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# **Parent & Guardian Questions Answered**

**Understanding University, the  
Ultimate Uni Podcast - Episode 11**

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## **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 programmes.

## **Katie**

My name is Katie and I 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](mailto:outreach@essex.ac.uk). When it comes to university, we know that students, parents and guardians have thousands of questions on their minds and sometimes it might be difficult to find the answer. For those who've had previous higher education experience, whether this is going to university yourself or having other children attend university, you may know that information changes year to year, and for those with no previous experience with higher education we know that it might be a little daunting but today's episode should clarify a few of the confusing bits. For all of our listeners out there, experienced, or not, we'd like you to know that the most important way to support a young person is to be able to discuss options with them and have open conversations. We asked parents and guardians to send in their questions to us, so we can answer them all in one handy episode so we're going to kick off straightaway with our first question, which is Karina, if you so could kindly answer what is UCAS?

## **Karina**

UCAS stands for Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, so this is a website, which is frequently used by students who are preparing for higher education to apply to up to five universities. UCAS allows you to apply to undergraduate degrees, as well as postgraduate degrees, it also provides lots of information on alternative routes, such as apprenticeships, internships and even gap years. The website itself provides students and parents and guardians with a variety of information on the university application process, student finance and more. If you would like to find out more you can simply visit their website or access some of the useful links we have provided in our resources section. On to our next question then Katie, the question is, do I, as a parent or guardian, have to do anything during the university application process?

## **Katie**

So the simple answer is yes. During your young person's application process it is optional for you to come along to an open day or provide support when they are researching their courses or universities, however as a parent or guardian, you may have to provide some information to support your young person's application. Your young person will have to keep to the deadlines provided by UCAS or their sixth form or college and obtain a reference for that for their application, write personal statement and fill out the application so there isn't anything directly linked to you as a parent or guardian, but you can choose to support them in any of these areas. Your young person will also most likely to complete an application for student finance and student finance will allow your young person to receive two forms of financial support throughout their time at university. The first is a tuition loan, and the second is a maintenance loan. Tuition loans are given to cover the cost of education, and these are not assessed by household income, however, the maintenance loan which covers day to day costs such as books, food and rent requires the parent or guardian, to provide information of the household income, and this is where you come in, so the process is super simple and for UK study you'll get an email with a link to create an account or log in if you have supported a previous application and this account will be linked to the student's account, so you must ensure you create a separate account. Then you'll have to provide information about your income in the previous tax year and then send in any evidence if you're asked for it. After this student finance England will automatically work out how much your young person will receive in their maintenance loan. If you do require any more information about this, you can either visit the government website, which is Gov.UK and we will put that link in our resources section as well. So, following on from this Karina will my young person go into debt from going to university?

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## **Karina**

So a student loan enables people to go to University who may otherwise not be able to afford the living costs or tuition fee. It is important to understand that the student loan is different to a bank loan. Currently, students only start repaying the loan once they have finished university, with typically a 8/9 month gap after graduation, and only once they are earning over a certain amount. As well as having to earn over this certain amount the student will only ever have to pay back 9% of anything over this threshold, so if you only just meet the threshold, this is a small nine pounds a month. Interest, is added, and there's no way in denying that the amount does slowly increase, but with these measures in place students shouldn't need to feel concerned about being in debt. Another bonus is that, after 30 years that your student debt gets wiped clean so other things, to mention which make the student loans sort of different from other loans is that it should not affect your credit rating and it shouldn't affect the student's ability to get a mortgage either. Actually, Martin Lewis explains this all so clearly on his TV program they have a couple on there the other day, they were asking about university payments but his handy website, which is [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com), is also a great place to go to seek sort of more advice in this field. Katie we've got another question for you, which is how can I financially support my child?

## **Katie**

Thank you Karina, this will be different for everyone. So Student Finance England, provide a loan for the tuition fee and a loan to support any then another loan to support any additional costs like rent, food, bills etc and this is called the maintenance loan. This loan is based on household income so every student will receive a different amount of money depending on this. It will also change depending on where the student studies as well, so the maintenance loan will change depending on whether they are studying in London, outside of London or if they decide to stay with their parent/carer or guardian as well. The tuition fee is not based on household income, so just to let you know about that bit as well. So, as well as the student loan support students can also apply for scholarships and bursaries if they're eligible, and this is non-repayable money gifted to the student. Another option as well, is that students can work part time to subsidise their money. They can work for the university as a Student Ambassador or as part of the Student Union in a in a cafe or bar, and this is a great first job experience. It's a very supportive environment, you'll be working with other students and the shifts are all organised around your lectures as well, because obviously universities understand that your main priority is your studies. So this sort of work and university balance is very good. It doesn't mean to say that students can't apply for jobs outside of university and apply at local shops and restaurants or bars, but they would need to ensure that their working hours fit around their studies. So there are a few ways for students to get access to more money, but this will be different for every family and how much additional support they require. Do when you're looking at scholarships and bursaries also bear in mind that if your young person is looking to study a health course there are additional bursaries and grants available and there is also a disability students allowance for those that have a disability, as well, so there are little extra pockets of money available for eligible students that if you are, if this is something that you're concerned about do your research and have a look to see what additional funding you can get to support your young person.

## **Karina**

Yeah I remember when I was applying to university, I was eligible I think throughout my whole time at university, I was eligible for two bursaries that I managed to get and I also opted to work as a Student Ambassador, which was great for me because, in my personal experience I got to choose my own hours, so it was perfect to fit around my studies. What about you Katie? What was your sort of experience with that working side of things?

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**Katie**

So I ended up having a gap year, which was a perfect opportunity for me to save some extra money and it not only helped me to feel better prepared, but also just took the stress off of me with being financially, having that money as well, so I had a couple of jobs during my gap year. Still had lots of fun though and then, when I was at university as well, I worked part time for the Student Union and yeah like I mentioned earlier, it was just perfect because it worked around my lectures, had the extra bit of money, and I also built skills within that working environment as well, which is all great for your CV. Okay so question for you Karina, how can I help my young person choose a course or university?

**Karina**

Oh, this is a really good one, so you can aid your young person in choosing their course or university by firstly trying to help them figure out what they actually want to study. And this can be done by doing lots of research, so this includes asking your young person of their interests and seeing what courses are available in the UK that relate to these interests. I think it's also important to note here that you have to remember that what they wish to study is their choice because they are the ones who are going to be studying this course for maybe three or maybe four years, so you do have to be super supportive with their decisions. We always recommend looking for courses first and then moving on to universities, because the course is the most important aspect of this research. Once they have chosen a course, though, you can either look up universities that either offer that course or offer that field of study or by maybe having a look at league tables there's many ways to look this up. And I think it's also quite important to note that, if two universities offer the same course as in under the same course name. This doesn't necessarily mean that the content or the core structure will be the same, so please don't forget to have a look what sort of you know content is within these courses and these structures at the different universities.

**Katie**

I remember when I went to university, there were lots of people on my course who clearly hadn't looked at the course content, because they were expecting a much different experience than perhaps some of us who had done our research, so I studied Performing Arts and typically well from this course name you'd expect there to be singing, dancing, lots of practical elements, but in fact there wasn't, and so I think those that perhaps haven't done as much research as they should have done were quite disappointed and they did actually end up leaving. But yeah that's just a personal experience of making sure that you do your research.

**Karina**

Definitely and other aspects of that can also include we've mentioned in our previous episodes of sort of split between exams and coursework so the same sort of thing applies will practicalities. So you're definitely looking into that is super important. Thank you so much for sharing Katie. Got another question for you, which is in regards to accommodation, so the question is, how can I help my young person choose their accommodation?

**Katie**

Fantastic. Okay so I'm just gonna, firstly start off by saying that we have got an episode dedicated to young people choosing their accommodation, and this is episode seven. So feel free to go and have a listen to that for more details about this, but I will give you some some tips in today's episode as well. Initially it's really important to communicate with your young person what it is that they're looking for in accommodation. So I'm just going to go over some good questions that you could ask your young person, which include would you want to have your own bathroom? And, which is often referred to as an en-suite or would you mind sharing a bathroom with other people? How many people would you like to share your flat with? This can vary at every university so at the University of Essex we have a wide range of choices and some of the

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accommodation can go up all the way up to having 15 other flatmates, that's quite large compared to maybe some other accommodation, where you might be sharing with only three other people, for example. So you want to check how many people they maybe would want to share with. Some other good questions are how far away, would you like your accommodation to be from campus or your lessons? I think some people assume that all accommodation is right next their lectures and they can just instantly walk there, but that isn't always the case, sometimes there's a short walk or bike ride, or even a bus or a tube ride so you'd want to think about that distance. Another consideration is thinking about catered or non-catered. So some universities offer accommodation that you get like a little card or they scan your thumb and there's like money on there that is dedicated to spending in the food facilities that they have at the university. So students don't have, they have minimal cooking facilities within their accommodation and they're expected to go and spend their money in the restaurants and cafes so they don't have to worry about cooking all the time. But for those with non-catered they would be provided with shared facilities with a fridge and cooking appliances and they would have to cook all of their meals. And that doesn't mean that they wouldn't be able to go and use the on campus restaurants, but those within catered, that would be what there'll be using most of the time. And so they're just some of the questions that you can sort of broach with your young person and, and this will help to define what it is that your young person is looking for. After this, it would be great to view the accommodation. You can do this virtually if that's an option or even attend a campus visible open day and, if possible, see what the accommodation looks like and feels like and you could also ask the students that live there, some questions and get a sort of realistic opinion on the accommodation. It's important to remember, there are alternatives. Students also have the option to privately rent out a one bedroom flat close to their university. Lots of students in their second and third year, they often share a flat or house with other students. So, if that is something that they are looking for you might want to support them with a few flat or house viewings too but, as I mentioned earlier, we do have a podcast episode called choosing your accommodation, and this is episode seven which is dedicated to helping students decide where they want to live when it comes to university. So yeah do have a listen to that as well. Karina this can be a difficult time for students so I'm wondering how, how can so for this questions how can I support my child if they don't get the grades that they were expecting?

### **Karina**

Great question, thanks Katie, so firstly, it's important to note that sometimes universities will accept students if they slightly miss their grades. They will look into the whole application, including the personal statement, references and any extenuating circumstances. Many young people and their parents or guardians they don't know much about clearing but that's why we're here to tell you a little bit more about it, so clearing is a period of time when students have received their results back where universities and colleges fill any places they still have on their courses. So universities will allow you to ring them up as soon as results day and apply to courses that are still on offer, so you can usually fill out an application online on the university's website, or have an application taken over the phone. Clearing can be used by anyone if they fall into any of the following categories, so this could be if they didn't receive any offers or none that they wanted to accept, if they didn't meet the conditions of their offers. If they paid the multi-choice application fee or if they decided that, if they declined sorry their firm place using the 'decline my place' button within track. There may be further criteria that can be checked on the UCAS website, this might change year to year, so we'd always recommend having a look, but it's really important to know that clearing is an option. Thank you Katie, I've got a question to fire back at us, so the question is, will my child be safe at university?

### **Katie**

So I think that lots of parents, carers and guardians maybe thinking this or might want to know the answer to this, because it might be the first time that their young person is leaving home. So naturally they might feel a bit like oo will my young person be safe at university and, yes, of

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course, they will. If you have any worries about it, we'd always obviously advise you to do a bit of research on what support the university provides. At the University of Essex, we have 24 hour security available on campus. Our accommodation, can only be accessed by those that live in the accommodation and we also have a variety of support available across the University, depending on what the student needs. This could be to do with disability or accessibility well-being religion but yes always do your research and we have actually got another podcast episode dedicated to support and safety at university, so again, if you want to find out particular information about the safety of university and some tips on this subject area, again, you can listen to that in our podcast episode. Karina this is quite an interesting one, partly because parents, carers and guardians if they haven't been to university themselves won't maybe understand or may have some sort of misconceptions of what student life is like, and so the question is what is student life like?

### **Karina**

Right so life at university is, I mean it's different for everyone, it depends, how you chose to sort of take it and approach it. I think it's stereotypical to assume that it's all about parties as it is up to the individual student on how they want to experience it. It's definitely a time for students to develop their independence to grow and to find out a little bit more about themselves. If a student decides to live on campus they'll be living in shared accommodation with other students attending lectures, seminars on the course that they've decided to study. There'll be social events for them to attend organised by the University, as well as other things that might be available in the local area. They'll need to do things like do food shopping, cook their meals, do their washing and there won't be any one to really bug them about getting their work done so, it will be up to them to organise their time efficiently. Some students decide to pick up a part-time job which can work quite well around their lectures and seminars, or there are longer periods of time, such as Christmas, Easter and the summer holidays where they could work a seasonal job too. The holidays are a little bit different at university and some students either decide to either stay at their university or travel back home for these brief period, so this can all differ as well. Katie we have a really interesting question here from a parent or guardian, which is, is their a parents evening or progress checks at the university?

### **Katie**

No, there isn't so sorry, to put it bluntly, but at university students are responsible for their learning and lifestyle whilst they're there. A student sorry, as you mentioned earlier answering the student life question, students are independent now they are going to be looking after their day to day working structure and so parents are kind of put aside when it comes to university, so there won't be any progress checks or parents evenings to attend. But there is support for parents and guardians so at the University of Essex, there is a networking group for parents and guardians, who have students at the University and they have a little newsletter that they send out to those guardians as well, which is quite nice. Okay next question, then, in terms of preparation, Karina what other advice, can I give to my young person ahead of them starting university?

### **Karina**

What a great question so, firstly, I would recommend helping your young person develop skills in the home, to help them prepare for when they have to go it alone in student accommodation. So this could be things like cooking pasta, ironing clothes, putting a wash on there's some of the simple things to help prepare them so it's not such a big deal when it comes to them doing it for the first time. Some universities list on their website what their accommodation includes and then offer a list of suggested items to pack. Over the summer, you can start collecting bits and bobs together, I personally looked a lot in charity shops for common items I'd need to keep the cost down. Going on to the university's website and looking at good facilities that they have. The welcome week events, sports clubs societies is also a good preparation task. There might be

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events or clubs that your young person wants to sign up to and you can both get excited about the start of your young person's university experience.

**Katie**

Thank you Karina I also just wanted to mention that, if you are completely lost when it comes to working out what it is to pack, speak to current students. I personally packed way too much and wish I'd spoken to a current student at that time, so you can use things like our unibuddi profiles on our and [rssex.ac.uk/life/chat](http://rssex.ac.uk/life/chat). And you can speak to current students with any questions you have but also just say what should I be packing? What would you recommend? because you don't want to be that person who either forgets their items or has just got way too much and so yeah I just thought I'd add that in there as well.

**Karina**

That's great, thank you for that Katie. I'm going to bounce off another question back to you now so question is, how can I help my young person with exams and revision?

**Katie**

Thanks Karina. Schools and colleges may have already provided your young person with tools to aid with revision and exams, but there are some great resources online too. People revise better in different ways and only through trialling these different methods will help you discover what works best for you, so it might take you and your young person, a little while to work out whether it's revision cards or mini presentations or simply trying out test papers. So don't worry if the first thing doesn't work for you young person. A simple suggestion that I'm going to give to our listeners today is perhaps having a calendar, up somewhere, that the whole family can see, and you can jot in there when the exams are or when revision sessions are and then you can look at adding in scheduled time specifically for revision and then by working through this together it will help you both feel at ease and perhaps better prepare your young person for their exams. I'd also just suggest speaking to young person and asking them how you can support them, because some students need more support than others and that's absolutely fine, so perhaps ask this question first. And also seek out your teachers and advisers at schools and colleges, to see what additional support they can offer to. So linking to this Karina I've got a question here, how can I help my young person with their workload stress or anxiety?

**Karina**

So I think a key part of it is exactly like what you said just now, which is the communication part. I think it's super important to communicate with your young person, ask them what you can do to help and try to support their response as much as you can. So some students may need help when it comes to revision as Katie mentioned so going over notes, flashcards whatever it is. Others may just need some space to be left alone and really keep their head down and concentrate on their work. I think this is why it's super important to ask them what you can do to help, we would recommend to try and ensure your young person is also getting adequate rest time, while they're going through a heavy workload or a stressful time to help them avoid burn out and maintain a healthy balance between working and free time. Our second episode of our podcast series is actually called stress busting for students, which provides listeners with lots of tips on how to manage stress. And what some of the symptoms of this may be so, if you are interested in hearing more about that you should definitely give it a listen.

**Katie**

Thank you so much Karina so we have come to the end of questions, thank you to those of you that were able to send those in. If you do have any more don't forget, you can send them in via Twitter using the hashtag [#UnderstandingUni](https://twitter.com/UnderstandingUni) or send an email to [outreach@essex.ac.uk](mailto:outreach@essex.ac.uk). We hope our listeners have learnt more about how they can support a young person through their journeys into adult life and have a better knowledge of higher education as a whole.

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## **Karina**

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.ac.uk](mailto:outreach@essex.ac.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.