
Supporting a Young Person Going to University

**Understanding University, the
Ultimate Uni Podcast - Episode 10**

Karina

Welcome to Understanding University, the Ultimate Uni podcast. My name is Karina, and I am a collaborative outreach assistant at the University of Essex and I work closely with our Aspire and Aspire Higher programs.

Katie

My name is Katie and I also work for the outreach team alongside Karina at the University. If you have any questions about any topics, we discuss please use the hashtag #UnderstandingUni on Twitter, or you can email outreach@essex.ac.uk.

Karina

We know that many parents and guardians of thousands of questions when a young person begins their journey towards higher education. Throughout our series, we have discussed the variety of aspects of university life and heard from students and lecturers at the University of Essex, but today we want to focus on what the journey is like from the parent and guardian perspective. So with us today, we have a special guest Teresa, who is a parent of a current student at university. So please could you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your son as well.

Teresa

Hi, my name is Teresa and I work at the University of Essex. I work at the Business School and my son started off at another university, but he is now in his second year here Essex and yeah really enjoying it.

Katie

Lovely. Welcome to the podcast Teresa. So what we're going to do is just go back a couple of years and briefly describe discuss the process to perhaps when your son was at college or sixth form. This is because our listeners, who have young people currently in school or college might find this really helpful in helping with their young person's journey in the next few months and years. So if you could just sort of imagine yourself few years ago. When did your son initially make that decision to go to university?

Teresa

They had a lot of discussions in secondary school. His secondary school, have a lot of visits from different universities and they went to some careers fairs as well, and then at sixth form college, but had visits from a number of universities. His mind was made up by then. Yeah he was like this is what I want to do, and it was, although I had applied to the university myself, I never actually went. So that's something I still want to do. I've just not got around to it yet.

Katie

That's so nice he was sort of set and knew from yeah school college. That's great and perhaps because you were looking into applying as well, maybe you had an idea of the process. How did you aid him with that process? Was it a case of? Did he know what course? Did he know what university?

Teresa

He did! From the age of four, he's always been mad on history and always wanted to go and visit castles, all over the place. So yeah history was his favourite subject. So yeah it was, without a doubt that's what he'd be doing, but you know I speak to a lot of young people in my job and I've also done some mentoring at secondary school. And I know it's not always easy for young people to decide what path they want to go down, so I often have a chat with them I say "well you know what is it you really enjoy?" you know we you know we find often students that pick courses just because they think it's going to earn the most money or that's what they're really good at that's fine but you've also got to enjoy it. If you don't particularly like it, but someone else is telling you "Oh, you must do that", you're gonna, you may will struggle with it. So we say, do something, you find interesting you know and you will find it a lot easier. Yeah you're going to have times when you really hate it, but if, when the whole you find it a really interesting subject, or you know area to look at, then you know you're halfway there so.

Katie

Yes, that's really lovely and the fact that he knew that he wants to study history from such a young age is really great. And yeah I agree completely you've got to definitely study, something that you enjoy and are passionate about. You're taking hold of your education and it's going to be your responsibility. So doing something that you are passionate about is definitely something you want to do. And so, in terms of choosing his university then, cause he knew what course he wanted to do and how did you help him decide on the university or were you even a part of that that process?

Teresa

Yeah when he looked. He had quite a lot of you know you UCAS and stuff online, was all sort of helpful. So he looked at, who offered the courses, you know he knew he wasn't going to get top marks. So there was obviously some universities that he felt were out for him. But I have relatives I'm helping to apply for stuff at the moment, as we speak, and they are expected to get A's and a stars so obviously they may have different choices and that's perfectly fine you know. Often, students say "well you know I'm not going to do that well and I won't be able to go to Oxford and Cambridge". You know, sometimes Oxford and Cambridge isn't everything so yeah? He looked at ones that that would take the grades that he was expected to get. So yeah that's how we started and we went from there really.

Katie

Great that's yeah that's a really important point to make. As well, is that when you're looking at your choices you do want to look at the entry requirements, you want to see what's going to be realistic, for you and sounds like you, are very supportive in that in that part of the process. So thank you for that Teresa. I've got another question for you and as in terms of terminology was there anything that you came across during the process. I know, obviously you work in university and have looking at applying yourself, and do you think that there's anything you'd want our listeners to be aware of. Or maybe something some tricky HE terminology that you came across and might be worth sharing with our listeners today.

Teresa

It's quite a bit. But it's harder to remember what they were really. I mean things even things like people say well "what's a module" so you know that that's a course, you know that sort of covers a particular topic or subject area. SU is another one, Student Union. So that's, Here at Essex,

we've got our own brilliant and unique Student Union. Other universities belong to the National Union of students. But our SU is the best. And you know that they, but if you're going to I would say to any parent if you're going to university, you know ask if you're not sure. You know the people you meet whether it's here at Essex or another university. They're all very helpful and you know they would explain something. You can ask for what does that mean you know so yeah don't be frightened to ask, we always say that. You know, part of the job my job is meeting people open days and I will say you know if you've got any questions and yeah we get us all sorts of weird and wonderful things but we say no that's fine. That's what we're here for so yeah it's all good.

Karina

Yeah I think one popular one that I sort of I don't know I didn't really think about it this way, but I started getting ask a lot of questions about was what does undergraduate and postgraduate mean. Because even those sort of things people were unfamiliar with and then sort of even just explaining something as well, what seems so simple to us after like going through university education. Essentially it just means all of our listeners, Undergraduate means a course that you would study before so as, like the first sort of course that you would pick up at universities and the postgraduate is any sort of course that you would do after you've completed initial degree at university. So that's the only difference. That's why it's undergraduate you're sort of like before and then post is after you graduate that's how you visualize it. but. Yeah, I think there's so many out there, but definitely agree with you just ask. There's no harm in asking. There's loads of support available. But yeah schools and colleges, will be able to provide guidance support for students when exploring their options. And then going through the application process too. At the University, we have also been providing parent information; webinars for parents, carers guardians with prospective students to find out everything they need or want to know. So they can sort of best support their young person and see what's on offer universities too. As they all have resources and guidance to support not only students but teachers, advisors, parents, cares and guardians. Everyone really. In terms of parent or guardian support what was your involvement in the application process and student finance.

Teresa

Well, actually had a lot of support from his sixth form college. But I know from I've spoken to lots of people, not all schools and sixth forms do support the young people. But there is a lot of help on the UCAS websites. And I know on our own Essex website, we have some really good things like hints and tips on personal statements and you know stuff like that, but yeah there is there is a lot of help out on the UCAS website. If anyone sort of finding a young person is not getting the support it, you know in their particular establishment. Yeah we didn't help a lot. Most of the help we got with the student finance forms. One suggestion I would make though is if your income comes from various sources as it did. We both sort of both public sector workers, you have some idea of your income and your outgoings. And also be aware that you know if your income is above a certain level your person, young person student finance not going to cover their expenses. So you're going to need to think about that a lot of parents, of course, oh I've got stopped you know. You know, you could you think of it together, you know how are you going to fund that short, for you know, is there, others that can help out. In the family or extended family or you know, is there any scholarships grants, you could go for, or does the students themselves need to get work. You know I've got some young relatives who are looking at taking a year out, next year and they're just going to work. You know they're going to go full time in their current part time jobs, and you know, save up for a year, like mad. But that doesn't suit everyone, you know, some people are always if I drop out for year, I'm not going be able to get back into study but yeah that's something that's very important, I think. I mean, luckily my son's gaps quite small so we were able to cover that ourselves.

Katie

Yes I actually took a gap year because I was worried about having enough money to support me, but it is possible, you can you can get a part time job whilst you are at uni and I did that as well. It was great experience and having a part time job, and when you work for your university as well they're very good at accommodating you and knowing that you need to study but also earn some money so they work around your lectures and things. A gap year or speak to your family and friends and just haven't have an idea about that income, when you are going through that processes and yeah is something to think about.

Karina

Yeah. Definitely agree with that, thanks for that Katie. Also wanted to ask you another question did you or your son know much about clearing while going through the initial sort of application process.

Teresa

Yeah I did because that's part of the day, job. I've helped a few people through clearing. Yeah you know, friends and family who know that I obviously know about it, yes, he did know about it, but he was lucky and got the, you know, the grades that he needed for his place. So he didn't have to go through clearing.

Katie

So for our listeners who haven't heard of clearing before, it's basically a process where universities and colleges fill any places that they still have left on their courses, so this usually happens from results day, they will allow you to call them up and enquire about whether they have any spaces left on their course and this is great for students who perhaps didn't get the results they were hoping for on results day. And maybe they didn't meet the conditions of the place they were hoping for and you can then enquire at a university that you maybe haven't applied to before and see if they have a space. This is great for those who maybe didn't meet the requirements or got the results they were hoping for but also students who maybe hadn't even considered going to university at all, so if you hadn't originally applied, you can call up when clearing opens and you could make an application there and then. You would obviously need to meet certain requirements but that would be processed by the admissions team at the university. For more information about clearing you can go to the UCAS website, but we also at the University of Essex have created a podcast episode specifically for clearing, this was during last summer so you might need to take a look back through the University of Essex playlists but the admissions team who deal with clearing have provided a very helpful podcast episode to help students like you who are not sure what clearing is and have maybe never thought about it or even considered it before, so definitely take a look at that

Karina

That's brilliant. Thank you so much for that Katie. I just have one more question for you, before I pass on to Katie did you attend any open days and, if so, what did you actually do at the open days.

Teresa

Well, we went to five. We look to everything. We got a feel for the campus what the lectures rely asked questions, so the lectures even you know what the accommodation was like. Proximity to you know, public transport, any other amenities how easy would it be to get home they wanted to come over the weekend. You know some students want that, others may not see their parents all year. I don't live that far away, but it depends on your student, you know you'll get some that find it a bit difficult and want to come home. Others that says no, if they come home they won't want to go back again. So you know you've got to think about all these things really. Yeah we, and they are all quite different.

Katie

Thank you. I think some students aren't possible aware that you can as a student attend an open day on your own. I went to a couple of my own because there wasn't anyone at the time available to come with me, but if you want your parent, carer or guardian to come with you on the day it's nice sometimes to have someone to spend the day with. But there will be lots of student ambassadors there to help on the day, so you won't get lost or and there'll be plenty of people to ask questions and but, having a parent, carer or guardian there is sometimes nice to share the experience and share with them as well, what you like about that university when you're when you're visiting it. So yeah that's fantastic, as well as face to face Open Days lots of universities are now offering virtual ones as well, so students can spend, spend an evening just exploring the university on Google and then they can sort of pass it over to their parent or guardian, as well as quite Nice, you can just say Oh, can you just have a look at this for me, I quite like the look of this university and. Within the next half an hour you've already looked at a whole campus without even moving your feet so that's quite that's quite good that we have that now, but I would definitely recommend if you get the opportunity to go on to a campus. It is great, because you can really get a feel for whether that that places for you. I also want to reiterate that it's okay for parent, carers, guardians to navigate this journey with their young person together especially if you're a guardian that hasn't been to university before and perhaps don't know very much about it. That's absolutely fine. Talk to your young person, talk to their teachers and advisers, school, college, maybe do the open days together like mentioned earlier, or go and visit the campus virtually together and yeah, it's definitely something you could experience together. What was the experience like I'm aware that he's happy experienced and living away from home but also commuting as well? What was this like?

Teresa

I mean, he went somewhere else, for his first year, but he had a few problems there. And then so decided to move back home and he's been here in Essex ever since and he feels he he's had a lot better support here and that he did his previous university I won't say the name. But you know I know the other people who have gone to the University he did, and done really well, so I don't know you know everyone does have a different experience. But yeah you know he's really enjoying the opportunities he's having and meeting different people yeah he's enjoying it.

Katie

Lovely yeah, thank you for sharing that, because obviously not every university experience goes as according to plan, but it's important to share how you're feeling at that moment, and, obviously, for your son, it was important to say actually this isn't quite right and that's absolutely fine and now obviously he's on a much better journey and university experience, which is really great to hear. So when he initially moved down went to his first university what was the move out date like? I'm assuming that he'd been living with you up until that point and then how was that, as a parent.

Teresa

It was strange it was it was a bit sad but also a nice thing because it's like all this is the next chapter, you know. So yeah I'd say on the day be prepared for tears. Wasn't me so much it his siblings. Yeah I'd say you know allow lots of time, maybe, if you can afford it, or you know it's physically possible you know. Whoever's taking them could maybe stay somewhere nearby overnight, because then that that means you can help you know go to supermarket. There's one just outside the campus you know. Or you know for anything else they need or missing from you know their accommodation and I would say don't spend lots of money on expensive kitchen where towels because I get wrecked or go missing. He did come home with some towels. I don't know who they belong because he was in a house of boys. But, yeah, so yeah, I would sort of say that, and please, please make sure your student can cook. The amount of students, we talked to that are spending their money on takeaways because they don't have to cook. yeah even a few dishes or also that they know how to use a washing machine. And they know how to shop. You know we've come across a few of our students who've really struggled with this. It

does affect their mental health, because you know they're sort of they feel like they've been thrown in and oh my God, you know. Mom and dad or my career, you know, whoever has always done everything. All of a sudden, you know oh was there's not magic toilet roll you know fridges and fill up magically so. I would say. Please just do that.

Katie

I love that. I love that you mentioned that because I was about to ask you as well, did you get any sort of text messages within the first few weeks saying like how did, how does this washing machine work and how do I cook this because I definitely was contacting my parents within the first few weeks, probably went on for the first year actually just confirming things with them to say like. Is this the right is this what I need to do is this is this what I'm doing but um yeah did you did you get anything like that from your son?

Teresa

No my mom did give him an ironing lesson though she's better than me. He did say, he wasn't gonna iron anything anyway. He could cook anyway, he did food tech for GCSC and he likes cooking so I know you'd be totally fine with that. Yeah so yeah did show him how to use the washing machine. He coped better than some of these flatmates did I know that. He does the cooking a few times so.

Karina

Thank you so much for sharing that. I think it's important to note that everything and all of these experiences will sort of differ depending on sort of your young person and how far they move away and how close they live, and you know all of these experiences, going to be very different because I know. Some students, when I moved into my university accommodation, some people came from pretty far away so, unfortunately, that families couldn't drop them off. I did because we lived super local. I was just up in East London and move to the Colchester campus at University of Essex, so my parents did bring me down and we did a whole food shop together and everything. All of these experiences will obviously differ for students. It important to remember that and not put any sort of pressure on yourself to think that it's supposed to go some sort of one specific way. But just to reflect on sort of the whole of this experience. Has the process of all of this had any effects on your relationship with your child and were there any sort of challenges along the way?

Teresa

I think, is because, as I said earlier, you move into that next step and it's yeah it's realizing that they you know they are an adult now. And I know we've spoken to parents that sometimes struggle with that you know they're an adult. They need to make their own decisions. No matter how much you want them not to. You know just support them, you know find out just say "how's it going?", you know "Do you need anything?", you can say that. Whether you're, on the other side of the world or not, you know. I know some of our parents that we've talked to that coming you know they're not in the same country, whatever you know just know it's so much easier to be in contact nowadays as well. You know just say "oh what you learned this week anything interesting?" and you know just sort of trying to kick off some sort of discussion. What you said earlier about if you know you, you know that's excellent what you said about that everyone has a different experience. And I would say to parents if you're not able to drop your child off don't worry, you know our Student Union a brilliant they pick people up from airports. You know they organize some events so people can get to know each other, you know and on moving day there's lots of people, people come and volunteer to help out on moving day. You know, members of staff so that you know people can ask questions or if they're a bit stuck you know we really try and support our students, so you know that they're not to sort of be worried and I know other universities do that as well, so.

Karina

Definitely, and I really agree with what you said earlier. It doesn't really matter where you are if you're halfway across the world or not, we have such great technology around us nowadays, that we can sort of meet up even though it is virtually. It is still face to face through things like zoom, Skype, facetime, any of those things. So definitely using those sorts of opportunities to still have a conversation and check in on how your family's doing. I also wanted to ask if you could advise any sort of support for parents and guardians when they go through this because I know loads of parents and guardians will sort of not know who to turn to in this time. So what would be your recommendations?

Teresa

At Essex, we have a friends and family newsletter. I would advise any person to sign up to, because that will give you some sort of information about what's going on the university. And I know other universities do that, and they have sites for parents and that, but you know if you're if you've got a wellbeing issue about your student. a serious wellbeing issue, then I would say, get in touch with the University. You know, obviously, as they are an adult there are things they can't tell you but you know if you alert the university, then you know we can help.

Karina

Yeah I think that's really good advice. Universities always have something available. Even before university talk to teachers, because teachers know all of this, as well, they get asked the same questions every single year. Turn to them, chat to people at Open Days whether its student ambassadors, the staff or just other people are the parents and guardians of the students that are there. They just going through the same process so just talk to each other, share your tips and listen to any advice that anyone can give you. And really just remember that there's a lot of support out there, and as we mentioned earlier places like UCAS websites, they all have so much information. So definitely don't hesitate to sort of reach out to whoever it is. Just before we finish off, I wanted to ask to Teresa could you give us some sort of final words of wisdom in regards to all of this, basically.

Teresa

Just try and support them, you know it's gonna be a great experience. It is going to be something you know they enjoy. Everyone will have a slightly different experience, but you know just tell them you're there, you're there to support them, and you know, help them to get the most out of it. You know, some students will want to join societies, others won't. Try to encourage them to because there may be other people, but don't get too worried if they don't. Everyone's different some people love being social, other people don't. You know it's along as they can at least try make a few friends, so you know, even if it's just on their actual course, then you know that that will be fine. I think parents and guardian sometimes stress too much. But you know they're an adult and they've got some of it they've got to find their own way, really.

Karina

Thank you so much for those words of wisdom. And thank you for being here, I think it is it's super important and so nice to hear your perspective as not only a staff of the university, but also as a parent who has somebody who's going through this currently and sort of you know you're going through that process and now you're sharing your tips with other parents and guardians, who could really use this information and see your perspective. If you have any questions about this episode don't forget to send them in via Twitter using the hashtag #UnderstandingUni or send an email to outreach@essex.co.uk. Additional resources will be posted on our website and sent to you via email if you're registered listener. Thank you for listening to today's episode don't forget to share with your family, friends and colleagues.

