a graduate contribution than a traditional loan.

3. Maintenance loans depend on household income

Student finance usually comes in two parts:

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

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





Top tip

Use the Student Finance Calculator to estimate what support your child may receive. It'll even break down how your income impacts their support.

Further support

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

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

Reforms

I haven't included the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) in this article. The LLE is intended to reform the post-18 student finance

system into a single funding model. It's expected to apply to courses starting on or after 1 January 2027, with applications opening in September 2026. I'm following the news about the reform, like others are too. The LLE is something to review directly, dependant on when your child is expected to start their course.

Things can and have changed

Student finance policies change over time. The information in this guide is correct to the best of my knowledge at the time of writing, but it should be used as general guidance only. Students and those supporting them are encouraged to check official sources for the most up-to-date information. Always refer to guidance from the Student Loans Company. It's also worth exploring advice from trusted experts such as Martin Lewis, who provides clear and easy-to-understand explanations of how the system works.

“ Once students understand the basics, the system is far more straightforward than they expect. As parents and carers, you can play an important role in helping them feel confident about how it all works. ”



University scholarships and bursaries

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

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

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

Scholarships vs bursaries

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

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

Potential and performance

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

There may be support available for those who have:

- Overcome specific personal or educational challenges
- Chosen a course or subject area that is under-represented
- Come from an area with lower progression rates to university
- Faced financial hardship or other barriers.

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

Finding scholarships and bursaries

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

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



The Disabled Students' Allowance

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

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is support for students with a disability, long-term condition, or learning difference. DSA is in addition to student finance loans. It doesn't cover everyday living costs or medical care, but it does help with study-related costs, such as:

- Course-related costs linked to a disability
- Specialist equipment and assistive technology
- Non-medical helpers, such as interpreters
- Extra travel costs related to study.

DSA isn't a loan and doesn't need to be repaid. Funding is paid directly to suppliers for equipment and services, rather than given to the student. Universities can offer advice, but they aren't involved in the application process. The arrangement is between the student and Student Finance England (SFE).

Eligibility for DSA

Students can apply if they live in England and have a condition that affects their studies, such as:

- Neurodiversity or specific learning difference - dyslexia, ASD, ADHD
- Mental health condition – anxiety, depression

- Physical disability - a student using crutches, a wheelchair, a specialist keyboard
- Sensory disability - if a student is visually impaired or d/Deaf
- Long-term health condition - cancer, chronic heart disease, HIV.

Students must also:

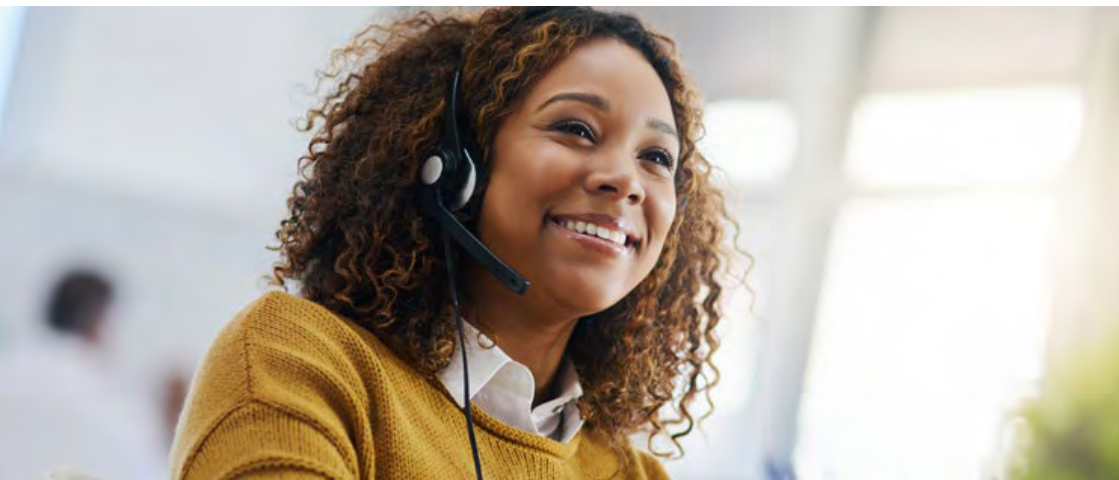
- Reside in the UK
- Study a course that lasts at least a year, including part-time and distance learning
- Qualify for Student Finance from SFE.

Applying for DSA

Full-time undergraduate students applying for student finance can apply for DSA through their online Student Finance account. After applying, students will be asked to provide evidence, and they may be invited to a study needs assessment.

A study needs assessment can be online, by phone, or in person. It's an informal meeting with a specialist to discuss what support and equipment may help a student with their course. A report is then created with recommendations, which is shared with the funding body and the university.

Remember, students should apply early to ensure their support is in place by the time their course begins. The process can take up to 14 weeks. Applications open at the same time as Student Finance, typically in late March. Students should have all their evidence ready to submit alongside their application.



The NHS Learning Support Fund

By Sheryl Kemp, Student Money Adviser at Anglia Ruskin University

Since its introduction in September 2020, the NHS Learning Support Fund (LSF) has been a welcome addition of money for students studying certain pre-registration healthcare courses in England.

Understanding the LSF

The LSF consists of four parts:

1. Training grant - £5000 per year for most courses, whilst some attract £6000 per year.
2. Parental support allowance - £2000 for students responsible for a child under 15, or under 17 if their child is registered with special educational needs.
3. Travel and dual accommodation allowance (TDAE) – this covers reimbursement of additional costs associated with attending study placements.
4. Exceptional support fund – a fund to help students that experience hardship whilst on the course. This can be as much as £3000.

The funding is grant-based, which means students don't have to repay anything. The LSF isn't assessed on household income, so students can access the grants without disclosing their parents' income. Also, it's paid in addition to Student Finance funding so it's a lovely bonus! It just means remembering to make two applications!

Eligibility for the LSF

Firstly, your child must be eligible to receive funding from Student Finance. However, if a student chooses not to access a Student Finance loan, then the LSF team would do their own eligibility checks.

Secondly, your child must apply for a healthcare subject which is eligible for LSF funding. Foundation years aren't eligible for the funding. The subjects are:

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

Receiving the LSF

Attendance must be confirmed by the university before any payment is made to ensure the student is actively attending their course.

The training grant and the parental support allowance are paid in three instalments during the academic year. These payments are made on a different schedule to Student Finance, helping to provide a more evenly distributed income rather than three large lump sums.

Alternatively, the TDAE is paid when a claim is made. Similarly, the exceptional support fund is paid when an application is processed and an award has been granted.

Applying for the LSF

Students express how valuable this fund has been in helping them meet their living costs while at university. It is a welcome addition to what they receive from Student Finance. Encourage your child to visit the LSF website for full details.



Opening a student bank account

By Tom Allingham, Communications Director at Save the Student

With the cost-of-living crisis lingering on, students need to give themselves the best possible chance of making ends meet. This means setting strong foundations and doing plenty of research, whether that's finding extra funding, creating a budget, or saving money in advance of university.

But less appreciated is the role of your child's bank account, and how the right choice can make all the difference.

Student bank accounts

Banks offer sign-up incentives to attract new customers. These usually take the form of cash bonuses, shopping vouchers, or discount cards like tastecards or Railcards.

Accounts usually come with a significant interest-free overdraft. This means your child won't be charged interest on what they borrow whilst they're at university (and for a period afterwards).

The freebies

The sign-up bonuses are tempting, but they're often poor value for money or not worth prioritising. For example, some banks say their free Railcard is worth a certain amount of money. This may be the full-price cost, but it ignores that Railcards go on sale multiple times a year for far less.

Even if a freebie is truly good value, it'll arguably never outweigh the value of having a budget 0% overdraft.

The 0% overdraft

The current financial landscape for students is the toughest it's ever been, with maintenance loans falling drastically short of living costs. Even with a part-time job, parental contributions, and other funding, students often find themselves needing extra cash.

Your child will want the biggest safety net possible. Compared to the alternatives – particularly other forms of borrowing – a student overdraft is the safest and most easily accessible source of emergency cash at university.

Your child won't have to repay a penny until they've graduated. Even then, all student accounts become graduate accounts. These have at least another year of the same 0% terms, allowing your child time to start earning before they need to clear their overdraft.

If a rainy day strikes while your child is at university, you'll both be glad they opted for the account with an extra £1,000 in the 0% overdraft, rather than the one offering a £100 shopping voucher. Indeed, our Student Banking Survey routinely finds that accounts offering the largest overdrafts – or guaranteeing an allowance, rather than advertising "up to" a certain amount – are often the highest rated.

Switch and ditch

Banks offer generous terms to students because they know people tend to stay loyal. In reality, there's little benefit to that. If your child decides they need something different from their account – or even wants one bank's freebie and another bank's overdraft – there's nothing to stop them switching.

Just make sure you've done your research, checked comparison guides, and worked out what's best for your child.



Managing money at university

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

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

Income

Firstly, work out what income is available. Students will be eligible for student finance (page 71). The tuition fee loan goes straight to the university. The maintenance loan is paid to the student for living expenses. For many students, expected outgoings will exceed the maintenance loan, so planning how to meet the shortfall is essential. Additional opportunities for income could include:

- Savings
- Work placements
- Parental contribution
- Part-time work (page 79)
- Grants, scholarships, and bursaries.

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

Outgoings

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

- Food
- Laundry
- Clothing
- Mobile phones
- Commuting costs
- Books and equipment
- Socialising and activities
- Accommodation and bills.

Accommodation is often the biggest outgoing, but travel costs soon add up for students living at home. Work out how much is needed for the

essentials, then check what budget is available for extras. Remember, some weeks will be more expensive, such as Freshers Week, and other weeks will be less expensive, such as exam time.

Savvy spending

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

- Travel cards
- Student discounts
- Batch cooking meals
- Making a packed lunch
- Carrying a reusable water bottle and cup
- Discount supermarkets and reduced "yellow label" items
- Borrowing or purchasing preloved books and clothes
- University initiatives: kitchen equipment recycling, free laptop schemes, free campus events and food.

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

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

Staying in control

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

- Student bank account incentives and benefits
- Pre-arranged free overdrafts to avoid fees
- Reviewing subscriptions
- Keeping credit cards for emergencies only
- Avoiding payment schemes where costs can rise unexpectedly.

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

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



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Part-time work opportunities at university

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

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

On campus

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

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

Off campus

Off campus part-time work could be available within local retail, hospitality, leisure, or tourism companies. For instance, surrounding Southampton Solent, there are shops, bars, restaurants, leisure clubs, and theatres where

students find part-time work alongside their studies.

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

Benefits of part-time work

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

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

Finding part-time work

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

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



The benefits of becoming a student ambassador

By Meagan Ullrich, Student Ambassador Coordinator at the University of Gloucestershire

University is about more than a degree qualification. Becoming a student ambassador is a valuable way for your child to get the most from their university experience.

Student ambassadors are current students who share their personal experiences to support prospective students to make decisions about their future, including which university, course, and accommodation they should choose. This article explores why your child may wish to become a student ambassador.

Gain transferable skills

Your child will get ahead in the jobs market by gaining the soft skills employers are looking for. These include time management, problem solving, communication, initiative, and adaptability.

The student ambassador role provides a wealth of real-life examples to reference in future job interviews. It could be waking up early for an 8am open day briefing, projecting your voice to a crowd of prospective students, or adapting a campus tour for a wheelchair user on a school visit.

At the University of Gloucestershire, experienced ambassadors can apply to become senior ambassadors, which means they gain leadership and delegation experience too.

Expand their social group

As an ambassador, your child will meet students from other courses, year groups, and halls of residence. They will get to know these other students and connect over shared interests. Many ambassador schemes run team-building events and socials too. Your child might make friends for life.

Inspire the next generation

Your child will be invited to share their university and course with young people to inspire them to follow in your child's footsteps. Ambassadors are encouraged to tell stories about their favourite modules, lecturers, trips, and work placements.

Ambassadors may be employed to work with everyone from primary school to post-16 to mature learners. They learn to adapt their style to different audiences, which is another transferrable skill gained in this role.

Supplement their student loan

Most ambassador work is paid and has the added benefit of flexibility. Students can work shifts which fit around their studies, social commitments, and other part-time work. This allows you to stay in control of your calendar whilst boosting your finances.

At University of Gloucestershire, students can also apply to become mentors, summer residential ambassadors, subject specialist ambassadors, student tutors, and career coaches for additional skills and income.

Become a star

And finally, student ambassadors are often hired for photo and video shoots to showcase student life. Your child's face could adorn the walls of their university, travel the city on the back of a bus, or star in a national social media or TV campaign. But don't worry, that bit's not compulsory!

“ I needed a job alongside my studies and becoming a student ambassador was an excellent opportunity - the work is super flexible and there is a wide range of events to choose from. The scheme has also allowed me to make so many new friends. I wish I could go back to first year and do it all over again. ”

- Issie, University of Gloucestershire Student Ambassador

Saving money at university

By Lucy Parkinson, Student Recruitment Assistant - Schools & Colleges Liaison at The University of Hull

Loyalty cards, Monzo, weekly shops – students are masters at making their money stretch. In this article, students share simple habits and practical tips to help your child manage their money at university.

Plan your weekly food shop

“Planning a weekly food shop with a set budget is one of the most effective ways I save money,” says Majadah, a Financial Management student. “Loyalty cards such as the Tesco Clubcard, Lidl Plus, and Nectar can help you save on your shopping, and many restaurants and shops offer student discounts if you just ask. Student discount apps are also helpful for branded items and eating out.”

Shop late at night

“Go shopping later at night,” advises Tilly, who studies War and Politics. “This is when most shops reduce their items and you can get some real food bargains. Reduced items aren’t necessarily out of date. They sometimes have up to a week left, especially eggs.”

Take your own lunch

“I learned quickly that buying snacks or lunch every day adds up fast,” explains Ria, a Business Management student. “Now, I always take my

own food. It’s a small habit, but it saves a few pounds every day. Little things like coffee, meal deals, and impulse buys seem cheap at the time, but they make a big difference to your bank balance.”

Open two bank accounts

“The biggest change for me was keeping two separate accounts,” says Jenesa, who studies Biomedical Science. “I have one for essentials, and another for savings and emergencies. It stops me from dipping into my savings, and makes it clear what I have to spend each week. A good budgeting tool is Monzo pots because they divide your spending automatically, making it harder to overspend by accident.”

Buy second-hand

“Something I wish I’d known in my first year is how much you can save by buying things second-hand,” explains Sara, a Primary Teaching Studies student. “Textbooks are expensive, but you can access them online or borrow them from the library. If you want your own copy, I found that Vinted and eBay are the cheapest options. It’s tempting to buy clothes when you receive your student finance, so use Vinted, Depop, and charity shops to help save money.”

Batch-cook your meals

“I buy my weekly groceries from Lidl,” shares Smita, who studies Biomedical Engineering. “And I batch-cook for three days at a time. It saves time, cuts down on takeaways, and makes a bigger difference to my budget than I expected. It might seem like a small habit, but it’s saved me a lot of money over the years.”



My advice for parents by Jerry Ndi



International Finance and Economics student at Queen Mary University of London

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

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

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

Now let's rewind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Jerry is one of the hosts of The Uni Guide Podcast. Listen to over 50 episodes offering valuable insights into applying to university.



Understanding the university admissions process

By Huw Peters, Student Recruitment and Marketing Officer at the University of Manchester

Applying to university can sometimes feel scary or overwhelming for students, and yourselves as the parents and supporters trying to guide them through the process. Thankfully, there are lots of ways for your child to prepare themselves and lots of help to get them started.

Application support

UCAS, UniTasterDays, and specific university websites are the best place to begin. They offer guides and resources to help your child and yourselves understand how to apply to university.

Your child will receive support from teachers and careers advisers at their school or college. They will have supported lots of students through the same situation. If you or your child is unsure about anything then ask. The only stupid question is the one you don't ask.

Application deadlines

Applying to university has different deadlines, depending on the universities and courses that your child is considering. These deadlines are similar each year. The specific dates for 2027 entry are:

- 15 October 2026 for Oxford, Cambridge, Medicine, Dentistry, and Veterinary Medicine
- 13 January 2027 for all other universities and courses.

Application sections

Your child will be asked to complete several sections within their UCAS application. This will include:

- **Personal details** – information about your child, where they live, and other supporting information. They'll need to provide their previous qualifications (GCSES or equivalent) and their current qualifications (A-Levels, BTEC, T-Levels, or equivalent).
- **Personal statement** – this is a chance for students to show their skills, knowledge, understanding, and motivation for a course.
- **Reference** – provided by one of their teachers to offer context to their application. This might include any mitigating circumstances. The teacher will also provide your child's predicted grades, which helps the universities decide whether to make them an offer.
- **Choices** – the courses and universities to which they're applying. Your child should apply for courses with a range of entry criteria, so they don't put all their eggs in one basket. They will need to pick a firm choice and an insurance choice. The latter should ideally have lower entry criteria, so it can act as a more achievable back-up.
- **Personal circumstances** – if there's anything else that we should be aware of e.g. a disability, if students have been in care or are a sanctuary seeker then please encourage students to let us know, it won't negatively impact the application and can mean we could give them extra consideration.

Application criteria

I speak to many students every year about applying to the University of Manchester, and to universities more generally. My most common answer to questions about the application process is "It depends" because each university and course may have slightly different criteria and expectations.

For instance, some will require tests, interviews, or a portfolio review. For this reason, encourage your child to seek the specific entry criteria when undertaking their university research.



Accessing admissions support through fair access programmes

By Anna Johnston, Lead Access and Articulation Officer at the University of Aberdeen

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

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

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

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

Scotland which supports access to high demand professions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Maya Patel, Employer Engagement & Partnerships Officer at the University of West London

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

Contextual offers

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

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

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

Post-16 choices

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

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

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

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

Strategic planning

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

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

Open the door

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

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

Qualifications accepted by universities

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

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

It's easy to overlook the importance of GCSEs in a university application, but these grades are vital in determining eligibility for many university degrees (page 86). Requirements are given on university and UCAS webpages. Typically, they require GCSE English Language, and sometimes Maths, Science, or a Modern Language depending on the course.

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

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

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

and a grade or score achieved or predicted in a particular module (such as Mathematics for an Economics degree).

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

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

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

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

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



The 2026 changes to personal statements

By Shay Jordan, Outreach Officer at the University of East Anglia

The UCAS personal statement is your child's chance to showcase their ambitions, skills, and experience, and explain why they're suitable for their chosen course. Previously, applicants were given one large text box with a 4000-character limit, but limited guidance. Many struggled to know where to start. For 2026 entry, this has changed significantly.

The purpose of the personal statement remains the same:

- To evidence and communicate passion, knowledge, and skills
- To link academic, extracurricular, and other experiences to the chosen subject area
- To explain why the applicant's experience is relevant and what they've learnt from it.

However, it's now split into three structured sections, each headed with a question to prompt the applicant. UCAS say the new questions will "level the playing field, providing clear guidance and structure for all applicants" by breaking the personal statement down into manageable parts.

Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Your child should showcase their passion and knowledge for their chosen subject. They should explain why they're a good fit, what excites them about the subject, and how it links to their career aspirations.

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

Your child should share the skills they've developed in their education, then reflect on how they'll help them to succeed. They should give examples from their projects and academic achievements.

What else have you done to prepare outside of education?

Finally, your child should share their activities and personal experiences outside of the classroom. This could include work experience, volunteering, additional responsibilities, and hobbies which make them suited to their future studies.

The overall 4000-character limit remains and runs across all three sections. Your child is required to write a minimum of 350 characters in each section, but they can choose how to split the remainder of their characters between the sections.

The questions aren't there to add an extra layer of challenge to the personal statement, and applicants shouldn't spend too much time deciding in which section to put something in. Admissions teams generally read the personal statement as a whole (not three separate pieces), so your child should focus on including all relevant information, rather than stressing about where it sits.

For that reason, your child shouldn't repeat information across sections. It adds no value to write about the same skill or experience twice. All three sections are read by the same person, so your child should make the most of the space to show off their best bits!



Writing an outstanding personal statement

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

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

Get everything down

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

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

Start to structure

Personal statements are split into 3 sections:

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

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

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

Remember, students have a total of 4000 characters (including spaces) for their personal

statement. This is spread between the 3 questions. Help your child to write concisely.

Question 1 - Why this course?

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

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

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

Question 2 and 3 - The ABC structure

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

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

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

Keep refining

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



Learn more on episode 36 of The Uni Guide Podcast.



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Preparing a portfolio for a creative course

Helen Bery, Digital Outreach Coordinator at the University of Brighton

If your child is applying for a creative degree, they will be asked to prepare and send in a portfolio of their work. This may sound daunting, but it's a brilliant opportunity to showcase their interests and unique way of thinking. It shows tutors their skills and thought processes, and acts as their visual story by presenting a collection of their best work with examples of creative exploration.

What are universities looking for?

University tutors are looking for potential and creative flair. Your child should showcase their skills and include a variety of mediums and techniques. For example, if they're applying for fashion, they may want to include drawings, design sketches, textile work, digital design images, and mixed media.

They should use 15-20 examples of image-based work within their portfolio, choosing standout pieces, alongside experimental works showing the development of their ideas. They should include drawings and unfinished pieces, plus short annotations so tutors can see the thought process, themes, and ideas behind their work. They should also include a title, materials/media used, size, and scale.

Digital presentations should be published on a single platform, such as Google Drive or WordPress. Most portfolios are now digital and can be uploaded to the university online.

At Brighton, we tell applicants how to access Student View where a link can be shared.

1. Get creative

It's not just about the artwork. It's also about how it's displayed. If your child has too many sketches, try filming the sketchbook and include this as a page within their portfolio, or take photos and create a collage or showreel.

2. Perfecting the presentation

Your child should select the best pieces of work and let them shine by presenting them in a clear, organised way. Simple layouts and clean, neutral backgrounds work well. They ensure the visual story is easy to follow. Play with the order of the portfolio – by project, by date – and see what works best. Place one of the best, finished images at the beginning and end of the portfolio to make a lasting impression.

3. Ask for feedback

Seek feedback from teachers, creative friends, and family members to check the portfolio for mistakes before submitting.

4. Have fun!

Finally, encourage your child to have fun with the process, and see it as an exciting way for them to express themselves and their unique creative talents.

Many universities offer advisory sessions on how to create an impressive portfolio. For instance, the University of Brighton runs online portfolio advice sessions every December, January, and February. These are led by academics, giving students the opportunity to view example portfolios and ask questions.

“A portfolio is like a book of visuals showing what you make, and how you make such things. It demonstrates the skills you have, the process involved, and your visual experimentation, alongside your interests, obsessions, and curiosity, both visually and intellectually. ”

- Roderick Mills, Course Leader and Admissions Tutor for Illustration at the University of Brighton

Preparing for a music audition or interview

By Luke Carey, Marketing Manager at The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance

There are various ways for aspiring music students to get ready for an audition or interview, from researching repertoire to preparing to share their musical passions and motivations behind studying a course. Auditions and interviews are an opportunity for your child to showcase their technical abilities and also their experience, passions, and career ambitions.

If your child is unsure about a particular course or area of study, then admissions staff can offer advice on the most suitable one for them. For example, at The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP), we offer prospective students guidance on how to prepare before an interview or audition, alongside feedback on how it went.

Choose the music carefully

If your child is looking to study a specific instrument, then they should think carefully about their choice of music. They should select a track that showcases their technical skills and musical versatility, which also meets the course requirements.

Their stylistic range, performance craft, and technique will be reviewed in the audition, so the piece should be within their comfort zone. An audition isn't the time to tackle an unfamiliar

track, but rather an opportunity for your child to showcase their musical strengths and abilities.

Reflect on motivations and skills

Those hosting an audition or interview will look beyond your technical abilities to understand why your child wants to study a particular course. Your child should articulate why they want to join a programme and how this feeds into their music industry ambitions. They should be prepared to discuss their selected pieces or work, their context, and why they chose them.

If your child studies a course in music business or marketing, then they should share their thoughts on the industry, and how a degree will equip them with the skills to flourish.

Allow plenty of time to get there

If your child is attending an interview or audition in person, then they should work out the logistics of getting there. Encourage them to plan their route, consider potential travel disruptions, and aim to arrive early. Allowing plenty of time will ensure they arrive in a calm state of mind. Performers should also plan the instrumentation they require ahead of their audition or interview.

Prepare questions

An interview is an opportunity for your child to understand a course or institution. They should do their homework on the institution and prepare questions once they have finished performing, perhaps on the faculty members or student facilities. This is a valuable chance for your child to learn about student life, what is expected of them, and the career avenues their chosen course can open up.



Understanding contextual offers

By Kendra Argile, Senior Access Officer at Sheffield Hallam University

Contextual offers, contextual admissions, alternative offers, adjusted offers...

As a parent, you might come across these terms when researching universities and entry requirements. They often appear alongside references to widening participation and access programmes. Essentially, these terms mean the same thing: the opportunity to receive lower entry requirements compared to the ones advertised. In addition, they often lead to extra activities and resources to help applicants have the best start at university.

Understanding contextual offers

When making offers, most universities consider predicted grades, actual grades, and your child's background. But they also consider what was happening in their life while studying, including how this may have impacted their results. Understanding this wider context will determine if your child is eligible for a contextual offer. In doing so, it ensures they receive a fair opportunity to gain a place on their chosen course.

Contextual offers could include:

- Reduced grade requirements - typically 1 or 2 grades lower
- Additional consideration during the admissions process
- A guaranteed interview
- An unconditional offer
- A different course, such as a foundation year
- A support package.

Accessing contextual offers

Contextual offers are a strategy to support students from a wide range of backgrounds to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. They help to level the playing field by supporting people who face factors and challenges beyond their control which negatively

impact their grades. Categories might vary depending on the university, but typical groups include:

- Care experienced students
- Estranged students
- Carers
- Students with a disability or mental health condition
- Recipients of free school meals
- Students from a household with an income below £25,000
- Mature students
- Military families
- Military veterans and service leavers
- Students in an area with low levels of participation in higher education
- First-in-family students to go to higher education
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Access programme participants.

Many universities make contextual offers automatically, based on the information in your child's application form. When applying through UCAS, there are two valuable sections: 'more about you' and 'equality and diversity'. These sections allow personal circumstances to be shared.

Anything disclosed is treated confidentially. It will never disadvantage a student. Sharing this information is the simplest way to be considered for a contextual offer. Some universities may need applicants to apply for their schemes separately, but this will be stated on their websites.

Checklist for contextual offers

Please share this support checklist with your child:

- Check eligibility criteria across different courses and universities
- Disclose relevant circumstances in the application form
- Be aware of key application deadlines
- Explore the support packages available.

The latter are invaluable in providing support through the application and transition stages. They will help your child have a successful start to university life.

“Contextual offers help to level the playing field.”

Understanding guaranteed offers

By Kath Bourne, Widening Participation Manager (Pathways and Conversion) at the University of Bristol

Choosing a university is a significant milestone for young people, their families, and supporters. Universities recognise that academic potential is only part of the story when applying for a degree. That's why many universities adopt a guaranteed offer scheme to provide clarity, confidence, and a fair opportunity for eligible students to access the university.

Guaranteed offer schemes sit alongside a wider contextual admissions approach. They recognise the dedication and resilience shown by students whose circumstances or experiences may have shaped their educational journey. For parents and supporters, this means added reassurance that your child's achievements are considered in context, not just through grades alone.

Understanding guaranteed offers

To offer an example, eligible students who apply to Bristol and meet the criteria can receive either:

- A guaranteed offer at either the standard or contextual level
- A guaranteed interview for courses where interviews are part of the admissions process, such as Medicine or Dentistry.

This gives students greater certainty during a potentially stressful and competitive process.

Eligibility for guaranteed offers

Universities often have similar criteria. Again, using Bristol as an example, students may be considered for a guaranteed offer or interview if they apply through UCAS, are considered a Home fee status student, and meet one of the following criteria:

- Living in specific postcode areas and attending a state school
- Studying an eligible Access to Higher Education qualification
- Participating in a Bristol widening participation programmes
- Qualifying for free school meals during their secondary education.

By recognising these experiences, we aim to ensure that students with potential aren't disadvantaged by factors beyond their control. While the scheme offers additional assurance, students still need to:

- Apply by the relevant UCAS deadline
- Meet the academic requirements for their chosen course
- Complete all aspects of the application process, including any admissions tests or assessments to a satisfactory level
- Achieve or be predicted the grades needed for their course.

For courses that require an interview, a guaranteed interview doesn't automatically mean an offer, but it ensures your child has the opportunity to demonstrate their potential.

Importance of guaranteed offers

Applying to university can feel uncertain, particularly if you or the person you're supporting are navigating the system for the first time. Guaranteed offer schemes aim to reduce that uncertainty and open doors for students who have shown commitment and ambition.

It reflects our broader commitment to widening participation, ensuring that talented students from all backgrounds can access and thrive at university. Full details and eligibility criteria can be found on university websites in their guaranteed and contextual offer sections.



What happens after receiving an offer

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

Receiving a university offer is an exciting stage, but it often brings new questions for parents and supporters. Understanding what happens next can make the process feel much clearer and less stressful. Decisions on applications submitted by the January UCAS deadline will normally be made by the end of May, but if further information is required then it may take a little longer.

Understanding the offer

When a university makes an offer, the official details appear in the student's UCAS Hub account. This is where the conditions are shown and where the student will later reply.

Most students receive a conditional offer. This means the place depends on achieving certain exam results. Some students receive an unconditional offer, which means the place has already been confirmed. This typically happens when the student has already completed their school or college studies.

Universities also ask students to read the terms carefully, as offers can sometimes include other conditions, not just assessment results. This might be a health check, DBS check, interview, or other conditions dependent on the course.

Waiting for decisions

Students don't need to reply when the first offer is received. Instead, they can wait until all universities have responded. Once the final decision has arrived, UCAS sets a deadline for replying. The deadline depends on when the last decision is received. If a student doesn't reply by this date, the offers are automatically declined.

Choosing a firm and insurance

Once all offers have arrived, students make two choices:

- Firm choice - this is the university your child wants to attend. If the conditions are met, the place is confirmed.
- Insurance choice – this is their backup option in case they don't meet the conditions for their firm choice. It's not possible to switch to their insurance choice after results day. It's only used if they have not secured a place at their firm choice.

Only one firm choice and one insurance choice can be selected. Any other offers are declined at this stage.

After choosing

Once a firm and insurance choice have been selected, the focus usually shifts to preparing for final school and colleges assessments and meeting the conditions of the offer. Universities may also invite offer-holders to visit the campus and learn more about the course before making a final decision.

If the required conditions of their offer are achieved, the place at the firm choice university is confirmed. If this isn't possible then they may secure a place at their insurance choice.

Supporting your child

Choosing between offers can feel overwhelming, especially if several universities feel like strong options. You can help by focusing on practical questions such as location, course structure, and how comfortable your child feels about each choice. In many cases, simply talking through the options together can make the decision much clearer and help your child feel more confident about what comes next.



How to choose university accommodation

By Natasha Parker-Wood, School & Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Huddersfield

Accommodation is a primary consideration when choosing a place to study. This article offers guidance to help you advise your child in deciding between the various options.

Accommodation types

- **University halls** - halls of residence are managed by the university. They tend to be close to campus, so they are popular with first year students. They arrange social events for the students who live there.
- **Private halls** – like university halls but managed by private companies. They often include modern amenities like gyms, social spaces, study spaces, and cinema rooms.
- **Shared houses** - flats or houses owned by private landlords and quality assessed by the university. They are popular with second year students who want to live with their friends.
- **Studio apartments** - privately run and are self-contained, so there isn't a shared bathroom or kitchen. These are popular with couples and mature students.

Room types

- **Ensuite** - a private bedroom with a bathroom included. This could be a separate toilet and shower or a wet room. You share the kitchen and living area with other students.
- **Shared bathroom** - a private bedroom only. You share the kitchen, living area, and bathroom with other students.
- **Shared bedroom** - a handful of universities allow students to share a bedroom with someone of the same gender. You share the kitchen, living area, and bathroom with other students.

Cost

Your child should think about how many housemates they would like. Ask if they would prefer a quieter environment or having lots of people to socialise with. The number of housemates sharing the communal facilities can vary from 4 to 12 students.

Ensuited tend to be more expensive than shared bathroom flats, whilst shared flats can get less expensive as the number of housemates increases. Bills are normally included in the cost of rent at university and private halls, whereas shared houses require you to pay them separately.

There are different contract lengths for accommodation, typically from 40 to 51 weeks. If you choose a shorter contract, your child must move out during the summer. If they study a course which requires them to attend lectures over the summer (like many healthcare courses) then a longer accommodation contract is worth considering.

Lastly, some universities will ask you to rank your preferences of accommodation before they allocate halls. To avoid disappointment, help your child make a list of their preferences before applications open so they can apply as early as possible.

Top tips

1. Visit - don't rely on staged photos. Get a feel for the place!
2. Have back-ups - popular accommodation can fill up fast.
3. Eligibility – check if all first-year students get guaranteed accommodation, or whether it's reserved for students who put the university as their firm choice.



Understanding and preparing for Clearing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Students can call back anytime to ask the universities additional questions. They might want to ask about accommodation or check the progress of their application if they're feeling anxious. We're always happy to help.

Finally, they should update their information with student finance if they have previously applied elsewhere.

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



Prepare for Clearing with our helpful Clearing Guide!

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

- Understand the importance of "knowing your why"
- Gain advice from students and HE experts



www.UniTasterDays.com/ClearingGuide

My supporter story by Jess Wood

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

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

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

2. How did they decide what to study?

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

3. How did they decide where to study?

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

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

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

4. Did you attend many open days?

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

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

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

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

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



What happens after results day

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

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

If all goes to plan

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

If they miss their first choice

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

If they don't have a place

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

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

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

What is Clearing?

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

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

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

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

Supporting their decision

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

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

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

An introduction to student life

By Lucy Parfitt, Student Recruitment Officer (Student Ambassadors) at St Mary's University, London

Starting university is a massive milestone, not just for your child, but for the families and friends supporting them. While the primary focus of higher education is obtaining a degree, student life is a much broader journey of personal growth.

Academic transition

Academic life is often split into two formats: lectures and seminars. Lectures are large presentations where an expert shares information with students. Seminars are smaller, more interactive classes where students discuss what they have learnt. To prepare for seminars, students engage in academic reading beforehand.

Independent study is a big difference from the learning style at school or college. This transition encourages students to become independent thinkers who manage their own schedules, so time-management will become an important skill.

Social activities

Life outside the library is where many students find their people. Most universities have a Students' Union (SU). This is an organisation run by students, for students. The SU arrange socials in the first weeks of university to help students make friends and become part of the community.

Through the SU, students can join clubs and societies. These are student-run groups based on shared interests, such as sports, hobbies, and academic subjects. Engaging in these activities is a good way to meet people.

Skills development

For many students, university is the first time they live away from home. This means learning practical skills like budgeting, food shopping, and laundry. Managing a limited amount of money for the first time can be a big challenge. This is also the case for commuting students, who manage travel costs and commute times. Discuss these practicalities before term starts to help your child prepare.

Support networks

As a parent or supporter, it's natural to worry about your child's wellbeing. Universities provide extensive support systems to help students navigate their challenges. This includes mental health services, financial advice, and academic tutors.

You can explore your child's university website to see the available support, so you can signpost your child to the right place. For example, at St Mary's University, the Student Support team offer counselling, mental health support, financial aid, and academic support.

For specific adjustments, connect with the university's support services before term starts. At St Mary's, we can put specific support in place such as extra time on exams, or additional wellbeing check-ins at the start of term to ease the adjustment to university life.

Parental support

As a parent or carer, you should act as a consistent source of encouragement and an active listener. Allow your child space to settle during the first few weeks before visiting them. This will help with homesickness. By showing confidence in their ability to manage their new life, you help them build the resilience they need to succeed in their journey through higher education.





St Mary's
University
London

St Mary's University Parents' Night

**Tuesday
9 June
2026
5.30-8pm**

This event is aimed at parents and carers, but year 12s and year 13s applying to university for September 2026 or 2027 entries are more than welcome to come along. The evening will consist of presentations as well as a Q/A in the hope of providing you with an insight into the higher education process to help your child make an informed decision about their next steps. We hope to provide you with useful advice and guidance, as well as to answer any questions you may have. The event will not only cover the benefits of university study, it will also outline the Student Finance application and repayment process, accommodation services, and resources and opportunities available for disabled students.

TIMETABLE

5.30pm	Refreshments
6pm	Welcome to St Marys
6.15pm	Student Finance Presentation
6.45pm	Accommodation Services talk
7.05pm	DSA Applications & Opportunities Talk
7.25pm	Employability Talk
7.45pm	Q/A with Student Ambassadors
8pm	End

SCAN ME



For more information
and to register, scan
the QR code

How to support your child after they start at university

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

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

Research the university

Universities have a wealth of support services available for students:

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

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

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

Discuss finances

Going to university is an expensive time. Budgeting is incredibly important (page 81). Encourage your child to apply early for student loans. Research any extra pockets of money that might be available, such as bursaries and scholarships.

Budgeting exercises can help them understand their expenses: socialising, rent, food, commuting. It will help them think about where the money will come from.

Check in regularly

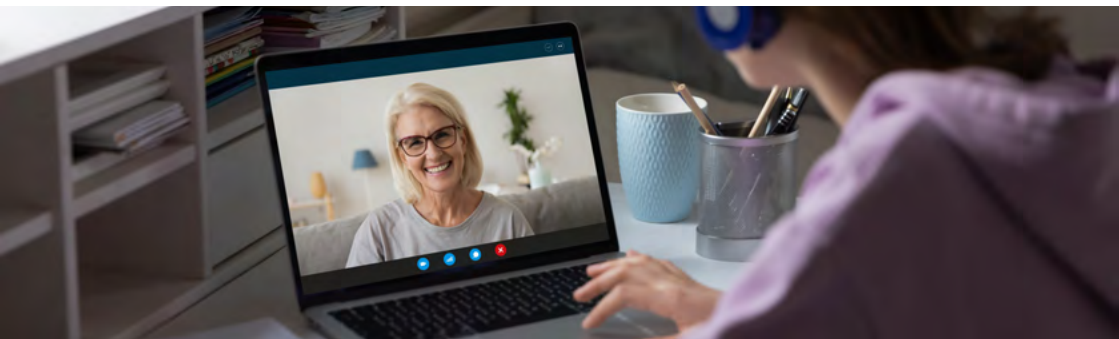
Some parents and carers commit to a regular weekly or fortnightly video call to catch up with the student in their lives. Listen to their experiences. Share some of your own hints and tips, from the best recipes to laundry hacks! Scheduling a reoccurring time brings some structure, especially if they are away from home. It can help overcome home sickness.

If your child is still living at home, set aside some time to walk together. This will allow an opportunity for them to talk about their exciting classes and projects, or talk about anything that's bothering them.

Embrace the change

It's daunting to adapt to this next stage of their lives, but students with a supportive home environment will continue to benefit from this at university. Be excited for them. Ask them lots of questions about their course, their university, their new friends, and their experiences.

Make sure they know you're still there for them. Encourage them to reach out for help if they need it.



How to make friends at university

By Amy Harvison, Access and Participation Administrative Officer at Arden University

One of the biggest worries I hear from parents is whether their child will make friends at university. Starting somewhere new can feel daunting, and it's natural to wonder how your child will settle in. From my own experience, friendships form in many ways, and the deeper connections take time to grow.

Before they arrive

Before starting university, I joined social media groups for my course and accommodation. I chatted to people ahead of time, and we arranged to meet during the first weekend. I didn't become close with everyone, but those early conversations made things feel less intimidating. I met one of my closest friends that way - nearly 20 years later we're still in touch. Encourage your child to reach out online.

Everyday moments

Friendships often grow out of shared experiences rather than big, planned events. Welcome activities are designed to help new students meet others, and going along with flatmates can make it feel less overwhelming. Joining a society or sports team can help too, especially when there's a shared interest.

But the everyday moments are valuable too: arriving early to a lecture for a quick chat, suggesting a coffee afterwards, studying together. Spending time in shared spaces can make a real difference too. Eating in the common room can become a natural opportunity to start conversations.

Comfort and routine

Confidence grows when students find spaces where they feel comfortable. Encourage your child to embrace the opportunities that feel right for them, rather than pushing themselves into situations they won't enjoy. Familiar settings make it easier to build connections.

Routine can help for neurodivergent students, or those who feel socially anxious. Visit the same places regularly, sit near familiar faces, and prepare a few simple conversation-starters to make new interactions feel more manageable.

Friendships look different for everyone

Not all students live on campus. For commuting or distance learners, friendships may form through study groups, online course communities, and time between classes. A part time job - especially on campus - can also provide opportunities to meet people.

It takes time

Reassure your child that making friends doesn't always happen straight away. Early on, it can feel like they're meeting lots of people without forming meaningful connections, and that's completely normal. Some students settle quickly, while others take longer. I made the mistake of going home most weekends at first, which made it harder to settle. Staying around to build early connections would have helped.

Supporting your child

Your role is to be a steady source of encouragement. Listen, reassure, and gently help them to stay engaged. Simple suggestions can help them find their place, such as attending events with flatmates, keeping their door open when they feel comfortable, and inviting friends to visit instead of going home every weekend.



The benefits of joining a student society

By Ellia Loureda, Student Liaison Officer at Leeds Arts University

At the start of your child's university journey, it's natural to focus on their course, the campus, where they'll live, and how many cookbooks on beans you need to order to last three years!

You may also hope they'll make good friends and find people they click with, because their experience outside of the classroom is important too. Some of the most valuable extra-curricular opportunities are student societies.

Joining a society

Student societies are organised groups of students with a shared interest, hobby, or identity. Joining a society is the perfect opportunity for your child to meet like-minded students, learn a skill, try something new, and make friends!

Each university has a wide range of societies. Options might include sports, languages, cooking, crafting, sustainability, volunteering, and performing arts, alongside more specific interests like K-Pop, Dr Who, and Warhammer. Many first-year students find joining a society is the quickest way to connect with their community, form a ready-made circle of friends, and settle happily into university life.

Leading a society

Beyond social benefits, societies provide students a chance to develop important, transferable skills for their future working life. Many societies are student-run, so there is a requirement for members to take on leadership roles. They will manage the society by organising meetings and events, updating mailing lists, creating promotional materials, and staying on top of social media accounts.

Often working in pairs or a team, society members must be extremely organised, passionate, and proactive. Societies run parallel to their studies, so time management is essential. This is a highly employable skill that could give them an advantage over their peers when it comes to job interviews.

Benefitting from a society

Academic success and securing a dream career might guide your child's decision to attend university, however the possibilities for personal growth and wellbeing are endless. A healthy level of interests outside of their course will build their independence and confidence.

They'll also gain memories that last well beyond graduation and into their adult lives. This could lead to previously unconsidered career paths, partnerships, and lifelong friendships that will construct the rich tapestry of their lives.



The benefits of joining a sports team

By Aaron Pardo, Schools and Colleges Engagement Assistant at the University of Exeter

For many students, joining a sports team is one of the most rewarding parts of university life. Families often ask why this matters, especially alongside academic commitments. Sports teams, whether competitive or social, can add value in several practical and personal ways.

Making friends

Sports teams bring students together regularly, giving them the chance to work with others who share similar interests. For many students, this leads to lasting friendships and a sense of belonging, which can help them settle into university life more quickly. Research suggests that students involved in sports or other extracurricular activities are more likely to feel connected to their institution and continue their studies.

At the University of Exeter, there are more than 50 athletic clubs covering a range of activities from football and hockey to swimming and trampolining. These clubs include both competitive teams and social sport options, so students of all experience levels can find something that fits their interests.

Improving health

Regular sporting activity benefits physical health, including improved fitness, strength, and stamina. At university, maintaining an active lifestyle can also help with stress relief. Exercise releases natural chemicals in the brain that help manage stress and improve mood. This gives students a healthy way to balance academic pressures.

Being part of a team also supports mental wellbeing. Social interaction and shared goals can reduce feelings of loneliness and give students a supportive community during busy or challenging periods.

Developing skills

Playing sport at university helps students grow in ways that extend well beyond the pitch or court. Being part of a team teaches cooperation, communication, and time management, skills that are valuable in the workplace and everyday life. Stepping into roles such as team captain or committee member can help students gain leadership and organisational experience.

Involvement in sports clubs can also build confidence. Learning new skills, meeting different people, and taking part in competitions will encourage students to push themselves and grow more comfortable in unfamiliar situations.

Enjoying university

Sports teams often organise social events, trips, and community activities. These can be fun breaks from study and provide additional ways for students to connect. Social sport options at Exeter, for example, are designed to combine activity with relaxed interactions and a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers.

Supporting resilience

Being part of a team also helps students learn resilience. Coping with wins, losses, and setbacks teaches perseverance. Many former students speak about how their involvement in clubs helped them stay motivated and engaged throughout their degree.

Joining a sports team can enrich a student's university experience, build skills for life beyond graduation, and support wellbeing and personal growth.



The benefits of volunteering at university

By Niall Seenan, UK and Ireland Student Recruitment Manager at Glasgow Caledonian University

Volunteering is one of the activities that your child can do outside of their studies to benefit them now but also in the future. University is about much more than just the academic side. Volunteering can help your child get the most out of their university experience.

Personal growth

Volunteering fosters personal growth by instilling a sense of responsibility, empathy, and compassion. Employers value volunteer experience, as it demonstrates commitment, teamwork, and leadership skills. Many universities hold Volunteering Fairs that connect students with relevant opportunities. These can help develop skills such as communication, problem-solving, and time management. Furthermore, opportunities like volunteering at the NHS provides hands-on experience that are beneficial for future careers.

Networking opportunities

Volunteering provides the opportunity for students to build connections with professionals, peers, and organisations that may prove useful for their future career. Universities collaborate with local charities and other institutions to create excellent networking opportunities. Engaging with like-minded individuals and industry experts can open doors to internships, mentorship programmes, and potentially future jobs for your child.

Mental and physical wellbeing

Volunteering can vastly improve wellbeing. Acts of kindness and altruism have been shown to reduce stress and increase overall happiness. Universities encourage students to participate in initiatives that support mental health, such as befriending programmes and volunteering time to run a university club or society. Getting involved with a club or society also provides an opportunity to develop lifelong friends.

Enhanced experience

University life extends beyond lectures and exams, with extracurricular activities playing a crucial role in a well-rounded student experience. Taking part in volunteering allows students to develop friendships, gain leadership experience, and become more engaged with campus life, enriching their overall university experience.

Making a difference

One of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering is making a meaningful difference in communities. Whatever cause is close to your child's heart, volunteering will provide them with the chance to give back and make a difference. This sense of purpose and impact is incredibly fulfilling. It helps shape a strong sense of social responsibility that can feed into whatever they do after university.

Ready, set, volunteer

Volunteering at university is a valuable experience that goes beyond academic achievements. It enhances personal growth, develops skills, builds networks, improves wellbeing, and allows students to contribute positively to society. With many universities offering structured volunteering opportunities and partnerships with local charities, your child has the chance to make a difference while also benefiting from their experiences.



My parent story by Philippa Dobrée-Carey

**Author of From High School to Uni and
The Essential Job Search Guide for Students**

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

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

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

1. Who did you support?

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

college while waiting for a commission in the Royal Navy. She was effectively a first-in-family student (page 11) who would live on campus, so we figured things out together.

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

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

2. How did they decide what to study?

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

3. How did they decide where to study?

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



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

4. Did you attend many open days?

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

Plan ahead

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

Assess the location

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

Take notes and photos

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

Dress comfortably

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

5. What advice would you give to parents?

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

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

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

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



Making the most of the students' union

By Dominic White, Schools and Colleges Regional Assistant at the University of Derby and Former President of the Union of Students at the University of Derby

A students' union (SU) is more than just a place or organisation. The SU is the gateway to student life at its best. It helps students to settle in, make friends, and get involved by providing support, representing the student voice, and hosting unforgettable events. The SU allows your child to be part of a vibrant student community where everyone feels welcome.

What is an SU?

A students' union is a student-led organisation that exists to represent, support, and bring students together. The SU creates a welcoming, inclusive community where your child can find their people, feel at home, and make lasting memories. The SU works to ensure every student feels part of something bigger through events, societies, campaigns, and support services.

At its heart is a commitment to democracy. Each year, students elect representatives - from course reps to the SU President - to champion the student voice and shape a university experience that works for everyone.

What does an SU offer?

University is more than lectures and assignments. It's about feeling like you truly belong. That's where the SU comes in. At the University of Derby, the SU is home to a thriving community of students, with over 100 sports clubs and societies to explore. Whether you're into poetry or football, academic interests or shared identities, there's a place for students to connect.

The SU brings people together through a packed programme of events: Freshers' Week, cultural celebrations, movie nights, festivals, and more. These moments create shared experiences and lasting friendships that define your time at university. When students need support, the SU is right there beside them.

Its friendly, student-focused welfare team offers free, confidential advice on everything from housing to mental health to money worries. And the SU offers part-time roles and local volunteering projects to help students give back and build their CV.

How to get involved

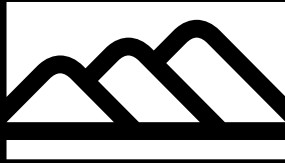
At the University of Derby, students automatically become a member of our SU - the Union of Students - when they enrol as a student. This means they're part of a student-led community from day one. It allows them to feel part of something bigger, whether they're looking for friendship, support, or a place to explore their interests.

One of the first chances to get involved is at the Freshers' Fair. This is a lively welcome event where students can meet, register for sports clubs and societies, and connect with local organisations and services. It's the perfect way to start feeling at home.

The SU offers something for every interest. Students also find meaningful ways to get involved through volunteering and student representation. These give them the chance to shape their university experience and build strong connections along the way.

More than anything, the SU is a space where students can be themselves, meet others, and feel like they belong. When exploring potential universities, your child shouldn't just think about the course. They should think about the community waiting to welcome them.

“The SU creates a welcoming, inclusive community where your child can find their people, feel at home, and make lasting memories. ”



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The benefits of undertaking a study abroad placement

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

Choosing to study or work abroad as part of a degree is a life-changing opportunity. Your child will experience new learning and working environments, meet people in different cultures, and escape their comfort zone. It's also proven to increase the chances of finding a job once they graduate.

Experiencing different cultures

A study abroad placement will give your child the chance to immerse themselves in a new language and culture in a way that goes far beyond lectures and tutorials. By living and studying in a different country, they will practice the local language daily and gain a deeper understanding of cultural customs, traditions, and perspectives. For these reasons, a year abroad is often compulsory for language students, but the opportunity is available to everyone!

Gaining independence

A study abroad placement elevates the experience of moving away from home to an entirely new level. Students are immersed in unfamiliar environments where they need to make decisions without their usual support networks. Simultaneously, they are adjusting to a new style of teaching whilst navigating new friendship groups, cultures, and often languages.

Global connections

A study abroad placement is an opportunity to build a global network. Your child will connect with fellow students, professors,

and professionals from different cultures and backgrounds. These relationships can open doors across industries and countries. Their connections often extend beyond graduation to provide support, collaboration opportunities, and career prospects in a crowded graduate pool.

Employability

The graduate job market is increasingly competitive, so the experiences and skills gained through a study abroad placement can significantly help your child to stand out. A poll conducted by the British Council found that 83% of students believed their study abroad experience improved their job prospects. The experience also provides some meaningful talking points for job interviews!

Tuition discounts

Students participating in a study abroad scheme will discover a brilliant financial incentive. UK undergraduates starting their studies at a UK university this year can expect to pay the full tuition fee of £9,790 per year. However, most study abroad years cost around £1,500 in comparison! Of course, there are living costs too, so this is worth researching before committing to a placement.

Study abroad checklist

Studying abroad is a life-changing experience for students, but it's a decision that shouldn't be taken lightly. Encourage your child to:

1. Research their options – find which of their university choices offers the best placements
2. Speak to students – seek advice from those who have completed study abroad placements
3. Calculate the costs
4. Check the selection criteria – universities expect a certain level of academic performance when reviewing study abroad applications.



Starting a business at university

By Asif Majid, Associate Head - Student Experience & Enterprise at Sheffield Hallam University

University isn't just about lectures, assignments, and exams. It can also be the perfect time for your child to start their own business. If they are interested, please do share this advice with them.

Many students arrive with an idea they want to explore, while others discover opportunities during their course. Whether you're interested in launching a clothing brand, starting a fitness business, building an app or working as a freelancer, university gives you the time and flexibility to try something new.

You don't need to have everything figured out at the start. What matters most is being willing to take that first step and learn as you go.

Support for new businesses

Starting a business might feel overwhelming, but most universities offer support to help you get started and grow. You can usually access:

- One-to-one advice tailored to your idea
- Workshops on starting and running a business
- Guidance on funding and managing money
- Help with branding, marketing, and promotion
- Connections to experts, mentors, and academics

This support is designed to help you build confidence, develop your idea, and avoid mistakes.

Meet other student entrepreneurs

One of the biggest advantages of starting a business at university is being surrounded by other motivated students. Many universities provide shared spaces, such as a student enterprise hub or co-working area. These spaces allow you to work alongside others who are developing ideas, making it easier to:

- Share ideas and get feedback
- Meet potential collaborators or business partners
- Stay motivated and inspired
- Learn from other students' experiences
- Being part of a community can make a big difference, especially in the early stages.

Work on your business during your degree

If your course includes a placement year, you may have the option to spend that time developing your own business instead of working for an employer. This opportunity allows you to:

- Focus fully on your idea
- Gain real business experience
- Build confidence and independence
- Develop skills that employers value.

These placements are usually competitive and may require an application, but they are a valuable way to take your idea further.

What you'll gain

Starting a business at university isn't just about making money. It's about developing skills and experience that will benefit you in the future. You'll have the chance to:

- Build confidence and independence
- Develop communication and problem-solving skills
- Gain real-world experience alongside your studies
- Strengthen your CV or personal statement
- Create opportunities for yourself after graduation.

Why start at university?

University provides a supportive environment where you can test ideas, take risks, and learn from mistakes without the pressure of going it alone. With access to advice, facilities, and a network of like-minded people, it's one of the best times to explore entrepreneurship.

“ I wanted to start my own business, not only to challenge myself, but to use it as a platform to support the sustainability movement. ”

- Becky Malkin, Inshore Designs

Accessing careers support at university

By Clare Scanlon, Recruitment and Marketing Coordinator, and Stephanie Willmott, Senior UK Student Recruitment and Outreach Officer at University of Portsmouth London

University employability and careers provisions are a key consideration when making a decision on what course to study and where.

Universities now take a more joined-up approach to career support, combining academic study with employability skills. Some courses include careers-focused modules and invite industry professionals to speak. This helps students to connect their learning to real jobs, supporting them in starting to build their careers before they graduate.

Careers support at university

Careers information, advice, and guidance can take different forms. Universities offer a range of student support services to encompass career progression. To begin, students are often asked to share their interests. From there, careers advisers can suggest next steps.

Having a specific job in mind is useful too. For example, a student might know the role they want, but not how to get there. Careers teams will map out the skills, experience, and steps needed.

Here are some of the ways universities can help your child navigate their interests and potential career pathways:

- Finding work experience
- Reviewing CVs and cover letters
- Providing opportunities for part-time work
- Interview preparation and practice
- 1 to 1 appointments
- Access to online jobs board
- Enterprise and startup clinics
- Career skills workshops
- Online advice and resources.

Careers experience before graduating

One of the biggest changes in recent years is the focus on experience. Employers often look for more than academic results. Encourage your child to look for opportunities, such as:

- Internships and placements
- Part-time work
- Volunteering
- Work shadowing.

University careers teams will often support with securing such opportunities. They might even be offered as part of the course. These experiences will help them understand different industries and build practical skills. They also strengthen future job applications.

Careers support after graduating

Careers support and guidance at universities isn't just for your child whilst they're studying. Most universities offer support for years after they graduate.

This allows for flexibility and offers reassurance that they'll have support whilst studying on campus, and long afterwards. It allows students to feel equipped and confident to explore their interests, and find a suitable career pathway that aligns with their skills and passions.

How you can help

Careers are no longer a single, fixed path. Many people change direction several times during their working life. This means it is normal for students to feel unsure at first. You can support them by:

- Asking about their interests and ideas
- Encouraging them to use careers services early and look at this before applying
- Helping them stay informed about the job market
- Reminding them that change and uncertainty are part of the process.

Trying different roles and experiences can help your child discover what suits them. Flexibility and curiosity are valuable qualities in today's job market. Your child's university can nurture this, and support them in starting on the right path for their career.



Preparing for a future career

By Sophie Jones, Regional Recruitment Officer at the University of Essex

A degree opens doors, but in today's competitive market, employers want graduates with experience and skills, so they can step straight into the workforce. Universities provide opportunities to give your child a framework to prepare for their future career.

Real-world experience

Experience is now a key factor in graduate employability. Employers seek candidates who can immediately join the workplace and contribute. Placements, internships, and volunteering help students develop this understanding.

For example, a placement student might work on a project, contribute to team meetings, and present ideas to colleagues. These experiences give them something concrete to talk about in applications and interviews. Many universities, including the University of Essex, provide placement years and opportunities to intern alongside academics to help students apply their learning in a real setting.

Global perspective

Employers value graduates who can collaborate across borders and adapt to different ways of working. Global experiences such as a year, term, or summer abroad help students build independence, adaptability, and confidence. At Essex, these options, alongside the Languages for All programme, make international experiences more accessible and help students build networks to support future careers.

Even without travelling, university life exposes students to a wide mix of cultures and viewpoints through group projects, societies,

and campus activities, equipping students with the skills to work in diverse teams. Essex's multinational teaching staff bring a global perspective to the classroom, introducing students to international outlooks and markets.

Skills beyond the classroom

Employers look at how well someone communicates, works in a team, and takes initiative. Student societies and extracurricular activities are often where these skills grow. Organising events, leading a group, or managing a project will give you child practical experience to mention in applications and interviews. At Essex, societies such as Student Rebel Media and sports teams, allow students to gain real responsibility, work collaboratively, and see the tangible impact of their efforts.

Careers support

Universities offer a wide range of support to help students prepare for employment, both during their studies and after graduation. This includes CV guidance, interview preparation, psychometric tests, and skills workshops on topics like digital literacy. Career modules are embedded in university teaching to help students map their subject skills to the professional market.

Employer events, career fairs, and guest speakers provide opportunities to meet professionals, while platforms such as LinkedIn let students stay connected, follow organisations, and showcase achievements from placements to society roles. Together, this support helps students build a professional profile, expand their networks, and demonstrate the skills employers are looking for.

University offers more than a degree. It gives students the chance to gain experience, develop confidence, and explore their options. They don't need to do everything, but making the most of the right opportunities can make a real difference in preparing for their future career.

“Experience is now a key factor in graduate employability. Employers seek candidates who can immediately join the workplace and contribute.”

A special thanks to our guest contributors

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