
Managing your Money at University

**Understanding University, the
Ultimate Uni Podcast - Episode 4**

Karina: Welcome to understanding university, the ultimate uni podcast. My name is Karina.

Katie: And my name is Katie and we work with the outreach team. If you have any questions about any topics that we discuss in this episode, please use the hashtag #understandinguni on Twitter, or you can email outreach@essex.ac.uk.

Karina: In this episode we'll be discussing how to manage your money before and at university. We'll cover what student finance is, how to earn and save money whilst being a student, a myth busting round and advice from current university students who are joining us today. The information shared today is relevant for the 2021 to 2022 academic year some fees and information is subject to change. So Inês would you like to introduce yourself.

Inês: Hello, my name is Inês, I'm a second-year student studying International Relations and Modern Languages.

Karina: Thank you very much for that and Rebecca would you like to introduce yourself.

Rebecca: Hello, my name is Rebecca and I'm a post grad student studying International Human Rights Law and I did my undergrad in Law with Politics.

Katie: So, university costs money, but luckily all UK students applying for a full-time undergraduate course can apply for a loan from Student Finance England. This loan doesn't work like normal loans do, and it is seen more as a graduate debt than a loan. It won't affect your credit score and it shouldn't have an impact on applying for a mortgage. You'll receive your loan to cover your time at university, and this is split into two parts, your tuition loan, and your maintenance loan.

Karina: So, the maintenance loan is to cover your living costs, so these would be things like accommodation, your books, your phone bill, food, travel and entertainment and this loan is paid directly to you and you choose how to budget it across your time at university. So, the amount you receive will depend on your household income; household income is the amount of money that your household earns, so this could be you or your parents/carers/guardians that you live with. And then you have your tuition loan and that covers the cost of your education. So, this money is paid directly to the university, so you don't have to worry about it once you've made your student finance application and had it approved. Every UK student is eligible to have their tuition fees covered by student finance.

Katie: For more information Student Finance England, please use the government's website. We'll be sending links out to our registered listeners, and we'll put some links in the comment boxes on soundcloud as well. So, we're going to chat to our ambassadors now. So Inês what was the process like for you when you were considering the cost of university?

Inês: So for me, obviously the process started with having a conversation with my parents and you know, trying to go on the internet and figure out what the possibilities were. Luckily, the government website is very clear and is one of the first things that shows up to you, and obviously through the university, you also get redirected there, and so it became pretty clear how beneficial it was to ask for a loan for my tuition fees and it was a very easy process thanks to how clear the website was.

Katie: Oh, and that's great thank you Inês and Rebecca did you find out about the student finance online or what was the process like for you ?

Rebecca: For me, I also used the gov website to I literally just typed in student finance tuition and it takes me straight to the gov website and I like the fact that it tells you like, how much tuition you get and it was clear. And it was the same for whatever you study, so it didn't really matter what I studied, the tuition was the same for me. And then you can kind of, with the maintenance loan and you can kind of decide how much you needed, so you didn't have to take the maximum amount, which was good.

Katie: Nice, and was there anything else that you needed to do to prepare for university or were you worried about the cost of university Rebecca?

Rebecca: Yes, actually, I was worried about the cost of until I realised that the loans were available, and I didn't have to pay back immediately. So, I think when I realised that there was money available. And for me, I think the most important thing was the tuition going straight to the university, because when I was starting uni I was so scared I was going to forget to pay the uni on time, so I liked the fact that my tuition went straight to the university so I didn't have to worry about that so yeah.

Katie: Yeah, thank you for that, I think some of our listeners might have been thinking the same thing so that's perfect that you said that. And with the student finance, what's the application process like Inês what do you have to fill out when you're when you're doing this form?

Inês: So, the form consists of different parts; you get help from the government website for each one of them and in the form when they ask you for things they also explain exactly what it is, but basically one part is filled out by you, by the student, with personal information, then another section filled out by your parents/carer/guardian and then you also have to have an ID identity checked.

Katie: Thank you for that hopefully from what Inês just said, the process is nice and simple, nice and easy, and I should also mention that this is an online application as well.

Karina: Yeah and I think it's good to add as well that student finance themselves are just super helpful and if you ever sort of get stuck or confused, there is a telephone number. As an ex-university student myself as well I definitely did call them and call them a lot, anytime I had a question, but they were the most helpful and friendly people to advise me so definitely would recommend doing that too.

Katie: So, it is important for us to also mention that when you're making a student finance application you don't need to have a confirmed place on a course to apply. So, these applications can take a long time to process so it's really important that you apply as soon as possible.

Karina: Yeah, and you can work out rough estimates on how much you will receive for your maintenance loan by using the student loan calculator available on the government website. This may be handy when starting to consider your costs for when you're at university, such as accommodation; all universities offer the cost of their accommodation, including halls of residence, which are the flats that students live in so that you can look at

how much they are. You can also have a look at the UCAS budget calculator to work out other estimate costs of living, depending on the university that you choose to study at.

Katie: Thank you Karina. So apart from your student finance application, how else can you prepare your money for university? So, there are multiple, and a huge variety of scholarships and bursaries available as additional financial support, and these can vary from things like sports excellent scholarships and disability student allowances and the scholarships and bursaries offered will vary at every university. So Inês please could you just briefly explain what a scholarship is please?

Inês: Yeah so from my understanding, one of the benefits of a scholarship is that you don't have to pay it back. So it's money that is awarded to you, and that you do not have to worry about paying back at a later date.

Katie: Yes, that is exactly right and this is an amazing opportunity if there are scholarships available out there for you to apply for because it's additional money that you don't have to pay back, so that can be amazing if you can pick one of those up.

Inês: Yes, and also I found out while my process of applying that many countries, for example, if you're a student from another country or even from the UK but have another nationality that sometimes countries do support students wanting to study abroad. So it's always good to know, do a quick search online and see if there's some scholarship that maybe you can get that you never thought of but it's right there so don't leave anything out.

Katie: Yes definitely, and you just said about looking online. So where can we look to see whether a university has a scholarship or a bursary?

Inês: For me, the first step would be to go to the university website and normally they are very clear. They have a section on finance who are help within that part of fees and costs and finance normally have scholarship and bursaries, and they are very clear. Also at The University of Essex, once you get to the website, you do have options to chat with people, so you can directly ask them a question if you're not finding what you're looking for this ask them, they will redirect you so, it's really helpful and very easy.

Katie: Amazing, and we're now going to ask Rebecca a bit about bursaries. So firstly, what a bursary is and also Rebecca was actually lucky enough to receive a bursary when she joined university so she's going to share a bit about that too.

Rebecca: So, like a scholarship, a bursary is also money that you don't have to pay back. And there's different types of bursaries, I can't really speak on all the different ones and different unis offer different bursaries. The one I had I actually didn't have to do anything; I literally applied, and I got emails saying I qualified for a bursary, and I just received the funds twice a year. However, when I was doing my post grad, I also went to the website and looked at fees and funding and on there you can kind of see the different bursaries and scholarships, and then you can see which one's you're eligible for, and then you can apply directly from the website. But, the ones I do know for example, if the university are aware you have a low income or you have a disability, then they usually automatically may put you on the bursaries that satisfied that category so you might not have to do anything, but I still think is worth checking the website just to see what other bursaries are available.

Katie: Yeah definitely, that's exactly what I was just about to say is that, just have a look online and see what's available. And then just double check whether you need to apply for them, or whether they are automatically given to you when you get your place at that university. Okay, so I'm going to ask you guys a bit about maintenance loans now. So Rebecca when you received your first instalment of your maintenance loan, what did you do and how did you feel?

Rebecca: When I received my first maintenance loan, it was weird. I was like okay I have all this money, what do I do first? Shall I be responsible or just spend it? So, I decided I would be responsible and the first thing I did was I paid my accommodation, so I got that out of the way, and then realised there wasn't that much money left. And then, what I did was, because you get your maintenance loan in three instalments, so what I did was I divided it by the amount of months that I would have to use the money before I get the next one. And then I just worked out what I had each month, and then I just worked out what bills, what utilities I need to buy and they just went about it that way.

Katie: That is great, that is perfect. And also, if you're not sure what your maintenance loan is going to be, we already mentioned that you can use the student finance calculator to give you a rough estimate of what you may be eligible for. And you can work that all out before you even go to university, and so you can work out that budgeting before you even get there, instead of in Rebecca's situation she had to do it right there and then, and work out how she was going to get through the next few months. So Inês how did you budget your money when you started university?

Inês: So I was lucky enough that, in my case, my parents could pay for accommodation. So at least that part I could take off of my mind and only focus on things like groceries and those almost day to day needs. Really the idea for those were the first time that I went shopping for groceries when I got to the UK and to the university I kind of wrote down roughly what I had spent, and then I saw how long that lasted me. Then on the next shopping trips I tried to make sure that it either was the same value or that I could even bring it down. I really realised okay, what things can I buy that will last me for longer? or you know just really learning from each experience, I think, really is the best thing.

Katie: Thank you, and these sorts of things, the example you just gave then about writing down what you need and budgeting. These are the sort of things you can do now, you don't have to be at university to start doing these budgeting things. You can start now and have a go, and hopefully that might make you feel a bit better about when you have to do in real life and at university.

Karina: Definitely, I think that's a really good point. But whilst you are at university, you also have the chance to work part-time so again transferable skills and earn a little bit of extra money as well. Every university offers a range of jobs that you may have the opportunity to apply for, for example, our lovely students chatting to us today are student ambassadors. So Rebecca, please can you tell us a bit about the role and how does it fit around your studies?

Rebecca: Okay, so student ambassador you do different things, you're basically just an ambassador for the university you do a lot of open days and a lot of different things actually. I mainly did a lot of tours, I did a lot of Open Days, I did a lot of applicant days, I get to talk to a lot of students like I'm doing right now. And what I really like about this role

was the fact that you pick the days that you're free. So if I'm free every Wednesday, then I will pick Wednesday, because then, I know I don't have lectures that day and I can work. The roles are very diverse, you never get bored, you're not doing the same thing over and over again, you're doing different things which I think is really cool. And you're meeting different people, you're engaging when you're talking, and you really fit it around your studies as well, so you can do days where, I had days when I did like two hours working as an ambassador, and then I went for my lectures after; so I really like the fact that you can tailor it around your studies and your lifestyle.

Karina: That's brilliant, thank you so much for sharing that with us. Inês, what other paid opportunities are there at university?

Inês: So, university has a very lively campus in the sense that you have restaurants, you have shops, where you can you know buy food or buy stationary, things like that, and obviously all of that requires people to work there and the good thing about universities is that they open a lot of places for students. The best part of working as a student ambassador, or at any of the university venues, is that people really are looking out for you. The first experience that sometimes, some of us get into the real world of working are very safe, they're very protected, and also they are very happy. You know you get out of there thinking of working as a pleasant experience, as a thing that you like, and as in if I put in effort then I can, you know have fun, I can enjoy what I'm doing, and I can get some extra money. Instead of going to the workspace, to the real world, with no skills or not knowing, you know how to write an email, how to talk to your superior and this way you get so much experience, meet so many people and honestly, your view of the world is just going to be more positive, because this was your first experience. It wasn't that you went to some job, and no one paid you for two months, no it's you know exactly who to ask for support, and you know that your work will be valued.

Karina: Thank you very much for that Inês and I completely, completely agree. And if you are looking at a university that's not necessarily a campus university or, you're just not interested in working in those sorts of places, you can always think about the places that surround the university as well. There are plenty of shops and restaurants and other places out there for you to get a job at, or you could even think about transferring your current part-time job to a different location, so at the university.

Inês: Yes, another thing I found out is that when you're in college or finishing in high school, there are a lot of skills and knowledge that you don't realise you have because you're looking forward to university as a way to acquire more skills, but once you're at university, you have some free time that you can use. For example, to private tutor students that are in college or high school in A Levels, and now you have all the knowledge that they don't have yet so you can actually help them, and that can be very good part-time and it can really help you with your communication skills that you will definitely need it university.

Katie: Thank you for that Inês, that was some great tips there and some perfect information for our listeners. So we've just talked a bit about how you can earn money alongside studying at university but, ultimately, you need to be good at budgeting too, so that you don't end up eating beans on toast all the time or pasta as typically students are known to eat. So, we'll go to Rebecca, how easy or hard, did you find it to budget your money?

Rebeca: I think once I figured out how much I was spending it was easier for me to budget by writing it down. I wrote down how much I spent on food, I wrote down much I spent on travelling, because I really wanted to get the uni experience, so I wrote down how much I spent on nights out as well. Then, once I was able to write down all of that, and then allocated money for each area, and then I also realised that by writing it down, I noticed I was spending so much money on take out, for example, so I started cooking more and then I was able to save that money.

Katie: I think when you mentioned takeaways just then I feel like as an ex-student myself, takeaways was one of those things that a lot of students really struggled not to do on a weekly basis. And obviously there's the craze with fakeaways at the moment where you recreate your favourite takeaway at home by buying the ingredients yourself and obviously it comes out a lot cheaper; it can be fun and something to do with the people you live with whether that's your housemates or your family at home. But I was just wondering Rebecca do you have any other cool tips like that to help you save or manage your money efficiently?

Rebecca: So when I was living in a house in second year, what me and my housemates would do is we'd buy our food together, so we can save money. And then that way, we realised that if we buy in bulk, we saved more money than if you buy individually, and then that was a really good way that we're able to save money.

Inês: Yeah I think that's definitely such a good strategy, and you know, making food even if you're living at university halls it can be such a great experience to bond with some of your flatmates because, you might teach them skills, and they might teach you skills. Another very good tip for budgeting when it comes to food is, for example at the University of Essex we're very lucky because, the university itself organises a market every Thursday and so, because you have producers there you can just go and buy fresh things at a much cheaper price than you'd get at a big supermarket. But even if you are at a different university, you should really look for markets or things like that, where, again, you can buy certain things in bulk or just fresher because they don't have the middle man, it would be cheaper and way better for you. But definitely cook by yourself, and this is something you can start thinking about before you get to university, so that is not as intense and as daunting as starting from zero, but even if you do, there are always people to help you out. So yeah in terms of budgeting I'd also say don't always take a lot of money, for example, your card if you're just going to the library because the temptation to stop to get sometimes a coffee or a cookie that you sometimes don't need because you're just going to go right back home, where you already have that cookie that you bought. So yeah definitely don't bring temptations with you.

Katie: Thank you for that advice Inês and also while we're, whilst I'm talking to you, and if you're having problems with money or you're struggling with budgeting where can you go, who can you speak to about that?

Inês: So our university actually has funds and people where you can ask for advice on all kinds of things, but specifically monetary issues and they do have a fund a, hardship fund, so if at any point you are struggling, you can go there, and you can you know, find a solution, and they can lend you some money for what you're struggling with. So do reach out.

Karina: Thank you very much for that. So I just want to briefly sort of mention what happens post-university and when it's time to repay your student loan. So in the April after you graduate you will be asked to start repaying back what you loaned from student finance, but only *if* you are earning over a certain amount of money. So, if you are then you'll only be paying back a small percentage over that threshold. The minimum salary that you have to have before paying back student loan has been slowly increasing over the past few years. And so, for more detailed information about this, you can visit the UCAS website, which offers clear information, or visit our talks and tasters page to watch our video and student finance.

Katie: Thank you Karina. So we're approaching the end of this episode, but we're going to finish it off with a bit of a myth busting session. So I'm going to do some quickfire questions for our ambassadors, who are going to hopefully answer them correctly and provide us with a bit of an answer too if they can. So we're going to start off with Inês then, and I'm going to say "University is just for rich people", true or false?

Inês: Absolutely false, everything we talked about this episode just proves that it's not just for rich people.

Katie: Thank you. Over to Inês then, if you go to university you end up with lots of debt that you'll struggle to pay back, true or false?

Rebecca: I will answer that, it's false, because, like Karina said you don't have to pay back and until you earn a certain amount of money and that's been increasing over the years, so definitely false.

Katie: Sorry Rebecca I realised I called you Inês. But we're gonna go back to Ines now definitely and say true or false, you can get a part time job that fits around your studies?

Inês: True, student ambassadors and many others, are great.

Katie: And back to Rebecca. Students have to live off beans on toast and pasta, true or false?

Rebecca: Definitely false, as was mentioned about budgeting and going out to buy food. You definitely do not live on beans on toast, if you budget really well and you work on your cooking skills, you can live as a student on really nice meals, yeah.

Katie: Back to Inês. Getting a student loan will affect your credit score rating, true or false?

Inês: False it will not affect it, as we mentioned before you can find the information on the government website.

Katie: And our last question for Rebecca: Paying back your student loan early will benefit you, true or false?

Rebecca: Not really, because I think it is just to do with your preference, you can pay back early if you want to, but if you do not it would not be a disadvantage.

Katie: Thank you, both so much for that, and I really hope that has clarified some misconceptions that surrounds student finance and going to university. But if you do have any other questions we do have a platform on UniBuddy, where you can chat to current students and staff at the University of Essex and, you can ask them any questions that you like. This is on essex.ac.uk/life/chat. We can also take questions at outreach [@essex.ac.uk](mailto:outreach@essex.ac.uk) or use the hashtag on Twitter [#understandinguni](https://twitter.com/understandinguni).

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