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over 60 education practitioners**



UniTasterDays.com

Teachers' Guide to University 2025

The key higher education facts for school and college staff

Produced in collaboration with

HELOA

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Welcome to the UniTasterDays Teachers' Guide to University 2025

Every year, we create this guide to help you deliver excellent university guidance to your students.

We hope it will support you in your day-to-day role as a teacher or careers adviser when speaking with those interested in university. It intends to provide you with detailed answers to common questions about the transition to higher education and its many opportunities. This edition was produced in October 2024.

The guide will offer updates about recent changes in the sector, such as the reform to UCAS personal statements, and ongoing concerns about the cost-of-living crisis. Critically, it looks to bring you closer to leading universities by providing you with advice directly from the higher education experts who work within those institutions.

Helping your students to make the right choice

Higher education is a significant decision. Committing to university study is not a decision to be taken lightly. This guide provides you with in-depth advice and first-hand insight into the student experience. In doing so, it will help you prepare your students for a smoother path into successful higher-level study, and a satisfying and fulfilling career.

Universities operate in a more competitive market than ever before. It's in their interest to attract students by inviting them to open days, workshops, talks, and all manner of familiarisation events, whether they be on campus, in school, or

online. Several of the articles in this guide offer an introduction to activities your students will find useful.

Quite simply, your students now have a wider range of options than ever before to experience higher education before fully committing to this path. There are multiple events and channels where they can meet university staff members and current students to have their questions answered.

Experts on your side

This guide features contributions from experts in higher education, as well as specialists from outside the sector. Each article offers fantastic advice and support.

It has been produced in collaboration with HELOA, the professional association of staff in higher education who work in student recruitment, outreach, marketing and admissions. We are very grateful for their support and the contributions made throughout the guide by HELOA members.

I hope you find great value in our Teachers' Guide to University 2025. When your school or college is ready, please do visit [UnitasterDays.com](https://unitasterdays.com) to connect with universities. We will help you search for existing university events, request bespoke events, and invite university staff to attend events of your own.

We wish you the best of luck with the academic year ahead.

Simon Fairbanks,
Head of Community
Engagement, UniTasterDays



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Emerging trends and changes in higher education

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

This year, UCAS announced that 2024 saw more 18-year-olds apply to university compared to previous years. That trajectory has been forecasted to continue, with UCAS expecting one million applications by 2030. Even though this trajectory exists, the trends within higher education continue to change. In many ways, students are becoming more aware of the variety of options available to them and, as their teachers and advisers, it is our job to help them navigate those options.

Degree apprenticeships

The opportunity to earn while you learn is becoming increasingly attractive to students. More students are enquiring about this, and the sector seems to be listening. Between January 2024 and July 2025, the Office for Students plans to distribute £40 million to support the development of Level 6 degree apprenticeships.

£1.2 million has been awarded to the University of Derby, which offers a range of degree apprenticeships, including Health and Social Care, Science and Engineering, Leadership and Management, and Education. The ability to discover degree apprenticeships through UCAS allows students to explore their options in one place. Both initiatives will improve awareness of and access to degree apprenticeships.

A change in priorities

The cost-of-living crisis is affecting all of us, with no exception to students. As a result, many students are reluctant to relocate, opting instead to attend local universities and commute. We are seeing a change in students' priorities, including a desire for part-time work, wellbeing support, placement years, and a focus on future employability.

As a generation, the so-called 'Gen-Z' seem to place less importance on nightlife compared to previous generations. This is likely to impact the social climate of universities. Universities are also adapting their academic offering, in preparation for the future job market. The University of Derby, for example, places a focus on industry engagement and has introduced new courses such as Artificial Intelligence.

Clearing

In 2024, 91% of students headed into results day with offers. Clearing was an available option for those who did not secure their first-choice place, had not yet applied, or had a change of heart. Clearing is growing across the sector, with more Russell Group spaces available in Clearing 2024 than in previous years. When I was a prospective student, Clearing was a daunting thought. However, times have changed, and students of today are becoming increasingly comfortable with the prospect of Clearing. It is no longer seen as a last-minute resort, but rather an opportunity for people to consider their options.

Personal statement

In September 2025, a new format of personal statement will be introduced to students applying for September 2026 entry onwards. Instead of the free text format we are familiar with, it will take the form of three structured questions. This, alongside the decision to waive the application fee for recipients of free school meals, is an attempt to make the application more accessible to students of all backgrounds. UCAS announced that, in 2024, the number of disadvantaged students getting a place at university hit a record high. This is an encouraging statistic, showing progress in the right direction.

There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to students' next steps. Some of your students will go on to study at university, some may take up an apprenticeship, and some straight into employment. Even though trends and priorities may be changing, it is important that your students consider all their options and make informed decisions about their future.



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How to work with student recruitment and outreach teams

By Nia Stokes, Student Recruitment Officer at Swansea University

Most universities will have student recruitment and outreach teams who manage relationships with schools and colleges across the country. These teams are usually split into regional areas. They will either live in or travel to these areas on a regular basis to provide higher education support to schools. For your first point of contact, recruitment office emails can be found on university websites. Alternatively, if you'd like to go straight to your regional rep, the handy UniTasterDays [regional contact search tool](#) will help you to do so.

Once you've found the right contact, there is a whole host of support that student recruitment teams will be able to offer. If you are considering holding your own careers fairs, Recruitment Officers will be able to attend to fill a stand with informational materials about their university. If you'd like to visit a large-scale exhibition with your students, they can also let you know if they'll be attending. Furthermore, Recruitment Officers can provide presentations at your institution on a range of topics tailored for year 12 and 13 students. At Swansea University, we focus on areas such as:

- Why HE and choosing your course
- The UCAS process
- Personal statements (including the changes to 2026 entry)
- Student life
- Student finance
- Interview skills

Topics can be tailored to fit your careers curriculum. Other activities usually include interactive workshop sessions, 1:1 personal statement clinics, and support with mock interviews.

Moreover, if you can find your regional contact, it is worth asking if they have a newsletter for teachers and advisers. Monthly newsletters from recruitment teams often feature the latest sector information, details on university events, and materials to print for your common rooms.

When you're contacting these teams, a few things to keep in mind are:



The recruitment calendar tends to get really busy around October, March, April and June, so it is best to book well in advance if you'd like visits during these months.



Think about the destinations that are most popular with your students. Do they tend to stay local? Could they be looking further afield? Having this in mind when reaching out to universities can enrich the interaction and present students with opportunities they hadn't considered.



All activities are free! Recruitment teams are paid directly by universities, so won't require payment for any activities you request.



Recruitment Officers travel a lot during term time – we can go from Manchester to Cornwall to London all in one week. Having an appreciation of this could strengthen relationships with these teams.

Note from UniTasterDays

Looking for university representatives in your local area?

Many universities employ regional school and college experts located throughout the UK. You can use our free tool to [search for university representatives](#) that live near you.

What to expect when starting a new relationship with a university

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

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

The start of a blossoming relationship

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

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

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

Preparing for a visit

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

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

Regular check-ins

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

Data, data, data

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

Ask who is the best contact going forward

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

Don't be afraid to ask

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

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



How universities can support your attainment raising activities

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

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

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

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

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

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

University outreach teams already do a lot of different things that are designed to support

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

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

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

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

“ You may have taken cohorts to university taster days. These are often subject-specific, with extra- or supra-curricular activities designed to enhance knowledge gained inside the classroom. ”

Supporting you to achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks

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

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

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

Gatsby Benchmark 1. A stable careers programme

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

Gatsby Benchmark 2. Learning from career and labour market information

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

Gatsby Benchmark 3. Addressing the needs of each pupil

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

Gatsby Benchmark 4. Linking curriculum learning to careers

Universities run a number of subject-specific taster workshops, so let us know what students are currently studying so we can link your curriculum to

ours. We can also include a discussion around the career prospects in those areas.

Gatsby Benchmark 5. Encounters with employers and employees

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

Gatsby Benchmark 6. Experiences of workplaces

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

Gatsby Benchmark 7. Encounters with further and higher education

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

Gatsby Benchmark 8. Personal guidance

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

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

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

Sharing university information with parents and carers

By Ellie Frankel, Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Officer, and Emma Culey, Operational Hub Lead and Enterprise Coordinator at ThinkHigher and the Coventry Careers Hub

Engaging parents and carers in conversations about their child's future education can be a challenging task. For many, the idea of their child leaving home and entering the unfamiliar world of university can be overwhelming. This is particularly true for parents and carers who have not experienced

higher education themselves. The uncertainty surrounding this transition often amplifies their concerns. This makes it difficult to fully engage them in discussions about the benefits and opportunities that higher education and other ambitious routes can offer.

In 2023, ThinkHigher and the Coventry Careers Hub took steps to bridge this gap by engaging over 150 parents and carers through our "Your Future Careers Roadshows." These took place across four locations in Coventry and Warwickshire, offering bite-sized 20-minute sessions exploring different pathways. This experience provided us with valuable insights into the best practices for sharing university information with this important demographic. One key lesson learnt is the importance of setting. For parents and carers who have never been to university, stepping onto a campus can be intimidating. Therefore, hosting these conversations in more familiar, community-based settings can be incredibly effective. Providers could consider partnership opportunities with local coffee shops. A neutral

“A neutral venue that feels welcoming can help put parents and carers at ease, encouraging them to participate more openly in the discussion. ”



venue that feels welcoming can help put parents and carers at ease, encouraging them to participate more openly in the discussion.

Equally important is the content of these engagements. It was imperative to highlight not only the benefits that higher education can bring to young people but also the advantages for parents and carers themselves. By focusing on how university can positively impact their child's future, parents and carers can better understand the value of higher education, enabling them to support and encourage their child's aspirations.

Language plays a crucial role in these interactions. The use of higher education jargon can be a significant barrier, making parents and carers feel excluded or overwhelmed. Simplifying the language and avoiding technical terms ensures that the information is accessible and digestible for everyone, regardless of their educational background.

Local context is easily overlooked but plays a huge role in this. Every community has its own unique challenges and barriers when it comes to higher education. Being aware of these local influences and addressing them directly can help alleviate specific concerns that parents and carers may have. This could

include anything from financial worries to the fear of their child moving too far from home. By acknowledging and addressing these concerns, we can build trust and promote a more open dialogue.

We have consistently found open and honest communication is far more effective than a traditional sales pitch. Parents and carers need transparency to feel involved in the conversation, not just as listeners but as active participants who can express their concerns without judgement. One key strength of the collaboration between the Careers Hub and the Uni Connect Programme is that it allows us to explore a wide range of post-16 pathways, not just higher education. This holistic approach helps parents and carers see the bigger picture, reducing the pressure of a single-track focus on university.

Our recommendation moving forward is to integrate these conversations into existing events, such as parents' evenings or options evenings. Partnering with knowledgeable organisations and using resources from impartial bodies can enhance the impact without adding extra work. The goal is to keep the process low-burden but high-impact, ensuring that parents and carers leave sessions feeling informed, reassured, and ready to support their child's educational journey.

“Local context is easily overlooked... Every community has its own unique challenges and barriers when it comes to higher education. „



Did you know we have two other university guides?

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An introduction to Uni Connect and how it can support your students

By George Foote, Outreach Assistant at Make Happen

What is Uni Connect?

The Office for Students (OfS) Uni Connect programme is a national collaborative initiative aimed at supporting young people from underrepresented groups in making informed decisions about their future. The programme brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges, and local partners to offer free and impartial outreach activities and information to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since its inception in 2017, over one million young people from underrepresented groups have engaged with the programme.

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

Objectives of Uni Connect

The primary objectives of Uni Connect are to:

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

How Uni Connect supports students

For students, all Uni Connect activities are free, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent participation. Uni Connect provides a range

of services and activities designed to support students at various stages of their educational journey. These include:

- Outreach activities - workshops, presentations, and events to raise awareness of higher education opportunities.
- University visits - visits to universities and colleges, giving students the chance to experience university life and learn more about the courses and facilities available.
- Information and guidance - impartial information and guidance on the higher education application process, including advice on writing personal statements, preparing for interviews, and student finance.

How Uni Connect supports schools and teachers

Alongside supporting students, the Uni Connect teams are able to offer support and advice to schools and teaching staff, including continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities. This CPD equips teaching staff with the knowledge and skills they may need to support their students in making choices regarding their future. The activities and events that partnerships organise for students can enhance their learning, as well as reduce the burden upon teachers.

Support for parents

Uni Connect provide information, advice, and guidance to parents and carers on how to support their young people through their education and future choices. This is achieved through offering resources and workshops to parents and carers online or in person. The impartiality of Uni Connect ensures that the advice given is in the best interest of the student.

Conclusion

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

The collaborative partnerships that have formed throughout the programme have improved the infrastructure of higher education outreach, ensuring that support is available to the students who need it most. As educators, it is essential to use the resources and support offered by Uni Connect to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed in higher education.

Understanding the University Alliance: a guide for teachers and advisers

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

What is the University Alliance?

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

Facts about the University Alliance

- Alliance universities are leaders in healthcare, engineering, social sciences, creative industries, business, and computing.
- Alliance universities came top for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2023.
- 95% of graduates from Alliance universities were in work, or another activity like further study, just 15 months after graduating, and 93% of those described what they were doing as 'meaningful'.
- Alliance universities are more likely to be rated gold for teaching excellence than universities in any other group according to the government's Teaching Excellence Framework.
- 67% of research at Alliance universities is rated as internationally excellent or world leading.

What are the benefits of studying at an Alliance university?

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

The assessment style also reflects this practical approach with an emphasis on assessing practical projects rather than exams. Alliance universities also deliver excellent research, which means that students gain skills and knowledge that are at the cutting edge of their fields.

Applying to an Alliance university

Alliance universities accept a range of qualifications such as A-Levels, BTECs, T-Levels, and more. The entry requirements for courses are often mid-tariff. This means they don't require high academic grades. Some students perceive this as an indicator that the course isn't valuable, but this isn't the case. Alliance universities are running courses that are not purely academic, and so the entry requirements reflect this. Often, work experience is key to entry onto these courses.

How can this help me as a teacher or adviser?

The process of finding the right course and university can be incredibly stressful for students. As a teacher or adviser, it's important to know there are different types of universities to suit different types of learners. There is a stereotype that going to university involves sitting in lecture theatres and taking exams. This isn't the case. There are world-renowned UK universities offering so much more than that, and many of them are part of the University Alliance.

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

If exposure to industry and strong employment outcomes is important to your students, I thoroughly recommend that you look at what Alliance universities have to offer. Book your students onto a schools and colleges taster day. Come and see first-hand how these institutions go beyond the lecture theatre.

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

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

By Martin Lewis, Founder of MoneySavingExpert.com

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

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

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

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

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



- You should only start repaying after you leave university (which for you is defined as April 2027 at the earliest).
- Then you only repay if you earn over £25,000 a year. Earn less and you don't pay anything back.
- You repay 9% of everything earned above that amount, so earn more and you repay more each month.
- The loan is wiped after 40 years whether you've paid a penny or not. This means many people will be repaying their student loans for most of their working lives.
- There's no worry of debt collectors as it's repaid via the payroll. In other words, it's taken off what you earn before you get the money, just like income tax is. And the debt doesn't go on your credit file.

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

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

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

For 2025 starters, the FULL annual loan is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. The system can and has changed

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

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

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

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

Other important student guides to read:

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



University bursaries and scholarships

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

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

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

What's the difference between bursaries and scholarships?

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

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

University bursaries

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

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

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

University scholarships

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

usually given in termly instalments and can be cash or credit based.

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

There are also scholarships for specific subjects. Sometimes, scholarships are supported by philanthropic donors. For example, at the University of Sunderland we have a Nursing Scholarship which is kindly funded by a local philanthropist and entrepreneur who is an Honorary graduate of the University.

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

Deadlines

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

Where to find scholarships and bursaries

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

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

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

Scholarships update: finding opportunities and standing out

By Jon Hering, Scholarships Lead at Blackbullion

Introduction

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

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

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

When to expect scholarships to launch

Students should be aware of these funding windows:

- **April** – A key period when many scholarships open. Encourage students to prepare applications in the spring.

- **September** – Another wave of scholarships launches in early autumn, giving students a second chance.
- **National Scholarships Week 2025** – Running 31 March to 4 April 2025, in partnership with Amazon. Last year, NSW2024 launched over £800,000 worth of scholarship funding through corporate partners.

Scholarships as a gateway to opportunities

Many scholarships provide more than just financial aid. They offer internships, mentorships, and work experience. These extras can be pivotal in building a student's career. Encourage students to seek scholarships aligned with their goals, as these opportunities make them more appealing to future employers.

Finding opportunities

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

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



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

Increasing chances for success

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

Remind your students to try to feel comfortable sharing experiences about their families, their personal achievements, and what their aspirations are. Linking future goals to the

subject that they have chosen to study will demonstrate the student's commitment to their education and their future, which goes a long way with funders.

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

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

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



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



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The Disabled Students' Allowance

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

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

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

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

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

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

Who is eligible for the DSA?

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

Important note:

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

A student is eligible for DSA if they have a:

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

There is a separate disability allowance for NHS students.

DSA applications

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

Providing evidence

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

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

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

How is DSA paid?

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

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



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The NHS Learning Support Fund

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Budgeting for students

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

Finance is often the biggest concern for students when considering university as an option. Attending university is usually the first time young people must manage a significant budget, so budgeting is crucial for their financial independence, as well as for their overall health and wellbeing.

Planning ahead

The issue with most budgets is that they often fail because people don't stick to them! They don't account for irregular expenses, such as birthdays, purchasing a railcard, or other one-off costs that don't feature in the monthly or weekly plan. To assist with this, there are various budgeting tools available, such as [The Budget Planner](#) on Martin Lewis' website, MoneySavingExpert.

Tips and tricks

If students are planning to move away from home for university, the best tip would be for them to invest in a 16-25 Railcard. They can also apply National Railcard discounts to the TfL Oyster Card, so they can get a third off when travelling around London.

A must before starting university is learning to cook, even if it's just basic recipes. This will make grocery shopping far more affordable and will stretch the budget further for non-essential items like meals out and cinema trips.

Next steps

We really encourage your students to open a bank account before starting university. This will often be the place where the student loan is paid into, and the account used to pay for accommodation. There is a myriad of different bank accounts targeted at students, some of which offer interest free overdraft facilities, but students should be mindful to look at all the terms and conditions when choosing which bank account to open. There are many perks. Some offer a free 16-25 railcard as a complimentary gift for opening a bank account with that provider.

Alternative funding sources

We know that some students aren't able to accept student finance due to the interest that is attached to the loans. This can make some students feel very anxious about money. However, there are often alternative forms of funding, some of which are non-repayable like bursaries and scholarships. Also, some banks and providers are Sharia Compliant and don't have interest attached to their loans. These include at the time of writing:

- Al Rayan Bank
- United Bank
- Ansar Finance

If a student decides to forego a student loan for faith reasons, then this may affect their eligibility for other forms of funding, such as opening a student bank account.

Conclusion

Effective financial management is vital for university life. By planning ahead, using budgeting tools, and leveraging student discounts, students can focus on their studies and enjoy university with peace of mind.



Part-time work opportunities at university

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

92% of prospective undergraduates are concerned about the rising cost of living, according to a survey conducted by The Student Room in September 2023. This can make the availability of part-time jobs on campus, and in the local area, a major factor in a student's decision-making process.

What does a part-time job look like while studying at university?

The first place that students can look for part-time jobs is at their university. There are plenty roles available to apply for.

One of the well-known roles on campus is working as a student ambassador, a position which is very valuable to universities. An ambassador's main job is to share their current experiences with a new wave of prospective students. This could be at an open day, careers fair, or delivery of a student life presentation. There are plenty of opportunities to work as an ambassador throughout the academic year. Ambassador work is typically well paid, and flexible with its hours, allowing students to earn some spending money and slot shifts around their studies and personal life.

If ambassador work isn't likely to be a good fit for your students, encourage them to look for what other part-time work is available on campus. It could be bar work at the students' union or an assistant at the library, helping shelve returned items and catalogue new

resources. There are positions available to suit most people.

Of course, students don't necessarily need to look on campus to find suitable part-time roles for financial support. Part-time roles available to students outside of a university can include being a barista at a coffee shop, bartender, retail assistant, steward at sporting events, lifeguard, or even a personal tutor. There are great options out there when they know how to find them.

How do students find part-time work at university?

Finding a job can be a daunting prospect, especially if students have never worked before. When it comes to the jobs offered at universities, some of the biggest opportunities are offered at welcome fairs. A welcome fair is often seen as a fun social occasion where you can meet new people and collect loads of freebies. However, welcome fairs offer incredible opportunities to find part-time jobs aimed specifically at students. A prime example is a company like Unitemps, who work closely with students and offer opportunities for paid work experience. Careers support teams also have stands at welcome fairs. They can help students obtain part-time jobs, and they usually offer support with CV writing and interview practice for students.

Overall, there's a variety of part-time work out there to enable students to support themselves during their studies. Of course, these roles have important financial benefits, but they also offer other character-building benefits. Firstly, CV-writing and interview practice are two great skills to have, and students develop these while looking for part-time work. When in a job, students can gain plenty of skills that will benefit their academic work, as well as their future prospects after graduation. These skills include teamwork, time management, problem solving, customer service, and so much more.

“Ambassador work is typically well paid, and flexible with its hours, allowing students to earn some spending money and slot shifts around their studies and personal life. ”

Guiding students on what to expect at university: a look into student life

By Susie Oliver, Student Recruitment Intern at the University of Sheffield

University can be a major transition for a lot of students, particularly if it involves moving away from home to an unfamiliar city, without many friends around them. Having an idea of what student life entails may ease some of your students' anxiety about this change in their life.

Academic life

Students may notice a shift in teaching styles from sixth form to university. In some courses, contact hours may be fewer throughout the week. Students are expected to take more initiative in their learning, including completing reading and preparation independently. These contact hours tend to be spent in large-scale lectures or smaller, discussion-based seminars. Alternatively, in STEM-based subjects, students might experience more hands-on learning through lab work alongside their lectures.

Exam formats and assessment methods can vary widely between universities and courses. For instance, at the University of Sheffield, disciplines such as History, Politics, and English Literature often focus on essays, with coursework deadlines spread throughout the year. Meanwhile, science-based courses such as Medicine, Chemistry, and Engineering place more emphasis on exams at the end of each semester. Some fields, such as Psychology and Philosophy, adopt a blended approach, combining both coursework and exams.

Social life

Making new friends is a significant concern for many incoming students. A fantastic way to meet new people is by joining sports clubs and societies. At the beginning of the year, it's great to sign up for these clubs, whether it's just for a taster session or as a member. Both options provide you with the opportunity to meet people in the same boat starting out at university.

With over 350 societies and sports clubs at the University of Sheffield, there's likely to be something to match every interest.

Joining sports and societies can open up opportunities across university life. This includes becoming part of the committee running the club, or travelling around the country competing against other universities, or maybe just being a social member and making new friends. The one thing to remember about university life is that there is something for everyone no matter their interests!

Health and wellbeing

University life can be exciting to a lot of students, offering endless opportunities to socialise and meet new people. However, it is crucial to remember the importance of maintaining wellbeing. Many students fall into the habit of relying on takeaways, ready meals, and sleeping in until noon. Although this lifestyle may seem appealing at first, it will eventually take a toll on physical and mental health.

To stay balanced, it is important for students to make a conscious effort to look after themselves, this may include some form of exercise, learning to cook healthy recipes, and spending time outdoors. For example, in Sheffield, with the Peak District right on our doorstep, many students spend time out there walking and swimming, and it often becomes one of the highlights of their time studying at Sheffield.



How to help students make the most of their time at university

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

Students turn up to lectures or seminars, do some extra reading, submit their assessments, pass them with flying colours and get their degree. There might also be some socialising thrown in too.

That is one way of viewing university, but by preparing your students for what to expect and what they need to put in to get the most out of it, it can become more than a transactional arrangement with some cheap drinks on the side.

Relationships are key

Encourage students to get to know lecturers, their peer group and other key players (the person who makes the coffee each morning is REALLY important).

The vast majority of lecturers welcome contact from students, want to hear their thoughts and be asked for clarification. This provides great support for students both academically and socially.

Peer group support is invaluable; someone to vent with over a coffee or ask questions over WhatsApp, all provide guidance and that key human contact we all need. With more hybrid, remote methods of learning being used, attendance for on campus sessions really helps when building these relationships.

Students should engage fully

There is no point turning up if the student is not actually 'present.' Paying attention to what is

going on during on-campus and online sessions is crucial. Students should take notes to ensure active learning is taking place, limit distractions (there are apps to disable social media, for example, during teaching time). They should also expand learning outside of the formally arranged sessions by reading around the subject, finding links across subjects and where applicable, into day-to-day life.

Take charge of their own learning

One of the key aspects of higher education study is becoming an independent thinker and an autonomous learner. There are huge advantages to this in that students have more choice and options than they may have experienced from compulsory education. But with great power comes great responsibility...attendance may not be monitored as closely, and additional reading and research will need to be done outside of the classroom.

Organisation and time management are skills that will need to be honed and students need to take charge of any feedback received. How can they improve? Are there common areas they are falling down on? How could this help them with future assessments in that subject, but also in different subjects?

Plan ahead

It is never too early to think about careers. What experience do they already have? How can they get more? All universities have a careers service that will be able to find volunteering and paid positions that can broaden any CV when it is time to think about the graduate job market.

University is not all about study either, so factoring in socialising, hobbies and me time is essential to allow students time to recharge and gain valuable transferable skills. By embracing all university can bring, students will have a successful, enjoyable and unforgettable experience.



Exploring unexpected opportunities at university: what your students may not know

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

There are many unexpected opportunities available to your students at university. From joining the committee of their favourite society, to signing up for a job as a student ambassador, there are chances for students to really make the most out of their university experience. Many students are not aware of these opportunities when they are applying, so you could direct them towards these when they are researching their options.

Societies and sport clubs

Students can join societies for various reasons, whether it's to meet like-minded people, make new friends, or take part in activities they enjoy. After their first year, they will have the option to apply for a role on the committee of these clubs, made up of fellow students. These roles can include president, admin, social secretary, communications officer, and more. Personally, I signed up to the university hockey club solely to make new friends, and in my second year I joined their committee. I came away with new friends, but also a brand-new hobby and useful new skills.

Placements and studying abroad

On most university courses, there is the opportunity to do a placement year. This is a chance for students to either work in their chosen industry for a year, or work and study abroad in a country that interests them.

There is plenty of funding available for studying abroad through the [Turing Scheme](#), which is free for students to access. The amount they receive will differ depending on the country they are moving to.

Working as a student ambassador

One of the best ways students can earn extra cash is by working at their university. At Anglia Ruskin, we have ARU Temps, our temp agency which hires students for a range of jobs on and off campus. As part of the Schools and Colleges Team, we use ambassadors for a wide range of tasks, like inputting data or speaking to a school group about student life. Working as an ambassador, on a zero-hour contract, is a great opportunity for students to earn money when it suits them, as they can choose how often they work around their studies. They also gain soft skills and general work experience, which is hugely beneficial for their CVs when they graduate.

Networking and experience

There are many subject-specific opportunities available to students through their chosen course. For example, when studying creative subjects, students may have the opportunity to exhibit their work or perform in showcases. This gives them valuable opportunities to network with contacts outside of their university and share their work with a wider audience.

Other courses may include project work with employers or work experience opportunities with local organisations. This allows students to gain real-world experience within their sector. Whilst being taught by industry professionals and experts, students may also be able to take part in vital research related to their industry. At ARU, our [Students at the Heart of Knowledge Exchange \(SHoKE\)](#) is one of the ways we provide students with volunteering opportunities to make a social impact and showcase their professional skills to employers.

Applying to university and researching options can be an overwhelming time for many students. However, sharing information with them about the many opportunities available can make the process even more exciting.

Help your students develop their university study skills

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

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

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

Learning their learning style

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

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

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

tools to face challenging assignments and examinations.

Reflecting to improve

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

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

Support with learning

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

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

Supporting students with the transition to university

**By PJ Dobrée-Carey, Founder of
FromHighSchoolToUni.com**

Introduction

A teacher's role in preparing students for the transition to university goes beyond completing the curriculum and striving for successful results. Using a few key strategies can have a big impact on a student's success rate and their preparedness for life after school.

Common challenges

Moving out of home, maybe for the first time, and beginning independent life is a huge milestone for most students. Several common challenges can affect a student's ability to thrive on campus or drop out. The academic pressure, the increased workload, independent study, social integration, and financial responsibilities are the most significant issues identified in recent years.

After the excitement of moving in and Freshers Week is over, the academic programme can seem overwhelming. With an unexpected increase in workload, attending lectures, and the requirement for independent study, the change in pace and expectations will be a new concept for most students. They may struggle to manage their time and new responsibilities.

In an unfamiliar environment, students may also find it difficult to adapt socially, make new friends, and settle into campus life.

Impact on dropout rates

Although most students can meet the course requirements at university, they will need to exercise a great deal more autonomy and self-discipline than at school where students are used to a structured environment, with teachers giving clear instructions, deadlines, and repercussions for not handing in homework. With much less oversight and support at university, the responsibility lies with the student to submit assignments on time. Some students find it difficult to adapt

to the increased workload and pace of university courses without the guidance they previously received.

In addition, the pressure of other simultaneous challenges such as financial responsibilities, social integration, and mental health issues can affect a student's capacity to cope and persevere with their course.

Strategies for teachers

Understanding these challenges is important and provides an opportunity for teachers to help reduce the dropout rates by preparing and supporting students early on. Teachers can deploy strategies to help students develop their autonomy, resilience, and self-discipline needed to succeed at university. You can teach your students about budgeting and financial management, time management techniques, and promoting open discussions about mental health.

Providing the right tools and resources can ensure that students thrive and succeed. For example, the following strategies can be incorporated during tutor time:

- Introducing the basics of financial management by providing practical lessons on creating and managing a budget can help students learn to manage their finances effectively.
- By running workshops on time management and study techniques, teachers can demonstrate how to prioritise tasks, manage time efficiently, and develop effective study habits. Students will then learn how to cope with the increased workload and improve their autonomy.
- Holding open discussions about mental health and wellbeing can help normalise the conversation, highlighting when to recognise problems and how to seek support.
- Encouraging participation in class time, workshops, or extracurricular activities can help boost a student's social interaction and sense of belonging.

By integrating these approaches in the classroom, teachers can help students build the foundation they need to thrive as young adults beyond school. Providing the right tools and resources will ensure that students are academically prepared for their transition to university, and their personal development and wellbeing will set them up for success in adult life.

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How to support elite athletes at university

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

Juggling university with a competitive sporting career can be challenging. We asked Emma Cartmill, Athlete Lifestyle and Advocacy Coordinator at Oriam, Scotland's Sports Performance Centre, for her recommendations on what support to look for.

Emma says, "one of the biggest challenges for new students is adjusting to living independently and taking responsibility for their own training, lifestyle, and studies. If students are moving away from home, this can be particularly tricky, so it's important to research what support universities can offer to help with this transition and throughout their time at university."

The support available to students will vary from university to university. It may be dependent on the level and sport they are competing at. Encourage students to research what's available by checking university websites. Students can also speak to their sport's governing body for recommendations on university partner programmes.

Some universities will offer an Athlete Development Programme. For eligible students, an Athlete Development Programme will embed high performance training into a workable academic timetable, and may provide a range of additional support including:

- Contextual offer at application
- Academic timetable flexibility
- Expert coaching
- Individualised strength and conditioning
- Educational workshops on topics such as anti-doping and nutrition
- Physiotherapy
- Sports psychology
- Athlete mentoring
- Fitness testing.

If no Athlete Development Programme is available, it's still worth asking admissions teams if they can make a contextual offer.

Sports scholarships may be available, dependent on level of performance. Sports scholarships can include:

- Tuition fee reductions
- Gym membership
- Travel assistance for competitions.

Emma also suggests students, "consider carefully what subject to study and the academic demands of a course before application. If a course has a large proportion of lab work, for example, this may be trickier to juggle if you will be travelling a lot for competitions." Work placements or study abroad requirements may also need careful planning.

Another key factor for athletes is access to performance level training. Is there a local or university club providing coaching and training at a sufficient level to support the athlete to improve?

Being able to stay on or close to campus and training facilities is important, particularly for early morning gym sessions. Students should consider the impact of commuting time to university and if this may impact training.

Communication with teaching staff is key. It is critical to be proactive, get your timetable as quickly as you can, work out a schedule, and then keep to it. Students may be able to access recordings of lectures that are missed due to training or competition commitments. However, good communication with teaching staff is essential so any clashes can be resolved as soon as possible.

Sporting communities are very welcoming and offer a lot of social and personal development opportunities. Emma is keen to reassure that, "most universities will have active Sports Unions offering a wide range of sporting opportunities at all levels of participation. This is a great opportunity to meet like-minded friends and develop skills such as coaching, refereeing, or umpiring."

Helping students with university accommodation

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

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

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

University owned accommodation

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

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

Partner accommodation

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

Private accommodation

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

After the first year, students may move into privately owned halls but, more often than not, they'll move into private rented houses in the local area with friends they've made in their first year. Many universities help students to find this accommodation and can also help them to check contracts with private landlords.

Five top tips for your students when making accommodation choices



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



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



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



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



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

The value of university societies

By Dominic White, Schools and Colleges Regional Assistant at the University of Derby

The student world of university life is filled with ever changing thoughts, ideas, beliefs and fun activities. The term “societies” can often mean different things at different universities. However, generally, the term “societies” or “socs” refers to three different categories of extracurricular opportunities that give students the chance to try something they have never done before. These three categories are sports, societies, and student-led services (SLS).

Sports

University sports clubs are an integral part of student life, encouraging personal fitness and wellbeing. The sports offering at universities ranges from mainstream sports such as football and rugby to smaller up and coming sports like korfbal, rounders, and ultimate frisbee.

As well as the physical and mental benefits, taking part in sports clubs builds key skills including teamwork, leadership and communication. Many institutions offer the opportunity for students to compete through BUCS (British Universities & Colleges Sport), who host national fixtures allowing students to compete against different universities on a weekly basis.

Alongside this, universities regularly host internal intermural competitions such as halls of residence leagues. University sports also help students build a strong sense of community and belonging on campus. For example, at the University of Derby we have “Team Derby.” This is the branded manifestation of the student sporting community that has developed over our institution’s history.

Societies

Societies are an excellent way for students to engage in new hobbies and explore exciting areas of interest. Often, societies will sit within these categories:

- Academic – for instance, Law, History, Midwifery
- Interest and inclusive – for instance, Debate, Warhammer, Esports
- Active and performance – for instance, Musical Theatre, Ballroom and Latin Dance
- Religious and cultural – for instance, Nigerian Soc, Filipino Soc

Societies are a brilliant outlet for students, enabling them to pursue established or newfound passions and hobbies with likeminded people. Being a part of a society can also enhance subject knowledge outside the classroom and provides additional exposure to their fields of interest. Societies also offer networking and professional development opportunities. For example, certain societies might give students the option to gain accredited qualifications in areas like first aid.

Student-led services

Student-led services give students exposure to a very different side of the world of extracurricular activities. They don’t just focus on the student community but the local community too. Often student-led services are grouped around three areas:

- Media and broadcasting
- Volunteering and charity fundraising
- Entrepreneurial skills

The biggest difference between sports, societies, and student-led services is their leadership. Sports and societies are led by elected committees. Student-led services are led by a committee appointed by interview.

Skills development is a key opportunity for those in a student-led service. Project management, event coordination, negotiation, and conflict resolution are gained, and these skills play an important role in both a student’s professional and personal life. Students who take part in student-led services can participate in many activities such as raising money, volunteering for causes that are important to them, and producing their own radio show or podcasts.

Participating in university societies will offer your students invaluable opportunities for skill development, personal growth, and networking. Encouraging students to continuously explore extracurriculars improves their overall university experience, boosts their future career prospects, and importantly lets them have fun.

Helping students to understand reasons to consider university

By Tom Heyes, Education Liaison Officer at Edge Hill University

Individualising the reasons to consider university

It is easy to list the general benefits of university: increased earning potential, academic development, gaining greater transferrable and social skills, and many others. The difficulty comes when conveying this to students disillusioned with the idea of university.

University is not a one-size-fits-all experience. There are over 35,000 courses and 400 institutions, from hybrid learning models to distance learning, traditional degrees to degree apprenticeships. Helping students to understand this is a key starting point. They can experience university in a way that suits them.

‘Knowing’ your students can help you ask the right question to spark their interest in university. For some, it’s about their love for a subject. For others, it’s the student life and social experience, or the financial and career opportunities that higher education cultivates.

Some of the most productive conversations I have seen between advisors and students have started with, “When else would you get the opportunity to...?” You can finish that sentence in a variety of ways:

- “Study abroad and learn a new culture”
- “Spend three years studying the subject you love”
- “Train and develop in state-of-the-art facilities”

Getting to know your students will help you finish that sentence.

Understanding why your students may not consider university

Typically, when advising students, we jump to myth-busting about student finance repayments or explaining why a tuition loan isn’t something to be worried about. However, we can often fall short in understanding other reasons why they might not consider university.

If, like me, you grew up in a household where your supporters saw university as something to experience and enjoy, then you may never have asked yourself the question, “Should I consider university?” For a lot of students, that isn’t the case.

During my time as a practitioner, countless students have hesitated about applying to university because of:

- Finance concerns
- Mental health and moving away from home
- Academic fatigue
- Concerns around making friends.

Rather than dismiss these concerns, we should help students recognise the support available at university and the unique opportunities for growth.

Facilitating students’ interest in university

Careers and guidance practitioners, and university outreach teams, share the responsibility of providing students with information to overcome barriers to considering university.

University events can be a great way to change a student’s perspective. Encouraging students to attend open days can create more opportunities for students to interact with universities. They can chat to a students’ union to discover a society that would make them feel at home, and speak with specific teams about tailoring their studies to their individual needs.

As careers staff, organising bespoke campus visits with university outreach teams can also be a great way of personalising the university learning experience for your students.

University outreach teams can create bespoke programmes with specific sessions that focus on areas of concern such as ‘Accessing support services at university’ or ‘Transitioning to university’. You can often request for these to be delivered at your institution too.

Encouraging students to consider university

The number of 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds applying to university has [increased by 30% over the last ten years](#). We should all continue to consider the barriers these students face, and how our information, advice, and guidance can effectively encourage them to consider university.

Careers support available at university

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

The increasing number of university students makes the graduate job market a competitive place to be.

Universities care about the future of their students, with teams dedicated to supporting them with gaining enterprise skills, securing work experience, writing CVs, preparing for interviews, and psychometric testing.

So, how important is it for students to get a head start on career planning and prep? What support should they expect from their university?

Placements, internships, and work experience

Employers aren't just looking for applicants with the best grades. They are looking for those candidates that have experience and skills that benefit their business straight away. Many use opportunities such as placements and internships to screen students for potential job opportunities.

If a student hasn't chosen to include a placement year as part of their course, then internships and work experience opportunities are vital in helping students secure key transferable skills valued by employers. These skills include project management, problem solving, adaptability, and teamwork, all of which can be spoken about at future interviews.

Some universities have long-standing relationships with employers, locally, nationally, and possibly internationally. They advertise work opportunities through online student portals or on-campus job shops. Other universities help find these opportunities and offer guidance on how to approach the organisations.

Job search, applying, and interviews

Knowing where to start can be the biggest barrier when applying for a job. From traditional paper-based processes to online

competency-based tests, there's lots of ways organisations recruit and interview candidates. It can seem overwhelming if it's a student's first time applying for a job.

Universities can support students throughout the process, whether that be understanding the job market, knowing where to look for vacancies, crafting an impactful CV, preparing for a test or interview, and effectively following up afterwards.

Giving students the skills to confidently research, apply, and interview for jobs is crucial for their development and future career.

Career fairs and networking events

These are a fantastic opportunity for students to explore job opportunities, network with potential employers or graduates, and get an idea of the type of sector they want to work in. Students can make that all important first impression, understand what companies are looking for in their employees, get tips on what to include in applications, and learn how to prepare for interview.

Some universities offer industry-specific events, such as an engineering fair. Others host general events with a range of sectors attending. Either way, researching which organisations are attending can help students decide who to talk to and what to ask.

Enterprise

If you have students who are ambitious entrepreneurs, it's important they check how the university supports them in setting up their own business. It could be through graduate incubation units or opportunities to engage with experts from business.

At Teesside, we have an entrepreneurial community to support our university's most promising start-ups and founders. We invest our time and resources to help them succeed with subsidised starter offices, mentoring, and networking events.

It's important for your students to understand they will get out what they put in. They are competing against thousands of other graduates, so working with a university careers team and using their expertise means they can stand out in a competitive job market.

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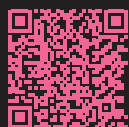


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What do employers look for in graduates?

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

We know university applicants worry that their choices will affect how they are perceived and assessed by employers. But are these worries founded? We asked employers what they thought.

In 2023, [University Alliance](#) conducted focus groups with 14–17-year-olds. We repeatedly heard concerns like, “I’m worried how different universities and subjects will be seen by employers,” and, “If I choose the wrong course at the wrong university, will I struggle to find a job?”

Given the high levels of stress these concerns are causing young people, we wanted to know the extent they reflected employers’ priorities. As such, in 2024, we commissioned [CBI Economics](#) to survey employers to find out what they really care about when recruiting graduates.

[The study](#), published by CBI Economics and UA in August 2024, showed that some of the things causing university applicants the *most* anxiety are actually the *least* important to employers.

1. Which university an applicant went to is not considered important by employers

The university an applicant studied at was the least important factor for employers when assessing graduate applications – with only 8% of employers saying that choice of university was important to them.

Where there were preferences by university type, employers favoured graduates from universities with specialisms in relevant subject areas and universities that specialise in vocational degrees, with 42% saying it was important if a candidate attended a professional and technical university.

2. Subject studied is important – but it’s more important in some industries than others

Subject choice is important, particularly for some careers, but it is not the most important factor, and nor is it equally important to all employers.

For example, while 52% of employers said that relevance of the subject studied was an important factor to them, this varied from 69% in the production sector versus 44% in the business services sector.

3. The most important graduate employability factors were transferrable skills and enthusiasm for the role

Enthusiasm for the role was a clear front runner as the most important factor for employers, and this was followed by transferrable skills such as communication.

Most degrees support students to develop these transferrable skills, and many universities have dedicated programmes to help students track and record examples of how they have demonstrated them. Unless a student is really set on a specific career, being in the best position to make the most of these opportunities will be more important than subject or university choice. That means choosing the course that will most inspire and motivate them.

4. Degrees with vocational elements were viewed favourably

Graduates with degrees that include vocational experience as part of their course (such as internships, placement years, or employer-informed projects at university) were deemed to perform better throughout the recruitment process. 85% of employers believed this kind of vocational experience enhanced performance at interview.

What can we take from this?

University applicants are, understandably, concerned about their future careers, and it is important that careers advice is informed by labour market information.

Our hope is that the findings of the CBI Economics study will be a tool for careers advisors to help alleviate some of these pressures, and help applicants choose courses based on their own preferences, not the perceived preferences of employers.

The different types of university courses

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

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

Bachelor's degree

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

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

Sandwich programmes

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

Foundation year

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

Degree apprenticeships

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



Supporting students in researching universities and subject choices

By Sophie Jones, Regional Recruitment Officer at the University of Essex

With over 50,000 courses and more than 160 universities to choose from, students can easily feel overwhelmed when deciding what to study and where. Should they focus on the course, the university, or future job opportunities? To help, here are some key strategies for guiding students through this important decision-making process.

Understanding interests and career goals

A great place to start is by encouraging students to think about their interests and career goals. Ask simple questions like, "What do you enjoy doing?" or "What careers interest you?" For students with clear goals, like becoming a conservationist, help them research which qualifications or subjects are needed. They can then narrow down courses from there.

For those who aren't sure about their future, suggest that they focus on what they enjoy now. If they dislike A Level Maths, a maths-heavy course might not be a good fit, even if it has great job prospects. Remind them that enjoying their subject is key to long-term success.

Choosing the right course

Once students have an idea of what they want to study, they should start looking for the right course. It's important to know that courses with the same title may be different at each university. Some might offer different modules, teaching methods, or assessments. Make sure they research what's included to see if it matches their interests.

They should also consider their learning style. Some courses rely more on exams, while others focus on coursework. Advise students to think about what suits them best.

For students with more than one interest, joint honours degrees - where they can study two subjects - might be a good option.

Does university choice matter?

After choosing a course, it's time to think about the right university. While the course is the most important factor, the university itself matters too. Students should think about things like teaching style, facilities, and location.

For example, if a student likes the buzz of city life, they might prefer a city university. But if they want everything in one place, a campus-based university could be a better fit. The cost of living is another big factor. Living in London, for instance, is much more expensive than other areas, so students need to budget carefully.

Choosing the right university will help students feel more confident and comfortable, which is important as they start their adult life.

Classroom activity

A helpful way to teach students how to make decisions about courses and universities is to compare it to something they already know, like choosing a mobile phone. Ask students how they picked their current phone. They'll likely mention things like features, price, or brand.

This same approach can be used for university choices. The course is the "features," affordability is the "price," and the university's reputation or location is the "brand." By breaking it down like this, students can better understand how to make more informed decisions.

Top tip

Interactions such as attending open days, taster sessions, and career fairs can help students visualise their future and make informed decisions. Schools can also invite universities for talks, and regional officers, like me, can introduce students to opportunities beyond their local area, broadening their horizons.

Helping students understand the different types of universities

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

With over 50,000 courses available in the UK at more than 160 different institutions, learners have an extensive and diverse choice ahead of them when beginning their university research.

When advising your learners to navigate the options available to them, they should remember that every university will offer something unique regardless of which category it falls into. Moreover, they should have first identified what they wish to study at university. Every institution's degree portfolio is different or specialised, as are the teaching methods or modules on similarly named courses.

Campus or city university? Small or large university?

If students learn better in a specific environment, these questions should be a part of their decision-making process. Do they thrive in smaller classes, where they receive a larger amount of personalised attention? Do they wish to study at a university where everything is on one campus? Do they want to experience an entire city at a university spread across their favourite location?

Advising learners to reflect on what they hope to gain from their university experience is the best starting point when exploring these options. Visiting open days to get a feel for a campus, city, large and small university is their first step towards understanding the distinctions.

What's the difference between a Russell Group and Red Brick university?

Russell Group and Red Brick universities both house prestigious institutions. The Russell Group is comprised of 24 world-class, research-intensive universities, and have strong global reputations. The phrase 'Red Brick' university has become

interchangeable with describing a Russell Group institution, and for good reason! Often, Red Brick universities are part of the current day Russell Group. The main difference between the descriptions of these institutions is their history: Red Bricks were built in industrial cities, and were originally known for their engineering programmes.

If your learner is looking for a traditional or academic university, it's natural that they may start their research within this group. Yet, other universities also offer traditional and academic experiences. Looking at course-focussed league table rankings for teaching and student experience statistics should accompany this research.

Modern universities and post-1992 universities

If your learners ask about these university types, essentially it is their timeframe of establishment which differentiates them. 'Modern universities' are polytechnic or metropolitan universities which gained university status in the 1970s and 1980s. Post-1992 institutions were established, or gained university status, after 1992.

Although these universities may be younger in comparison to Russell Group institutions, they offer no less in educational quality. They may even offer a wider range of vocational degrees, and a student's course preference should guide their university selection.

Specialist universities, conservatoires, and colleges of higher education

Specialist universities, as the name suggests, are experts in teaching specific subject areas. Examples include veterinary, medical, or arts institutions. Conservatoires usually focus on performing arts, specialising in acting, music, or dance. Colleges of higher education are colleges which offer degree-level qualifications, often accredited by a partner university.

Other institutions may offer similar qualifications and a wider university experience, but learners may prefer to learn in a specialist environment. It's always worth students visiting both specialist and mainstream institutions before submitting their applications. Likewise, studying at a local college might align more suitably with a student's lifestyle, whilst affording them the opportunity to gain the qualification they need.

Information sessions with St Mary's Schools and Colleges



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96% of graduates are
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or further study within 15
months of graduation
HESA 2024

Top 10 in the UK for
student experience
The Sunday Times
Good University Guide 2024



The benefits of studying in Wales

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

Wales is a popular university destination for students from across the world. When you visit Wales, it is easy to see why this is the case, with its natural beauty and vibrant urban centres. In addition, there are some specific advantages that Wales can offer, which has led many teachers and advisers to encourage their students to study in Wales.

Low cost of living

Unfortunately, the cost-of-living crisis is having a detrimental impact on most people's lives. However, studying in Wales will help many of your students with this issue, due to the cost of living in Wales being lower than the UK average. From accommodation costs to the price of public transport, students will save money on a daily basis, compared to if they were studying in a city within England. This will allow students to keep more of their student loan and hard-earned money to enjoy the positives that Wales has to offer.

Multiple university options

Wales has eight higher education institutions: Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales, Bangor University, Aberystwyth University, Swansea University, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and Wrexham University. They all have unique characteristics, so there will be a Welsh university that caters for each of your students, depending on their preferences.

Easy transport links

Transport links are continuously improving across Wales, giving quick and easy access to the majority of our universities. For universities based in South Wales, the M4

gives direct access to major hubs such as Bristol (1 hour 15 minutes from Cardiff City Centre) and London (3 hours 10 minutes from Cardiff City Centre).

In addition to this, the main train stations are well linked to Manchester Piccadilly, all main London stations, and Birmingham New Street. For universities based in North Wales, the M53 and M56 provide great links to Liverpool, Manchester, and the surrounding towns and cities in the Northwest. Also, with close proximity to train stations such as Crewe, it is easy to get to any part of the UK from North Wales using the rail system.

Growth industries

Many industries across Wales have seen remarkable growth over the past few years. This has created a stronger job market with better pay and conditions for students that graduate within Wales. Some of our strengths are:

- Creative careers – these are growing fast in Wales, second only to London and Manchester in the UK.
- Marine energy initiatives and low-carbon projects.
- Regenerative medicine and cell therapy - creating a world-leading regenerative medicine ecosystem.
- Online insurance aggregators – the UK's first price comparison site Confused.com was launched in Wales, and now MoneySuperMarket and GoCompare are also based in Wales.
- High value manufacturing – we are home to over 5,000 companies in this sector, which employs over 150,000 people. These companies operate in a wide range of sectors, such as aerospace, automotive, power generation, infrastructure, and low carbon.

Hopefully, this article has provided you with enough information to demonstrate that Wales is a great country for students to study in, and potentially call their home after university.



The benefits of studying in Scotland

By Jenny Patterson. Student Recruitment Officer at Heriot-Watt University

Your students may have visited Scotland on holiday, to watch a world-class sporting event, or attend one of the many cultural events and festivals held here throughout the year. Scotland can also offer your students a fantastic university education. This article explores the many benefits of studying in Scotland.

Scottish universities are prestigious

Scotland offers 600 years of excellence in higher education.

It is home to four of the six oldest UK universities, as well as many modern institutions. The quality and structure of the education system in Scotland is renowned and has been replicated by many countries around the world.

Most Scottish school leavers have studied Highers or a mix of Highers and Advanced Highers. Scottish universities traditionally offer four-year degree pathways with the option to study your degree over three years for A level students.

Scottish universities are empowering

The four-year degree structure is a very popular choice and has many advantages. It will offer your students:

- Flexibility - The first two years of study can be more flexible, as they often allow students to study their subject and the surrounding subjects as well. This enables students to gain a breadth of knowledge, and often allows them to switch degrees after the first year if they find their interest has changed.
- Skills - The knowledge gained before specialising in their later years of study

enables students to improve and develop study skills. This is highly valued by employers.

- Time - A four-year degree provides time to mature and develop as a young adult. Students can get to grips with university life and living independently, whilst making the most of the student experience.

Your students may have questions about tuition fees, particularly if they're considering a four-year degree option. Don't worry: the application process for tuition and maintenance loans are the same as they are elsewhere in the UK. Students can apply for a student loan for each year of study.

Scottish universities offer fantastic graduate prospects

The quality of education in Scotland, depth of research excellence, and strong industry connections fostered by Scottish universities mean that our students benefit from some of the strongest graduate outcomes in the UK. In fact, five Scottish universities feature in the UK top 20 for positive outcomes for graduates in full-time employment or further study. This is reported in the HESA Graduate Outcomes survey of 2021/22 when looking at graduates' activities 15 months after graduation.

Scottish universities are welcoming

Your students will receive a warm welcome. Scottish universities are diverse and inclusive, home to over 50,000 students from more than 180 countries each year.

There's something for everyone in Scotland, with easy access to vibrant cities, beaches, and the great outdoors. The cities are some of the safest cities in the UK to be a student, and they are well-connected by rail and air.

Better yet, students under the age of 22 receive free bus travel in Scotland. They can make the most of this to explore Scotland in their leisure time.

Your students will discover a fantastic student experience in Scotland.

Understanding university league tables

By Darcy Beckett, Student Recruitment Assistant at Lancaster University

The league tables are a popular starting point for students beginning their research into universities. By listing almost all UK universities, they help students in the early stages of their research find out what institutions exist and provide an indicator of how they rank compared to one another.

For universities that rank highly, either overall or in specific subjects, the league tables can form a large part of their brand. However, many students are unaware of the factors actually being assessed. Therefore, it is important to encourage them to look beyond the numbers to assess whether they align with their personal criteria for a university.

In the UK there are three main league tables: The Complete University Guide, The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide, and The Guardian University Guide. They assess the same key areas, which can broadly be grouped as:

- Entry standards
- Value added
- Continuation
- Graduate outcomes
- University expenditure
- Research
- Student-staff ratios
- Student satisfaction

Rather than considering advertised entry grades, the league tables measure the average UCAS tariff score for new students, meaning they include the lower grades that universities typically accept during Confirmation and Clearing. The impact of teaching is assessed by considering the number of students graduating with 'good degrees' (firsts and 2:1s), whilst continuation measures the percentage of first-year students continuing into year two.

They examine the number of graduates in highly skilled employment (requiring a degree) 15 months after their graduation. To understand the amount that universities reinvest, spending per student on academic services and facilities (such as libraries and sports) is also calculated. For some students, a university's research is an important consideration. Therefore, the quality and proportion of staff involved in research is a large factor in most league tables.

Student-staff ratios are a useful measure for understanding the amount of support and contact available to students. One of the most important measures in league tables is student satisfaction. The National Student Survey reveals students' opinions on the quality of their teaching, providing a valuable insight into the actual experience of studying at that university. The league tables weight each factor differently, producing minor variations in positioning. Many online tables allow students to sort based on their priorities. Students should be encouraged to explore this, as a ranking which prioritises student satisfaction will be noticeably different to the overall ranking, but this may be a more useful tool for a student if this is their key priority.

For students with specific courses in mind, subject tables are arguably more important. They assess the same criteria as the overall rankings but at a departmental level. Some universities may rank lower overall but excel in particular subjects, whilst some high-ranking universities may not rank highly in a particular subject, or even offer the subject at all.

League tables are undeniably a useful tool for shortlisting and researching universities, but they should not inform the entirety of a student's decision. Additional aspects beyond the ones measured should also be researched, such as the campus, nightlife, course flexibility, and assessment types. Equally, no ranking can embody how a student feels at a university.

No student should feel pressured to apply to a higher ranked university over one that aligns with their priorities and where they feel comfortable. For students that are concerned with rankings, it is important they look beyond the numbers to understand what is being measured.

Assisting students considering degree apprenticeships

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

Apprenticeship popularity continues to grow, with many people expressing an interest in this method of study due to its lack of tuition fees and the chance to 'earn while you learn.' Although degree apprenticeships are an amazing opportunity, students need to consider whether this method of learning is right for them, or if a different route would be a better option.

With drop-out rates for degree apprenticeships being at 47% according to the EKSQ 'No train, no gain' report, it is important that students are thoroughly considering whether the apprenticeship route is the right pathway for them. Just as funding is an important factor for consideration, so is the suitability for the method of study and their likelihood to complete.

Apprenticeships can offer an excellent opportunity to kickstart a student's career and study while working alongside industry professionals. However, it's really important that students are making an informed decision and understand what studying as an apprentice really means.

Personality and future goals

If student life, joining the students' union, moving into student accommodation, or studying abroad are big factors for going to university, then an apprenticeship is not the right pathway to choose.

First and foremost, an apprentice is considered an employee first and a student second, which comes with its own benefits and limitations. Apprentices gain first-hand experience of working within the sector and applying the knowledge they learn, but they are also working full-time hours and must commit to the responsibilities of their workplace and role.

Furthermore, many degree apprenticeships can take between 4 to 6 years to complete, which means the student needs to be ready to commit to that sector for several years to gain their qualifications. This could be a dream come true for somebody set on their career goals and ready to gain over 4 years of experience within their desired field. However, it may not be the right choice for a student wanting the other elements of the student lifestyle.

What do students interested in an apprenticeship need to know?

All apprenticeships require the completion of level 2 English and Maths qualifications. While some providers do allow students to study these alongside an apprenticeship, it is easier to achieve these before they start as it can be very demanding to juggle full-time work, their apprenticeship, and the English and Maths qualifications.

They should also gain lots of work or volunteering experience before applying because apprenticeship opportunities can be competitive. Prior experience can help set them apart.

How to apply

Training providers, such as colleges and universities, don't usually provide apprenticeship opportunities, so the student will always need to secure work with an employer first. There are no specific deadlines to applying, so they need to be looking all year-round for opportunities and secure positions similar to applying for a 'regular' job.

“An apprentice is considered an employee first and a student second, which comes with its own benefits and limitations. ,,



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Helping students identify creative career pathways

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

Figuring out career plans and pathways is difficult enough for any student, and the case remains the same when it comes to studying and working creatively. It's not just about highlighting the different pathways and helping them discover which one might be best for them, but to also dispel taboos around creative careers that still persist today.

The UK creative industry

Thanks to media headlines and preconceptions from family and peers, there are many students who might have an interest in creative practices but don't believe a creative career is viable. Presenting facts that offer inspiration can help dispel myths and taboos. The UK creative industries are valued at £126 billion, according to government figures, and there are over 2.4 million jobs within the creative sector. That's a lot of opportunities for young creatives, and a hopeful sign for students wanting to work in creative fields.

Choosing a subject area

Most students applying to creative courses come from an art and design background where they might not have had a chance to explore different artistic practices. There aren't many general art and design courses at university, which opens the door to students specialising in areas they never knew existed.

As with anything university-related, the best thing a student can do is to attend open days to gather lots of information about different

courses and their institutions. But when it comes to making the jump from studying art in school to developing their practice at university, students should be encouraged to explore different areas through practical means.

Different HE institutions run their own programmes, online schools, and events that give students a taste of specific subject areas, such as animation or graphic design. These are designed to give students insights into those courses and industries, so they can make informed decisions on which path is best for them. Signing up to university mailing lists for teachers will let you know what offerings there are for your students. If you'd rather not be bombarded with emails, you could check out a university's event page on their website or contact their recruitment and outreach team directly.

Deciding on a course

Even if a student has decided on a particular creative subject area, it can be overwhelming to sift through the numerous courses and choose one that suits their intended pathway. Breaking into the creative industry hinges on two key factors: networking and having a professional portfolio. Getting that across to students can help them whittle down their choices to whichever course they feel provides them the opportunity to develop both.

There are some questions you can get students to think about: would they prefer a practical or theoretical course? What facilities does the course provide for them to work on creative projects? Do the lecturers have connections with industry professionals? Do the topics and projects explored throughout the course align with their interests and creative practice?

Next steps

For students, getting them to attend open days, and take part in programmes and events run by universities, can be massively helpful in letting them decide the best path forward. You could also invite universities into your class to run talks and workshops on creative careers.

“Presenting facts that offer inspiration can help dispel myths and taboos.”

Demystifying Higher Technical Qualifications

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

You may have heard of certain qualifications, like HNDs, but what do they have to do with Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and university study? This article explains what they are, the most common HTQs that you will come across, and which students could benefit from considering one.

What are Higher Technical Qualifications?

An HTQ is a recognised technical qualification which has a specific quality mark. This is awarded by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) who assess the qualifications against occupational standards. If a qualification meets an occupational standard, it means the skills that students gain on that course directly relate to a specific job, and they will graduate as 'work-ready.'

HTQs are level 4 and 5 qualifications, the equivalent level of study as the first and second year of an undergraduate bachelor's degree. HTQs ordinarily have part-time study options, and are offered at both FE or HE institutions. At some institutions, there are options to top-up to a degree, or join a degree course in second or third year. Some of the more common HTQs you will come across are:

- Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (HNC/HND) - 1 or 2 year-long vocational courses.
- Certificates/Diplomas of Higher Education (CertHE/DipHE) - 1 or 2 years long, but slightly more academically focussed than an HNC/HND. They are offered at HE institutions, as the name suggests.
- Foundation Degrees (Fd) - 2 years long, not to be confused with a foundation year.

Whilst these are popular qualifications, they aren't classified as an HTQ unless the course meets the occupational standard required by IfATE and gains that quality mark. Does this mean that other qualifications aren't as good as an HTQ?

Not necessarily. It just means that it either doesn't meet the occupational standard, perhaps because there isn't one developed yet, or the institution hasn't yet applied for their qualification to be certified by the IfATE.

Which students might benefit from considering HTQs?

Those who are interested in gaining a qualification to make them work-ready are ideal HTQ students. You may have some students who previously would have thrived starting at the bottom and working their way up, but the reality of 'entry-level' positions now is that you often need a qualification to get started.

“ An HTQ could be a good option for those who are more practical learners, and can demonstrate this through more vocational or practical, industry-focussed assessment. ”

HTQs also work well for those students who are nervous about committing to 3 or 4 years of undergraduate study and/or the associated tuition fees and living costs.

Those who want to work alongside their qualification could also consider HTQs, as they tend to be timetabled into a day or two a week, even in the full-time study mode. HTQs ordinarily address a skills gap within a given geographical area and are often developed with industry input. Whilst you can never guarantee a student will get a job straight away, there is demonstrable evidence that there is a need for graduates with the skills gained on an HTQ course.

Supporting students interested in studying medicine

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

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

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

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

2. Be organised with all aspects of their time

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

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

3. Use social media

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

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

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

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

How to book a university event

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

Booking university events plays a pivotal role in shaping students' higher education journeys. A campus visit can greatly influence a student's decision when choosing the right institution. For teachers and advisers, understanding how to book these events is essential to helping students make informed choices about their future. This knowledge ensures that students are equipped to explore their options confidently.

Types of university events

University visits offer students a glimpse of campus life, allowing them to engage with academic staff, connect with current students, and gain deeper insights into degree programs.

Open days are the most common type of university event, offering a general overview through talks, activities, and campus tours. Although students typically book these independently, teachers and advisers can arrange additional events to ensure that all students have equal access to exploring universities.

For instance, subject-specific taster days can give students a more in-depth experience, including one-on-one interactions with academic staff, and the opportunity to use university facilities beyond what is available on standard open days.

For students who may not initially consider university, outreach events hosted by university staff, or the schools and colleges liaison teams, can demonstrate that higher education is within reach. These events may include subject-specific content or general information, and guidance to demystify HE and inspire students to explore their options.

How to book a university event

Before booking, assess what information your students need to make progress. Are they

undecided about university, or have they chosen a specific subject? Consider the event types discussed above to identify the most relevant opportunity.

Once you've determined the type of event, you should research institutions offering those events. Websites like [UniTasterDays](#) provide listings of upcoming taster days and open days by region, and you can also search nationally if you're open to traveling further.

For specific universities, visit their websites where you will typically find a section dedicated to their schools and colleges liaison team. These teams specialise in HE outreach and manage many events. Sign up for email updates to stay informed about upcoming opportunities.

When booking an event, be prepared with details such as the number of students attending, any access or dietary requirements, and contact information. Make sure a staff member is available to attend, especially for events during school hours, as they will be required to act in place of a parent. Some universities may offer financial assistance for travel or meal costs, so it's worth contacting their outreach teams to enquire.

In the weeks leading up to the event, brief your students on what to expect based on the joining instructions provided by the university. Encourage them to prepare questions to ensure they gain as much insight as possible from the experience.

Benefits of university visits

Exposing students to different aspects of university life can boost their confidence in pursuing further education. These events help reduce any anxieties about the transition to university by giving them a clear understanding of their options. For teachers and advisers, participating in university events also deepens your understanding of the HE landscape, enabling you to offer better guidance.

By attending these events, students will expand their knowledge and gain valuable insights that will help them make informed decisions about their future educational paths. As a teacher or adviser, you play a crucial role in guiding them along this journey.

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How to book a subject-specific university event

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

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

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

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

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

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

What to request and how to arrange it

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

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

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

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

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

Our top tip for students..

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

Our top tip for you...

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

“Subject-specific events can be mutually beneficial for teachers and students.”



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DISCOVER
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How to organise online and physical events

By Oliver Rossetti, Outreach Manager at Arden University

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

Do you want an online or physical event?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Organised chaos is better than no organisation

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Maximise speaker efficiency

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

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

Refreshments

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

Visiting campus

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

A passionate event will make a world of difference!

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

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



Your campus visit: an outreach P.L.A.N.

**By Dr Ann-Marie Tupciauskas
Richardson, Outreach Manager (Degree
Apprenticeships) at the University of
Greenwich**

There are few things more exciting and hectic than an on-campus visit for an outreach team. They are the culmination of building a relationship with a school or college and an opportunity to showcase the quality of the university in question. Events such as these also require a high level of collaboration and communication, as the outreach team often becomes the middle-person between the school/college representative and various teams within the university, from academic speakers, to student ambassadors, to hospitality teams.

During a time when we are all becoming increasingly busy, factors that contribute to the overall success of an event accidentally go undocumented. To give you and your students the best experience possible, here are some of the most crucial things an outreach team needs to know in our easy-to-follow P.L.A.N.

Policies

We understand there are hoops a careers advisor or organising teacher must jump through to confirm a trip to another campus. These include a minimum number of supporting staff, minimum period of notice that must be given to students and their families, and so on. Universities are no strangers to policy, so please don't hesitate to tell us if there is anything we can do to help.

Please familiarise yourself with the university's policies. For instance, at the University of Greenwich, we ask visiting

schools and colleges to view our Class Contract, which stresses that we will treat students like university students for the day, and we expect them to act accordingly. The majority of outreach teams won't issue disciplinary action, as we don't wish to overrule a school/college's procedure, so encouraging students to act as they would expect an undergraduate to behave is appreciated.

Learning style

Expectations for campus days often vary from school to school, with teachers requesting highly interactive subject days and others hoping for strictly information-based visits, namely during the UCAS period. Please clarify in your communication with the outreach team if there is a certain learning style that you believe will suit your cohort best. We want your students to enjoy the day and absorb as much information as possible, and we will aim to design a programme to support this.

On the subject of interactivity, you and your staff are welcome to participate on the day. Often, the university staff are strangers to your students, so having teachers take part often makes them feel more comfortable.

Accessibility

Please let your point of contact know if there is any additional support needed for staff or students, such as long-term health conditions and accessibility needs. This allows us to prepare accordingly and ensure every student feels included.

Notification

Last, but certainly not least, please notify the relevant team as soon as possible if there are any changes on your side prior to the event. This includes last-minute cancellations, and also if there is an increase or decrease in student numbers, last-minute accessibility needs, and so on. All relevant contacts should be included on the university's risk assessment.

Policies **L**earning Style **A**ccessibility **N**otification

The benefits of attending university events

By Kate Filimon-Rice, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Huddersfield

As a member of an active schools and colleges liaison team, I frequently visit schools and colleges across the country to discuss higher education options with prospective students. This is a cost-and-time-effective way to introduce university to large groups, as we can visit free of charge at a time that suits you.

However, while the planning, time, and expense of attending university events may seem much less appealing, there are many unique experiences that can only be gained from taking some time out of the classroom and getting stuck into a new environment.

Higher education conventions, such as UCAS Discovery exhibitions, take students out of their comfort zone and put future choices front and centre, with students able to visit representatives from a huge number of institutions at the same time. The combination of the buzz created by the large-scale event, rubbing shoulders with students from around the country, and the series of informative talks and interactive stands gives a wonderful experiential introduction to the variety of options available.

Conventions lead perfectly into a visit to a university campus for more in-depth exploration. Open days are ideal for larger groups of students who have diverse interests. Course content from websites is brought to life by academics who are fully absorbed in it, speaking in the facilities in which they work and thrive. Student life becomes tangible when enthusiastic undergraduates show off their sports facilities, social areas, and support services. The towns and cities in which universities are based can become vibrant beacons of new opportunities when visited, rather than just viewed on Google Maps.

Universities can also offer school and college groups bespoke opportunities to visit their campuses. These can be general visits, focussed on the university experience and suitable for large groups, or subject-specific tasters for slightly smaller numbers. These hands-on experiences can help students make informed decisions about their futures, as well as providing networking opportunities and fantastic content for university and job applications. Travel contributions may be available if funding is an issue, and the time taken out of the classroom is hopefully repaid in increased motivation and inspiration.

Although it can be tempting to bring only the most focussed students, these university events have perhaps the greatest benefits for learners who are undecided about their post-16 options. When discussed in the classroom, university can become an overwhelming mass of figures: scary financial projections; dizzying lists of league tables and awards; stats on student satisfaction, contact time, and salaries; entry requirements and entrance tests. Whilst some learners take this in their stride, there are many who are put off by an information-led approach.

“When physically on campus, young people can be inspired in tangible ways.”

Perhaps learners will favour the no-nonsense approach of health lecturers as they give warts-and-all descriptions of their jobs and put them to work in their specialist training labs. Maybe learners will get a new perspective on what it means to be an academic when they meet the mid-20s PhD student who grew up in a town close to theirs.

Or they might visit a private, tranquil student bedroom, shelves lined with books and pictures of home on the wall. This will allow them to visualise themselves feeling a sense of belonging somewhere other than their childhood bedroom. University events can help your students discover first-hand that there is more to the university experience than just league tables and module titles on a page. They can provide the moments that shift perspectives and make a difference.

How to prepare students for UCAS fairs and events

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

Soon, your students will be stepping into the world of higher education. They will need as much information as they can get to help them manage this transition. You have been there for them: coaching them through their studies, and ensuring they are where they need to be in preparation for this next step. To help you along, here are some hints and tips you can pass on to your students about how to prepare for UCAS fairs and events.

Before the event

- Check travel arrangements and car parking - you will want to make sure you leave enough time for your journey (try doubling it!) and find out where to park if you are taking a car.
- Plan your route - use the UCAS event webpage to find the university stands you most want to visit, and plan your route based on this.
- Make sure you have your barcoded ticket - you will need this to gain entry, and throughout the event. Universities can scan it to give you more information on your course of interest, open days, and the university itself. Make sure it is easy to find and access.
- Prepare some questions - topics could include the UCAS tariff points, the local area, and accommodation. It's a great way to start an interesting conversation with a university representative.
- Take a strong bag - you are likely to collect many prospectuses, guides, and merchandise. You don't want a broken strap halfway through the event!
- Dress comfortably - it is likely to be a long day, so wear comfortable shoes and clothes.

At the event

- Be independent - it might be tempting to flock together with your friends, but this is your opportunity to build confidence and independence. You'll want to visit the universities you are most interested in, and speak with the people on the stand.
- Ask questions - use the list you wrote prior to the event, but also don't be afraid to veer away from your questions. This is your opportunity to find out everything you need to know. Remember to note down the information you receive.
- Keep an open mind - speak to a variety of different universities: campus, city, coastal, northern, southern. Perhaps your top choice doesn't quite meet your requirements, so why not speak to a university you don't know much about?

After the event

- Reflect - still missing an answer to a question you really wanted to know? You can contact the university by email or engage in a live chat. They will be pleased to hear from you.
- Take action - if any universities stood out to you, then book onto their next open days. It's really important to visit the local area when you are choosing your university.
- Chat to current students - many universities have Unibuddy, a platform where you can talk to current students. It's the perfect opportunity to find out what the university is really like!

“Most importantly, your students should enjoy the event. This is the start of a very exciting journey for them: their journey into independence, making new friends, and the beginning of their future career. ”



How to prepare students for an open day

By Ellie Millington, Undergraduate Student Recruitment and Access Officer (UK) at Keele University

Open days can be overwhelming for students and teachers alike, but they should be positive and informative experiences. Here is some advice on how to help prepare your students to get the most out of their visits.

Before the day

- Many universities require students to register for the open day online. There are capacities on some activities, so registering ensures students have a space booked and can attend everything they want on the day.
- Help to plan travel in advance! If students are driving, is there parking nearby? Encourage them to research public transport in the area, and plan where to go to minimise anxiety and lateness.
- Look into possible financial support for travel if costs are an issue to see if universities can offer any support. Or even consider booking to take a school group if that is an option!
- Download information packs and sign-in instructions before the event, such as maps and room information. Some campuses may not have good signal, so it is handy to have these accessible in advance.

On the day

- Encourage students to take a tour. Tours are often led by student ambassadors, which is a great opportunity to hear a current student's opinions and experience of the university in their own words. Options available on the day often include things like campus, facilities, and accommodation tours.

- Build confidence to ask questions. It can be scary for young people, but it is so useful for them to get involved and ask what they need to hear. Support them with writing questions. Some ideas could be teaching hours, class sizes, subject facilities, and extra-curricular opportunities.
- Help plan some time into their day to experience the university at their own pace. Between sessions and tours, it can be really useful for students to stop and look around the area, but is often overlooked in the adrenaline of the day.

After the day

- Don't let your students forget about the day! Encourage them to reflect on, and write about, the experience. This will be very useful a few open days down the line.
- Find any gaps in the day. Does the university have any other resources that can fill those gaps, or can students get in contact with anyone? Platforms such as Unibuddy can be used to seek answers from current students.
- Consider other opportunities to interact with universities.

Mistakes to avoid

- Being attached to one idea too early. Encourage students to think about their options and experience the event with an open mind, as there are often more opportunities than they expect.
- Lateness! Some event sessions may not allow visitors to enter once they have started. Encourage students to plan ahead and allow extra time to get around.
- Wearing something uncomfortable. Prepare students for the physical and outdoor aspects involved in open days. One thing most UK universities have in common is the rain!

Note from UniTasterDays

Listen to Episode 34 of [The Uni Guide Podcast](#) for further advice on how your students can make the most of their open day.

“Plan where to go to minimise anxiety and lateness.”

Understanding university taster courses

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

It can seem like universities offer an endless stream of potential events and activities for students to sign up to. It can be hard to know what's best when balancing travel time, costs, and time in or out of school. However, enabling a prospective student to engage with taster days or masterclasses at universities is a hugely beneficial experience.

For many students, a taster day or masterclass (or the many other myriad names for these events) may be the first real opportunity for your students to test the waters of their chosen subject. Many subjects may sound familiar, but others can be completely unknown quantities. A prospectus or an open day can't always provide the depth to help choose between university A or B, or course X or Y, but a sampling of the product through a taster day or masterclass may help clarify the teaching style, the environment, and the resources more accurately.

Enabling your students to experience these activities can reassure or reaffirm (or even dissuade) their subject choices. They are an opportunity for them to engage with the learning that the university offers, do a mini-deep dive of their subject of choice, and hopefully gain confidence that they're making the right decisions.

It may be an opportunity for students to understand how their subject links to other

(sometimes more niche) degrees in allied course areas, opening their options to things they may not have explored.

It's also a chance to meet academics and students, get an insight into the realities of a university experience, meet potential future colleagues, and maybe see the future career routes and opportunities available.

The experience can also be beneficial during the application process. They can talk about the experience within the personal statement, and what they got out of it. This can show dedication: stepping out of the classroom, exploring their subjects and passions in their own time, off their own back, in greater rigour and depth. It can also give them something to share with genuine vim and vigour at interviews.

And if travel distances, costs, or time is an issue, then online events can be the way forward. They may not quite have the impact of in-person activities, but they can still provide insights that help towards making a decision for the future, and they can show commitment to learning and development.

Not only this, but many of these taster days can help drive inspiration and engagement in the classroom. Your students will bring back new and different experiences for themselves and classmates when exploring topics, projects, and themes in the curriculum, and helping them to find application in their classwork.

Taster days are great, unique experiences, but it's important to help your students identify events that match their interests, where it might add value and knowledge to future choices, and where they will feel that they will enjoy and benefit from them most.



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Types of online university events

By Liv Squires, Senior Student Recruitment Officer at Solent University

As well as in-person events, universities are still offering a range of online events. These online alternatives can help students fit events into their busy schedules, and feed curiosity around what university is all about. As such, online events remain a beneficial part of the research stages and application process.

Virtual open days

Virtual open days are a good alternative if students are unable to travel to multiple universities. Students can gather key information about the university and get an insight into their course area. This is also an opportunity for students to meet members of the teaching team and ask any questions they may have, whether this be about course content or student life. A virtual open day could also be an indicator of whether the student would like to visit in person, especially if the university happens to be a top choice!

Webinars

Webinars can cover a range of topics, such as things to consider before starting a UCAS application, how to write a personal statement, or how to choose the best university course for you. These are a great resource for students when researching HE and will help them consider various factors before committing to a shortlist. Other

topics, such as student finance and working whilst studying, are also covered. Definitely a hot topic at the moment!

IAP sessions

An interview, audition, or portfolio session is something I recommend to students if this is a requirement for their application. It can make students feel more at ease about the process and offers another opportunity to have their questions answered. It can also be a good chance to meet potential tutors and network. It's a great way to gauge what is required of your students and confirm what they must prepare for their interview, audition, or portfolio.

Online lectures and course talks

Online lectures and course talks can act as a teaser into the content of a course of interest. It is always worth asking universities if there are any upcoming talks throughout the application cycle. They could be a taster for students before they decide to book onto an in-person open day.

Reflections and conclusion

Reflecting on my own experience, I would have really appreciated online event options being available. In the past, there was a sense of, "If I don't go to this open day, I've completely missed my opportunity to see a university." Having such a range of online events available now means that your students are spoilt for choice!

Your students can pick and choose what interests them and easily work this into a busy week, even if just for an hour one evening. Encourage students to use online events to their advantage and as a tool for testing the waters. It's right at their fingertips.



Evaluating your school events

By George Green, Student Recruitment and Outreach Manager at Imperial

Evaluating your events effectively is key to improving future activities and ensuring they meet the interests of students, expectations from families and supporters, goals for university providers and employers, and achieve the objectives you set.

Why evaluate the effectiveness of your events?

1. Improve future events

Evaluation provides insights into what worked well and what didn't. By identifying strengths and weaknesses, schools can enhance the planning and execution of future events, making them more effective, engaging, and successful. This is useful for everyone involved. Families will know the school events are top quality, and universities and employers will be keen to come back!

2. Demonstrate your successes and highlight areas for improvement

Evaluating allows you to see whether an objective is met. It's important that each question you ask in a survey is linked to an objective. You'll be able to demonstrate to senior leadership how the event was successful, backed-up with data. You can also tweak certain aspects of the event for next time to meet the objectives you set.

3. Enhance stakeholder engagement

Gathering feedback from students, staff, and families can help them feel more involved. Staff are observing the event, and participants are experiencing the event. This means they may have valuable feedback for you. Furthermore, your stakeholders are likely to value that you've asked the question. Sharing results in a school newsletter, and outlining improvements based on that feedback, will demonstrate that stakeholder voices are heard and valued, helping to build trust.

4. Strengthen relationships with families, the community and your partners

Events play a vital role in building relationships with families, your community, and your

partners. Evaluating your events will help gauge how well students and families engaged. This could lead to improved attendance at your next event, which is positive for everyone involved: your school, the universities, and the employers.

5. Inform decision-making

What a student decides to do next is important. Hosting well-executed events that provide the right information is essential to helping them make informed decisions. Effective event evaluation allows for data-driven decision-making, ensuring future events are even more impactful.

Ways to effectively evaluate your events

Here are some suggestions for conducting thorough evaluations of your events.

1. Pre- and post-event surveys

Use surveys before and after the event to track changes in perceptions and confidence levels. For instance, you could ask, "After attending this event, how confident do you feel (1–10) about taking the next steps in your education or career path?"

2. Post-event survey about event content

Include questions to evaluate specific parts of the event:

- Which presentation or workshop did you find most informative?
- Were there any sectors or universities you would have liked to see?
- Did you find the representatives knowledgeable and helpful?
- Was the pre-event information useful?

3. "Notes for next time" document

Create a document to record feedback from staff who observed the event, capturing ideas for improvement. This ensures you keep track of useful suggestions made at the time, which you can refer to when planning your next event.

4. Feedback wall

Set up a "feedback wall" during the event where students and families can post sticky notes with their thoughts on what they found useful and areas for improvement.

5. Gather feedback from exhibitors

Gather feedback from university and employer exhibitors about the number of meaningful conversations they had with students. Ask representatives to assess the quality of student questions, and whether they felt the students were prepared and engaged.

Supporting you: teacher conferences and CPD opportunities

By Rachel Brookes, Widening Participation Officer at Harper Adams University

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

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

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

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

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

How do I find opportunities?

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

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



Understanding fair access and widening participation

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

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

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

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

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

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



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A guide to fair access and widening participation programmes

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

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

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

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

What opportunities are available?

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

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

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

What are the benefits?

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

Who's eligible?

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

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

Where can I find out more?

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

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Supporting disadvantaged students applying to competitive universities

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

'Those kinds of universities aren't for people like me.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

In truth, competitive universities often have the means to provide a wide range of supportive resources - from dedicated,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contextual university admissions

By Heather Monsey, Outreach Manager for Post 16 and Transition, and Gemma Standen, Widening Participation Officer for Mature Students at the University of East Anglia

What are contextual admissions?

Higher Education should be for all, and many universities have contextual admissions as a way of making sure everyone has a fair chance of getting onto the course they wish to study. Universities are aware that students come from a wide range of backgrounds, facing a variety of barriers that make it more difficult for them to meet the entry requirements. Universities consider these barriers that students face. If eligible, they can make applicants an offer to reflect these circumstances.

This could be a reduced offer with lower grade boundaries or even a guaranteed interview for a particular subject. Although eligibility criteria will vary from university to university, contextual offers are largely made to students from under-represented groups. This could include areas with lower progression to higher education, or students in receipt of free school meals. Universities want students to realise their full potential and reach their goals, and providing contextual offers allows them to help students achieve this.

Are contextual offers a good thing?

Yes! Universities understand that education is inequitable for some, with some students facing more barriers to learning than others. Contextual admissions recognise an applicant's potential to succeed in the context of these barriers. Students who enter higher education should reflect the full makeup of society, with universities

reflecting an inclusive and diverse range of individuals.

One student that received a contextual offer for UEA through participating in our Preparing for Medicine programme said, "As someone who came from a very untraditional background, I was scared that I wouldn't stand out, but knowing the UEA believed that I was good enough for an interview and had what it took to become a medical student... that gave me lots of confidence."

How to advise your applicants

When making contextual offers, universities use the information from a student's UCAS application to determine whether they are eligible. In some cases, where UCAS asks students to share personal circumstances on the application form, the fields are listed as optional. Please do encourage students to complete this where you can, as this could determine their eligibility for some contextual offer schemes.

Typically, if your students are eligible for a contextual offer, they don't have to do anything further as this will automatically be applied if an offer is made. The universities will let your students know by email that the offer they are receiving is contextual and will confirm the required entry requirements that are associated with it.

Although it is becoming increasingly popular, not all universities will offer contextual admissions, and some may only have course-specific offerings. We recommend advising your students to look at university websites to gather information on what contextual offers might be available to them in relation to their interests. They can call or email the university admissions team if they have any further questions.

Note from

Visit page 68 of this guide for more information about fair access.

“Contextual offers are largely made to students from under-represented groups. ,,

Supporting care-experienced and estranged students with their university opportunities

By Liam Shaw, Widening Participation Officer at the University of Salford

Studying in higher education can be a big decision for all prospective students to make. However, for those who face additional barriers, such as students with experience of care, or those that are estranged from their families, the decision can be much trickier due to lack of family support and financial barriers.

University and local authority schemes

A good starting point is to see what opportunities there are for young people to engage with their local HE providers. Many universities, in collaboration with local authorities and Uni Connect Partnerships, will offer sustained programmes targeted specifically for estranged and care-experienced pupils, from Year 9 onwards.

These programmes are often bespoke 1:1 visit days, longer-term programmes for building soft skills, or subject taster sessions. Taster sessions are a great way for young people to experience what a university lecture or workshop is like. Experiencing how and what they can learn can be invaluable in deciding whether higher education is right for them.

Finding the right course, institution, and support

Specific information on the support that is available to care-experienced and estranged is available on [Propel](#). You will find a comprehensive list of all institutions in the UK, along with contact information for a

named person or team, so you can get in touch with them for information on specialist support.

Most institutions will offer support to students with care experience, or who are estranged from their families. The most common is a cash bursary that is paid directly to the student to go towards living costs while studying. These usually start around £1,000 per academic year but can be significantly more depending on where you study. Other areas of support that are regularly offered are 52-week accommodation contracts and guaranteed paid work.

It is also important that young care-experienced people are aware of the support they're entitled to from their local authority. Again, this differs across the UK, but each council must publish their offer online and this can be easily accessed through [Care Leaver Offer UK](#).

Contextual information may also be accepted as part of the application process, so it's worth contacting universities to see if they can offer help and advice at the pre-application stage. Some universities now offer [open day travel bursaries](#) to support with the cost of visiting them, and students can find out information on eligibility criteria when booking online.

Tick the box – it's important!

On a UCAS application, the applicant will be asked if they are care-experienced or estranged. It's really important that they are encouraged to tick this box. Young people may be nervous about this, as they don't want everyone to know of their status. However, this information is only shared with the teams that need to know, and it will never count against them, only benefit them. By ticking the box, universities will be able to get in touch far enough in advance so that students can access as much support as possible. This means that when they come to register and begin their course, it will be as smooth a transition as possible.

Note from UniTasterDays

Do your students need financial support to attend an open day?

Our new search tool will help you discover which universities offer bursaries and discounts to enable eligible students to attend their on-campus events. Financial incentives include full or part reimbursement of travel costs, train discounts, coach discounts, hotel discounts, free bus travel, and food vouchers. Use the search tool for free at: www.unitasterdays.com/event-incentives

Supporting students with special educational needs and disabilities at university

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

Supporting students with educational needs and disabilities as they transition to university can be challenging but immensely rewarding. As teachers and advisers, you play a pivotal role in ensuring students are aware of the support available to them in higher education.

Understanding the needs of students

Students can have a wide range of needs, including learning difficulties, physical impairments, sensory impairments, and mental health conditions. It's important to recognise that each student is unique and may require different types of support. Begin by discussing their specific needs and concerns with them. Are they worried about physical accessibility, academic adjustments, or social integration? These conversations will help you guide them to the appropriate resources.

Support at universities

UK universities are required to make reasonable adjustments for students under the Equality Act 2010. The key is ensuring your students know about these services and how to access them.

- **Disability support services** - most universities have dedicated teams to support students. Encourage students to contact the disability support service early in the application process to discuss their needs and any accommodations they may require.
- **Reasonable adjustments** - these might include additional time in exams, note-taking support, or alternative formats for reading materials. Some universities provide assistive technology, such as screen readers or speech-to-text software, to help students with specific learning difficulties or disabilities.

- **Mental health and wellbeing services** - many students, especially those with conditions like anxiety or ADHD, benefit from mental health support. Universities typically offer counselling services, peer support groups, and wellbeing workshops to help students cope with academic and personal challenges.

Funding and financial support

An important resource for students is the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This is a non-repayable grant designed to cover additional costs that students might face because of their disability. DSA can be used for things like specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, or travel expenses. Students apply through their respective student finance body, and the amount awarded is based on individual needs.

It's important to note that some universities can assist students with the assessment process if they are yet to receive an official diagnosis. Certain institutions offer financial support for these assessments, meaning students can still access the help they need once they begin their studies.

Additionally, some universities offer scholarships or bursaries for students, so it's worth checking what is available at each institution. For example, at The University of South Wales, they offer a bursary for diagnostic assessments for dyslexia. Upon completion, this provides dyslexic students with a full diagnostic assessment that stays with them for life, aiding their support options, and allowing them to access additional funding during their studies.

Supporting students as they transition to university requires a tailored approach, open communication, and proactive preparation. University websites, third party websites, and student finance are great sources of information. They can be used by both advisers and students.

By equipping students with knowledge of the available resources and helping them develop the skills they need to thrive, you can make a real difference in their university experience. Ensuring they know their rights, their support networks, and their opportunities for success will empower them to make the most of their time in higher education.

What is university event targeting?

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

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

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

Bespoke events

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

There may be events for those who have applied to specific subjects too. For example,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Understanding the university admissions process and offer-making

By Stephanie Willmott, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of West London

Considering university can feel like a big step for students who may be finishing their studies at sixth form or college. Deciding to go to university, and choosing a course that is right for them, is vital in a student's journey to understanding the process for applying to university. It is also beneficial for students to understand the key decision deadlines that form part of the UCAS lifecycle. This article will explain these stages in further detail.

The most common way for students looking to undertake an undergraduate course in the UK is to apply through the University and Colleges Admissions Service, also known as UCAS. This article offers an overview of the application process, which you can share with your students.

Firstly, it is important for students to do their research by attending university open days, browsing university websites, and chatting to university staff and current students. They should find out more about the courses on offer at university, whilst also seeking to learn more about the different facilities and services that are available and accessible to them.

When your students are ready to begin their application, they should firstly create their account on UCAS, choose their choices (they can apply for up to five universities), and start drafting their personal statements to support their application.

Once completed, your students can submit their applications. These should be submitted by the UCAS equal consideration deadline on Wednesday 29 January 2025. This is for guaranteed consideration for September 2025 entry. For students waiting for decisions, it is important to be aware of the deadlines by which universities must reply with a decision, and when students must reply to their offers. All dates can be found on the UCAS website.

After students have received their offers on UCAS, we recommend your students attend offer-holder events, such as applicant days. These will give your students the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of what it's like to study at each of their chosen universities. These events are typically invite-only, and you will be invited to book onto your events by email.

Applying for finance is another important consideration. It is important for your students to submit their application with Student Finance England (SFE) by the end of May if they require a loan to cover the cost of tuition fees and living costs.

For students awaiting their university results on A-level results day, they should check their UCAS account to see if they have been accepted. If not, they can contact individual universities to seek a place through Clearing. It is important to note that not all universities are in Clearing, and not all courses are in Clearing. Clearing usually starts in July for most universities. More information can be found at ucas.com/clearing.

After your students have received their results and chosen their university, the final step is enrolment into their desired course. This is where students are welcomed into university. It provides a fantastic opportunity for them to meet new people, attend freshers' events, begin their studies, and unleash their potential!

Note from UniTasterDays

For more information about Clearing, check out Episode 32 of [The Uni Guide Podcast](#). This special episode features interviews with staff members from three different universities who offer valuable advice about Clearing. You will also hear several mock Clearing phone calls to help you understand the process.

Qualifications: what will universities accept for entry?

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

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

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

Qualifications outside A Levels

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

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

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

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

How about pre-16 qualifications?

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

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

“British universities accept a range of qualifications for entry, however, as with many other areas of higher education, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach.”

Writing a standout university reference

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

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

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

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

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

Outlining the UCAS Reference Sections

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

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

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

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

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

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

Three top tips when writing a university reference



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



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



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

How personal statements are used in the application process

By Kimberly Chitifa, Graduate Ambassador at Durham University

Personal statements are a crucial part of the application process. It is important for your students to spend time drafting their personal statements.

How personal statements are used varies between universities. Some universities place more emphasis on other factors, such as face-to-face interviews, or admissions tests. Meanwhile, for others, the personal statement is the only time when university admissions get to know more about your students. This guide provides an overview of how personal statements are typically used in the university application process.

What is a personal statement?

The personal statement is a piece of writing where students can describe their academic experiences, motivations for studying their chosen course, and what they want to get out of higher education.

How exactly do universities use personal statements?

Admissions staff at the universities where your student has applied will read their personal statements. They will review the statement alongside other parts of their application, such as predicted grades, to assess their overall application in

comparison to the competition. They will also assess whether your student is a good fit for the university. The personal statement offers a valuable opportunity for admissions staff to assess your student's suitability for studying the course, and whether the institution is a good fit for them.

For courses where there is little competition, universities may respond more quickly as they review personal statements more quickly. However, for more competitive courses, there may be multiple admission staff reading through many personal statements.

Ultimately, in cases where students have similar academic profiles, a strong personal statement can make the difference between receiving an offer or not. It will allow admissions staff to gain a more holistic view of the student.

Top tips for supporting your students with personal statements

1. Encourage specific examples – students should provide concrete examples of their achievements and experiences.
2. Encourage students to demonstrate research and interests beyond the curriculum.
3. Help students write in a concise and clear manner.
4. Ensure students relate their extracurricular activities to the skills and experiences needed for their course.

Understanding the importance of personal statements in university applications will help your students prepare more effectively and feel less anxious. Helping them as early as possible will enable them to draft strong personal statements that enhance their applications.





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Writing university personal statements and the 2026 changes

By Millie Copas, Recruitment Officer (Schools & Colleges) at Brunel University London

Writing a personal statement is a fundamental part of the UCAS application. It is an opportunity for your students to explain and demonstrate why they want to study a particular course, and to showcase their related knowledge and enthusiasm.

For the September 2026 intake, UCAS has changed the structure for writing personal statements. There will be three set questions for students to answer. The character limit remains the same as before: 4,000 characters (with spaces) and the provided questions don't count towards the character limit. UCAS recommends that each question should have a minimum of 250 characters. Before writing their personal statement, your students should take time researching their course descriptions to identify the skills and qualities it requires, as this can help during the planning stages.

The three questions that your students will need to answer are:

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

The first question is for students to demonstrate their passion, curiosity, and interest for the course. This could include discussing their motivations for studying the course, knowledge of the subject area, their future ambitions, and how the course will aid their career development.

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

This section is a chance for students to explain their current and previous studies, highlighting modules that have given them prior knowledge relating to their course.

It is important to note that students might apply for different courses or a combined course in their application, so it is crucial for them to include common themes and skills across the different courses they have chosen.

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

This question is a great opportunity for students to talk about their extracurricular activities. Examples could include sports clubs, musical and artistic activities, scouts, work experience (paid or unpaid), and any qualifications and competitions they have completed outside of school. They should always link this back to their chosen course.

To keep the application concise, the PEEL method is a great way to structure the three questions:

- **Point** – Start with a clear topical sentence that establishes what the paragraph is about, relating this to the provisional question (for example, previous studies).
- **Evidence** – Provide an example that reaffirms the point in the paragraph (for example, reading relative textbooks and their titles).
- **Explain** – Detail how the evidence-based activity helped develop an interest in the subject, and any skills or knowledge gained (for example, inspiration and wider understanding from literature).
- **Link** – To finish the paragraph off, link the point back to the chosen course and the provisional question being answered.

The introduction and conclusion should only be a few sentences. It is important to prioritise the word count for the main body which holds the most important information.

In summary, students need to keep their personal statement accurate and focused on why they want to study that course. It is their chance to showcase their achievements, skills, and knowledge. We encourage students to talk positively about themselves, make several drafts, and proofread before submitting their final personal statement.

“There will be three set questions for students to answer. ,,

Applying for a creative course - preparing for interviews and portfolio reviews

By Sarah Hewitson, Faculty Marketing Manager, Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries, at the University of Portsmouth

Applying for a creative course requires more than just grades. Developing a portfolio of work, attending an interview, or writing a personal statement will form a key part of a student's application. It will allow them to showcase their style and creative ability, discuss their influences, and demonstrate their passion for their creative subject.

This article offers five tips to help you support students during the creative course application process.

1. Research the course

It is really important that your students look into the course they're applying for. Universities won't expect them to be able to recite every module, but course content and ethos can vary between universities. In their portfolio/interview, they'll need to show an understanding of the course and subject area. Encourage them to attend an open day, read the portfolio guidance carefully, and explore current events to stay ahead of the game.

2. Help us learn about your students

At the same time as showing they understand the course, universities will also want to see what inspires the student. Everyone is unique, and we want to see them amongst the pages. Encourage students to include a range of things that describe them as a person and as a creative individual. What makes them tick? As creatives, we put

so much of ourselves into our work, so ensure that comes across.

3. Show us the creative process

Within the portfolio, your students can shine by demonstrating their creative journey through initial research, developmental work, and the final piece. They should also demonstrate that they can critically review and analyse their work. Would they do the same again? What would they change? This balance of creativity and reflection will help them sail through their studies.

4. Keep it succinct

While we love to see a variety of work within a portfolio, we do want to see their ability to edit. It is all about establishing a balance. They shouldn't bring everything they've ever done, but equally not pare it back to nothing at all. Students should also try to tailor their portfolio to the course they're applying for.

5. Choose a suitable format

Students should opt for what best suits the creative area they're working in. Just because a portfolio is digital, it doesn't mean all the work has to be digital too. Consider practicality too. Is a bulky folder going to hinder them in transit? Would a digital portfolio be easier to share? Tailor the format of the portfolio to suit the situation.

If they're attending an online interview, firstly make sure the tech works. Does the microphone and camera work? Has screen sharing been set-up? In addition to this, does their digital portfolio read in the same way as a physical portfolio would?

Remember, applying for a creative course can be daunting, but universities will always be there to support students through the application process. If you have links with universities, make the most of opportunities to attend workshops, taster days, and more, so that your students are fully engaged and prepared for their application journey.

“Your students can shine by demonstrating their creative journey.”

Understanding and preparing for Clearing

By Gemma Stead, Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer (West Yorkshire) at the University of Huddersfield

Clearing can be an anxious time for students, particularly if things haven't gone to plan on results day. Below is some information about what Clearing is and how to prepare your students for it.

What is Clearing?

Clearing is the process in which universities fill vacancies they have on courses. It takes place between July and August each year. It allows students to search for available places if they don't have a place or perhaps wish to change course.

Who can enter Clearing?

Students who have already applied through UCAS, but aren't holding any offers, will automatically be entered into Clearing. This could be because:

- They didn't receive any offers
- They declined all of their offers
- They didn't meet the conditions of their conditional firm or insurance offers.

They can also apply directly through Clearing. For example, they might have changed their mind about taking a gap year and now wish to start university a year earlier than planned, or perhaps they are a mature student. It is also possible to change courses or university through the Clearing system.

Will all the good courses have gone already before Clearing?

Applying through Clearing isn't necessarily a bad thing. Lots of people apply in this way. Many are now choosing to apply through Clearing once they have their achieved grades, instead of applying with predicted ones, in the main UCAS application cycle.

If students are flexible and quick off the mark, there are lots of great opportunities still available. They can find vacancies listed on university websites and the UCAS website. It's a good idea to start researching as soon as possible, and they don't always need to wait for their results to see what's available.

Top tips to prepare for Clearing:

- Most universities operate a call centre system to manage the volume of calls during Clearing. It's a good idea to make your students aware that the first person they speak to may not be able to offer them a place. There can also be long queues of callers at peak times, so students will need to be patient if they don't get through to someone straight away.
- Each university will operate different opening hours so check their websites. Most universities open early on A level results day, around 8am or earlier. Places are offered on a first-come, first-served basis so make sure your students ring as early as possible.
- Ensure that, where possible, it is your students who make the call to the university, as the university might not be able to help unless the student is present due to data protection.
- Your students will need to have the exact details of their qualifications in front of them, particularly for BTECs as these can come in many forms.
- Make sure your students are confident in why they are choosing their course and are prepared to talk about it. If they are close to meeting the Clearing criteria, they may be asked to discuss this, the qualifications, and any experience they have with an academic tutor from the course.
- Let your students know they can 'shop around' during Clearing. Advise them to speak to a variety of universities. Students may receive offers from as many universities as they like, but it is only possible enter one into UCAS as their Clearing choice.

Note from UniTasterDays

Check out the [UniTasterDays school resources](#) for a Clearing preparation sheet, including a guide on what to expect when you call!

Preparing for university - what happens after results day?

By Catherine Brabin, Student Recruitment Assistant at Lancaster University

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

Enjoy the summer

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

Packing

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

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

Top tip:

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



Getting ready for student life

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

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

Academics

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

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

Top Tip:

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



Explore the city

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

Final words

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

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

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