



**Featuring expert contributions from over 35 higher education practitioners.**



**UniTasterDays.com**

# **Teachers' Guide to University 2022**

**The key higher education facts for school and college staff.**

*Produced in collaboration with* **HELQA**

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# Welcome to the UniTasterDays.com Teachers' Guide to University

This guide has been produced to support you to deliver excellent university guidance to your students.

As well as supporting you in your day-to-day role, it will also anticipate a conversation between you (the teacher/careers adviser) and your student (the potential higher education applicant), arming you with solid answers to their questions about moving on to higher education. It has been produced based on the higher education system in England and released in October 2021.

The guide aims to clarify the current position for you and your students following so many significant sector changes. Crucially, it looks to bring you closer to the institutions that offer so many ways for your students to explore higher education, before committing to it.

## Helping students to make the right choice

As with any of life's landmark choices, higher education is not a decision to be taken lightly. Sound advice and first-hand insight into what students face, at an early stage, provides a smoother path to successful higher-level study, and a better chance of a satisfying and fulfilling career. This guide helps you to provide it.

Universities operate in a more competitive market than ever. It's in their interest to attract students by inviting them to open days, workshops, talks and all manner of familiarisation events – be that on campus, in-school or now more than ever, online. The following pages show a selection of activities your students will find useful.

The simple fact is that your students now have a wider choice than ever of ways to 'try on higher education for size' and to ask any question they want to the university staff member or student best equipped to answer it.

## Experts on your side

This guide features contributions from experts in higher education, as well as specialists from outside the sector with fantastic advice and support to share. It has been produced in collaboration with HELOA - and we are very grateful for their support and the contributions made throughout the guide by HELOA members.

I should also add that often in the guide, we use the term 'university' – but it is acknowledged that not only universities offer higher education programmes. We just use the term 'university' as it avoids another acronym and using repeated references to 'higher education institutions' throughout.

I hope you will find this Teachers' Guide to University useful, and that you'll visit UniTasterDays.com to search or request your next event soon.

Jon Cheek - Director, UniTasterDays.com  
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# Higher education update 1 - Introducing recent changes

**By Jonathan Atkinson, Events Manager at the University of Liverpool and HELOA UK Chair**

Until recently students have followed a well-worn path when researching their choices and applying to higher education. School, college and university support teams knew the cycle and each year enhanced our understanding and subsequent support.

Needless to say, this has not been our recent experience and it may be a while before we know what the new 'normal' looks like. To understand some of the changes and challenges here's a (very) brief sector summary.

## Higher education admissions changes

Applying to university has never been more popular and the trend only looks to increase with 700,000 applicants for entry in 2021 and UCAS forecasting that this could hit 1 million applicants by 2025.

Selective courses have had to be (and I believe will continue being) increasingly careful with their contractual offers as Teacher Assessed Grades and Centre Assessment Grades have not resulted in the variance of achievement that typical A-level exams resulted in.

Increased numbers of students attending their first-choice university also meant a smaller clearing cohort in 2021, with less students exploring other opportunities offered by institutions with spaces.

## Preparing for the jump into higher education

Although many students may have found researching and preparing for higher education disrupted, universities have pulled together wide-ranging expertise from their teams to create new transition programmes.

Some programmes are for students with their university entry confirmed with course and

support specifics and others are open and online. Either way, the student journey from first chat to first graduate job is sharply in focus. A quick google search will show you a broad offer, and the Office for Students also have some case studies too.

## Outcomes and choice

Leading on from focusing on student success is how success is being defined. This is a contentious topic with many different answers depending on who you ask. Some regulators will insist that quality is based on quantifiable metrics that can correlate to increased salaries for graduates over the course of their careers. Others would argue that this creates tunnel vision on what higher education is worth and what it is for.

There are, and will remain, a huge number of benefits to going to university that improves a person's quality of life and satisfaction, even if it did not result in a six-figure salary. The debate will continue, and I wouldn't be surprised to see 'Auga-esque' headlines of, if not steps taken towards, £7,500 tuition fees for some courses emerge again in 2022.

## Post-18 education but not as you know it

The sector itself is continuously changing and adapting to what students, society and the economy need and discussions seem to indicate a growth in post-18 options. Watch out for more accelerated (2 year) degrees, ideally more opportunities (increased numbers please) of degree apprenticeships and slightly further into the future, a teaching and funding model that supports lifelong learning, encouraging engagement with further and higher education over a person's lifetime to develop relevant work-based skills.

## Crystal ball gazing – so what is the future?

Looking to the year ahead, you would hope for a steadying of the sector, some reflection on our learnings and how best to bring together the two worlds of pre and post pandemic teaching and student success.

Depending on the political climate and who is in charge of education in the next 12 months, a debate on post qualification admissions (PQA) or offers (PQO) will be of huge interest to everyone involved in helping students make informed decisions about their futures.

Changes to systems and processes can result in better ways of working. I would caution against changing a system that is widely understood to work, albeit with needed improvements, for one which could bring a host of new and unknown challenges.

### Where to go from here

The sector always changes; however consistency can always be found in the volumes of support and engagement on offer from your local university's recruitment/outreach teams (whichever title they fall under).

We'll return to some trusted ways of providing information and we'll discover new ways to provide ongoing support. If the sector interests you then keep in touch with your local recruitment and admissions teams, give yourself a weekly treat of reading Wonkhe, and for advisers always keep up to date with UCAS.

## Higher education update 2 - more on the recent changes

**By Alix Delany, Head of Admissions at the University of East Anglia**

There is never a dull moment in education. In the past 18 months the higher education sector has been consulted on a wide range of issues, whether it is the future of technical qualifications, the outcomes of the Augar review, how qualifications should be assessed, post qualification admissions systems, degree apprenticeships, funding of subject areas, and widening access to higher education, including contextual admissions.

All of these complex subjects are intertwined, and the discussions around them will continue in the years ahead, as they impact and shape the sector for the next decade and beyond. This is of course against the backdrop of Covid-19, and how we ensure students entering higher education are supported both practically and emotionally.

What has been demonstrated is that there is still a strong level of demand for higher education from school leavers. As we come out of a 'demographic dip', 2022 will be the first year in a decade where we start to see a noticeable increase in the number of 18-year-olds potentially looking to secure a place at university.

### Qualifications: T Levels

This will be the first year that we receive UCAS applications from students who have studied T Levels. Universities are keen to ensure that there are courses available and routes into higher education for these new qualifications. We will continue to collaborate with you as teachers and advisers to understand new, existing and legacy qualifications and how we can best assist students to ensure they have a pathway to higher education.

### Subject trends

There is continued growth in health and social care applications, covering courses such as nursing, midwifery and medicine. We are also seeing that there is a rise in interest for subjects such as law, media, computing, engineering, biology and psychology.

### University offers and competitive courses

In 2021, the way universities made offers started to change, meaning students may have received fewer offers for more popular courses. These trends may continue as demand for these subjects increases. There is currently enough overall capacity in the system for the majority of students, however you might need to encourage students to expand their search beyond the traditional 'go to' university and course choices.

There are plenty of good quality, exciting, innovative courses out there, and it is worth exploring them fully with your students.

**“ 2022 will be the first year in a decade where we start to see a noticeable increase in the number of 18-year olds potentially looking to secure a place at university. ”**



# THIS IS A TASTE OF UNIVERSITY

Our subject tasters are a free and easy way to support current studies and give students a feel for their subject at university level.

[www.uea.ac.uk/study/tasters](http://www.uea.ac.uk/study/tasters)

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University of East Anglia

## Student finance information for your students - please do share this with them.

### 5 things EVERYONE should know about student finance

By Martin Lewis, MoneySavingExpert.com

**Ignore everything you've read in the papers. Ignore the political spittle that flies across Parliament. And in some cases, ignore what parents tell you too. There are more myths and misunderstandings about student finance than any other subject (my polite way of saying there's a lot of bull spoken).**

This is a political hot potato. People spin explanations to suit their own arguments. Yet that's about the big picture. When you come to decide whether you can afford to go to university, you should focus only on how it'll practically affect your pocket. And that is radically different to what you usually hear.

Now please don't confuse the fact I want to explain the system, with unblinkered support of it. I do have issues, but frankly that's not relevant here. What counts is that I tool you up to make the appropriate decision. And a quick warning before I start – if people talk to you about their uni finances ask them where they went and when they started.

This is about the system that began for English students who started in or after 2012. It can be very different for others. (For help across the UK see [www.moneysavingexpert.com/studentmythbuster](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/studentmythbuster))

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

Students don't pay universities or other higher education institutions directly. Tuition fees, typically up to £9,250 a year at the time of writing, are paid for you by the Student Loans Company. Over a typical three-year course, the combined loan for tuition and maintenance can be over £60,000. But what counts is what you repay...

- You should only start repaying in the April after you leave uni.

- Then you only need to repay if you earn £27,295 a year (and that threshold is set to rise in April each 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 30 years – whether you've paid a penny or not.

- It's repaid via the payroll, just like tax and doesn't go on your credit file.

#### 2. There is an official amount parents are meant to contribute, but it's hidden.

You are also 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 (in other words, parents') residual income. For 2021/22 starters, the loan is reduced from a family income of just £25,000 upwards, until around £61,000 (or £69,000 if you're going to uni in London), where it's roughly halved.

This missing amount is the expected parental contribution. Yet parents aren't told about this gap, never mind told the amount. I'm in the midst of talking to ministers to try and get them to change that, but nothing has happened yet.

So for now, when you get your letter saying what living loan you get, you'll need to work out the parental contribution yourself. To do this just subtract your loan from the maximum loan available (as an example, for all 2021/22 starters, it's £7,987 if living at home, £9,488 away from home, and £12,382 away from home in London). To find out more use our [www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-loan-parental-contribution-tool/](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-loan-parental-contribution-tool/)

Of course some parents won't be able to afford it – 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 to have this conversation with your parents and discuss together how you are going to plug the hole.

In fact, while the papers often focus on tuition fees, I hear most complaints from students that even the maximum living loan isn't big enough. Funny isn't it, after everything that's said, the real practical problem with student loans isn't that they're too big, it's that they're not big enough.

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

**3. The amount you borrow is mostly irrelevant – 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 (read it a couple of times if necessary).

What you repay each month depends solely on what you earn, ie from April 2021, it's 9% of everything earned above £27,295.

In other words, the amount you owe and the interest is mostly irrelevant. As proof, for a graduate who earns, for the sake of easy numbers, £37,295...

- Owe £20,000 and you repay £900 a year
- Owe £50,000 and you repay £900 a year
- In fact, let's be ridiculous and say tuition fees have been upped to £1m a year, so you owe £3m+, you still ONLY repay £900 a year

So as you can see, what you owe DOESN'T impact what you repay each year. The only difference it makes is whether you'll clear the borrowing within the 30 years before it wipes.

It's predicted very few – only the top 17% highest-earning graduates – will clear it in time. So unless you're likely to be a seriously high earner, ignore the amount you 'owe'.



Instead in practice what happens is you effectively pay an extra 9% tax on your income (not including National Insurance) for 30 years. At current rates, it works like this:

Earnings	Uni goers	Non-uni goers
Up to £12,570	No tax	No tax
From £12,571 - £27,295	20%	20%
From £27,296 - £50,270	29%	20%
From £50,271 - £150,000	49%	40%
£150,000+	54%	45%

This doesn't make it cheap, but it does mean that all the talk of burdening students with debt is misleading. The burden is paying 9% extra tax – frankly it shouldn't be called a debt, it really doesn't work like one.

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, the headline rate is 4.5%, but many won't pay it.

Student loan interest is set based on the (RPI) rate of inflation – the measure of how quickly prices of all things are rising and it changes annually each September, as follows...

*While studying: RPI + 3%.* From September 2021, it's been 4.2% (due to a temporary rate cap; this will drop to 4.1% from October before the rate reverts to 4.5% in January).

*From the April after leaving:* It depends on earnings. From September 2021, for those earning under the repayment threshold it's RPI (1.5% at the time of writing), rising on a sliding scale to RPI + 3% if you earn over £49,130.

So many graduates won't actually be charged the full 4.5% rate. In fact many graduates 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 30 years before it's wiped. Many won't. And even of those who will, all but the highest earners won't come close to repaying all of the interest added.

#### 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.

So sadly all my explanations above need the caveat of 'unless things change'. The government-commissioned 'Augar' report on further and higher education, published in 2019, proposed many big changes – including lowering tuition fees and changing the name of student loans to a 'student contribution system'.

Whether these proposals will be put in place is still very much open to question, yet if they are, the recommendation was it'd only be for new starters, not for those who are already at uni. Hopefully that gets you started on student finance. If you'd like to read full info see my detailed 20 student finance mythbusters at [www.moneysavingexpert.com/studentmythbuster](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/studentmythbuster)

#### Other important student guides to read:

[www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-budgeting-planner/](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-budgeting-planner/)

[www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-bank-account/](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-bank-account/)

[www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-guide/](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-guide/)

**Note from**  UniTasterDays

**This student finance content has been kindly provided by Martin Lewis for you to share with your students.**

**Of course this will provide the key student finance information for you too.**



University for the Common Good



## Join us at GCU

At Glasgow Caledonian University, we have superb facilities, teaching excellence and a high-quality, vocational education. Just as importantly, the University – and the city of Glasgow – is a warm, welcoming and fun place for students to spend their student years.

With personal campus tours and a variety of open days and events, both in person and virtual, these are just some of the ways for prospective students to meet and chat with staff and students and discuss applications, courses, funding, study and living arrangements.

Find out more online at: [www.gcu.ac.uk/opendays](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/opendays)

*We are also committed to attending school and college careers fairs. Contact us at [ukroenquiries@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:ukroenquiries@gcu.ac.uk) with your fair dates.*

# Why should your students consider university?

**By Lydia Greenhalgh, Content Officer at the University of Kent**

Gone are the days of limited post-18 pathways. From apprenticeships to full-time work, gap years and further college study - it's no surprise that students find themselves at a crossroad of future options, trying to navigate the best route.

They might ask you 'what's special about going to uni?' Whilst the answer to that is never the same for every student, higher education offers an unrivalled wealth of opportunity that extends beyond their years as an undergraduate.

To support the conversations with your students, here are my main 'pros' for considering university:

## They can study what excites them

Studying for a degree allows students to explore niche areas within their subject and helps them get to the nitty-gritty of what they love. By taking ownership of their learning, and tailoring their module choices, they can also become an expert in their field of study.

What's more, they may learn from academics who contribute to some of the most progressive research in the world, are leading thinkers in their discipline and have years of experience in both teaching and industry.

## It's a career springboard

Having a degree unlocks doors to exciting and fulfilled futures. By achieving a higher-level qualification, students are more likely to have greater earning power throughout their working life and a wider pool of opportunities than non-graduates.

To boost graduate employability, some universities leave the textbooks behind and teach their students using industry-standard facilities and real-life learning environments. These spaces provide an opportunity for

students to apply their learning and use the technologies or methods that they will come across in their chosen careers.

As part of their degree, they could also consider taking a sandwich year to either work or study abroad. Both experiences are valuable for gaining new skills and exploring different career paths.

## There are personal perks too

The social hive and autonomy of student life is a totally unique experience. There is no other post-18 destination where your students could be learning about their favourite subject at 10am, playing lacrosse by 2pm and heading to a social by 5pm!

University provides the ultimate level of independence. Students can explore new social spheres, try out different hobbies, travel abroad and even change where they call 'home' for years to come. So rather than seeing university as a daunting prospect, get them thinking about all the exciting unknowns – who will they meet? Where will they live? How will university change their path?

Of course, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to life after school or college. With lots of online and on-campus events available, now is an exciting time for your students to consider what comes next and which options feel right for their future.



# UNIVERSITY OF KENT



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- HE information and guidance talks
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to find out more

University of  
**Kent**

# How to support students making their university course choices

**By Emily Day, Recruitment Coordinator at the University of Wolverhampton**

When thinking about this article, I started with how I made my choices. It was a fair few years ago, but there are key things that still stick in my mind. I'm sure that you too can think of a few things that influenced your decision.

Of course, we all had very different factors that were important to us. Years later, would we still follow the same list? Seventeen-year-old me was convinced that being an extra on Hollyoaks was top of my list!

Until I started to visit open days, I thought my mind was made up. But then I started to look at other factors – including location, course and module choices and grade requirements. As I visited different universities these factors kept changing and I started to compare them against each other. Ultimately, my decision came down to a gut feeling *can I see myself living and studying here?*

## Personal choices

The most important thing to remember when supporting students at pre and post offer stage is that each student will have different things that are important to them. Of course, students should get advice from parents and carers, friends and their school or college, but make sure that their list is personal to them.

They can start with a long list, which can help when initially researching universities, and then ask questions at both face-to-face and virtual events. As students find out answers to their questions, this list will start to change and help create a list of potential choices. I used different post-it notes with factors on that I could move around and group together depending on which became the most important.

## Encourage students to attend open days

Now that things are starting to return to some sense of normality, encourage students to grab this opportunity with both hands (and feet). Have resources available to help students find when open days are, such as a map of universities with QR codes that link to open day webpages.

Open days are the best way to get a feel for a university and can naturally help students to select their choices. Applicant specific events, as well as engaging with university communications and social media channels, can then help students to pick their firm and insurance choices.

We know that choosing a path for higher education is one of the hardest decisions students make and there is no one size fits all guide. My best advice is to have multiple resources available for your students, such as videos, prospectuses, careers/higher education fairs as well as drop-in sessions.

Each student will be different of course, but starting their research as soon as possible will be very beneficial for them all.



# CHECKLIST



# Introducing the different types of university courses

**By Jen Barton, Student Recruitment Manager at Durham University**

Understanding different options for university study can be challenging for your students. The language used can also be difficult to understand when they are unfamiliar with it. We have therefore created a guide to the different types of courses that are available.

## Foundation degree

The first level of study at university is a foundation degree, intended to help bridge the gap between school or college and university. They are typically one year and offer direct entry on the relevant bachelor's degree.

## Undergraduate

A bachelor's degree is the most common type of undergraduate degree. These include BA (Hons), BSc (Hons), BEng (Hons) and LLB (Hons). In these courses 'Hons' stands for honours, which usually means students study for three years, or sometimes four if they have a sandwich year or year abroad.

## BSc

This is a Bachelor of Science and they are typically science-based degree subjects, like Chemistry, Biology and Physics, but often subjects like Psychology, Maths and Computer Science too. This type of degree will often have a strong focus on analytical and statistical skills.

## BA

This is a Bachelor of Arts, they are often less specialised and focus more on qualitative thinking, creativity, theory and critical thinking. Typically, this includes subjects such as English, History, Politics and Sociology. Some subjects offer both a BSc and a BA, for example, Anthropology and Sport, depending on whether it's more scientific or theory based.

## Integrated Master's

An integrated master's usually takes four years. Integrated master's qualifications include MSc, MEng (Engineering) and MChem (Chemistry). A master's degree enables students to become a subject specialist and move directly onto further study or a particular career path.

## How about postgraduate university opportunities?

Once students have completed an undergraduate degree, there are then many options to progress on to postgraduate study.

## Master's

This is the next level up from a bachelor's degree. Students follow the same sort of title as outlined above, MA, MSc, MEng, and take between one and two years. This can also lead to PhD level study.

## MBA

Master of Business. This is an internationally recognised business degree and usually takes two years to complete.

## PGCE

This is the qualification that is usually required to become a teacher and takes one year to complete, or two part-time. Students will need a degree in the relevant qualification for this.

## Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) and Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert)

This is also an option following a bachelor's degree. They can often fit around a job and are at the same level as a masters.

## PhD

A PhD usually comes after a master's and typically takes four to six years to complete. It is a research based qualification requiring students to write a thesis, based on their research.

**“ Understanding different options for university study can be challenging for your students. ”**

## Events and Resources for Teachers

Interested to learn more about what Durham University has to offer your students?

Sign up to our teachers e-newsletter to find out more and access our free online resources.

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## Higher Education Advisers Conferences

Durham hosts Higher Education Advisers Conferences for Teachers and other events throughout the year.

Visit the website below to browse our resources and book your place, once bookings are open.



# Tips when supporting students who are thinking about moving to a new area for university

**By Ruth Boyce, School & College Development Officer at the University of Winchester**

Trying out a new place can be a fantastic experience for young people, whether that be from a rural to urban location or experiencing a new town with differing local culture and atmosphere. However, students often rely on what they know, secondary aged students (11-16 years old) travel an average of 3.4 miles to get to school (1) and although often travel further for their post-16 education, it is perhaps not a surprise that they rely on places they recognise to guide their decision making.

Below are some ideas to encourage students to think far and wide when considering where to study.

## Where is? Quiz

This is fun to do with those starting their research, focusing on places in the UK (not even thinking global!). It is interesting to see where the gaps are, parts of the country they may not have been exposed to or places they haven't heard of.

Destination maps showing where previous students are studying can be a great reinforcement of scale and maps in shared spaces can provide easy look up opportunities.

## All in a name

We know not all universities are named after their location; but many discount a university because they've not heard of the place before. Additionally, search result lists in online platforms tends to be alphabetical. Think about the shortlisting platforms you are promoting and whether students have the skills to critically use the search filters. Reordering lists can throw up previously unconsidered options.

## How far

In the UCAS course search students can choose how far from home they might study. They may need support to identify how far a distance is in journey time though. Depending on where in the country they are starting from, 100 miles is around a 2 – 2 ½ hour drive. This might help students visualise where they are willing to travel and put into perspective scale from map to journey time.

## Local or living away

Students may live at home to save on spending, but often overlook the cost of commuting and their reduced maintenance loan. As they shortlist, urge them to consider how often they plan to travel home. In addition, questioning whether being 1 or 7 hours away is going to have an impact on how connected they feel to those at home, how would they connect over the distance?

From starting at a point of researching far and wide, they might find a course that is perfect for them either by exploring a university that is new or a few miles outside their search zone. It is worth reflecting on how you support students (and their supporter at home) with their geographical thinking.

*1. Taken from the National Travel Survey 2019*



# A guide to international university study opportunities

**By David Hawkins, Director and Founder, The University Guys**

In an increasingly global world, with students connected to friends, celebrities, news and opportunities all over the world at the click of a button - and Zoom allowing us to all keep in touch, today's students have never been more globally connected, tied into a digital economy that knows no borders.

Yet, when it comes to university, so many focus only on options in the UK. As a result, students are missing out on a huge array of opportunities to find their 'best fit' university around the world, or study at the best university in the world for their subject, not just the best in the UK.

Here, I will guide you through some of the key differences, so you can provide initial support to students considering study opportunities overseas.

## Assessments

Students are attracted to the fact that university in other countries doesn't work in the same way as it does in the UK: on a global spectrum, the typical single-subject, final assessment model that most UK universities offer is quite unusual.

In the USA students will study a broader range of subjects and their 'major' will only be about a third of what they study while at university. In the Netherlands (which has over 300 degrees taught entirely in English), the Universities of Applied Science system offer a hands-on style education connected to employers.

Universities across Europe are now offering many international degrees, with options such as the world-class Bachelor of Business Administration at IE Madrid or Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at the Central European University in Vienna offering life-changing opportunities to students who don't want to follow the crowd.

## Applications

Application procedures vary widely from UCAS and from country-to-country. When applying to other countries students need to learn new processes, timelines and terminology. Students should start the process at least six months earlier than for UCAS (and, for the US, at least a year earlier due to the probable need to take either the SAT or the ACT).

## So, where's popular?

The USA dominates, with universities from the world-class names such as Harvard to lesser-known institutions that compare with the best of the UK. Even in these challenging times, students are working hard preparing university applications to hopefully study at world-leading institutions in California, Florida or New England.

Canada has risen in popularity, with the perception of a more European political and social system, and a favourable immigration regime for post-study work drawing applications to universities such as McGill and Toronto.

Europe is increasingly popular, from studying in English-speaking locations such as Ireland, to courses taught in English across the continent.

A particular trend is for students to look at well-regarded private universities in Europe, who offer modern education in a global context, drawing in international students from all over the world to study in cities such as Milan (for Bocconi University) or Dublin (for Trinity College).

## Today's students are very globally minded

With changes due to Brexit, students will know that being internationally-connected gives them a wealth of job opportunities after graduation.

Students we worked with last year gained offers from 140 universities in 14 countries, from Stanford in the USA to Leiden in the Netherlands, McGill in Canada to ESADE in Spain. These ambitious and global students will have job opportunities on graduation that their peers at provincial UK universities can only dream of. The time is now ripe for more students to seriously consider international universities: the world is out there!

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# A guide to degree apprenticeships

**By Jack Ridleigh, Senior Student Recruitment Engagement Officer at Sheffield Hallam University**

## What are degree apprenticeships?

Degree apprenticeships are work-based training programmes which combine paid work experience with university-level study.

The level of study varies between apprenticeships, ranging from Level 4 (equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree) to Level 7 (equivalent to a master's degree). Degree apprenticeships take between one and six years to complete and are available in a wide range of subject areas, including:

- Building and quantity surveying
- Digital and technology
- Engineering
- Food technology
- Health and social care
- Leadership and management
- Policing

What is consistent, however, is that degree apprentices spend most of their time (a minimum of 30 hours per week) working and learning on the job. Unlike university students on placement, degree apprentices are contracted, salaried employees with the same employment rights as their colleagues.

A degree apprentice's remaining time (roughly 20%) will be spent on off-the-job training, study and assessment, usually delivered in partnership between their employer and an education provider. Though much of an apprentice's training will take place in their workplace, they may also be required to attend college or university periodically. This usually takes place through 'day-release' teaching, or in some cases 'blocks' of study throughout the year.

**“ Degree apprenticeships differ from university courses in that they are employer-led, meaning students must apply directly for the opportunities they see advertised. Apprenticeship programmes can be advertised at any time of year, so prospective apprentices should ensure they check apprenticeship websites regularly. ”**

## Tuition fees and earning potential

Degree apprentices do not have to pay tuition fees or any other training costs relating to their apprenticeship; these costs are covered by their employer and the Government. Like other employees though, degree apprentices must consider living costs, such as the cost of commuting or accommodation if they're living away from home. Degree apprentices are not eligible for maintenance loans, so these costs must be covered by other means.

Degree apprentices will earn at least the minimum wage throughout their employment, but many companies pay significantly more than this, particularly for higher-level apprenticeships. According to Glassdoor, the average salary of a degree apprentice in the UK topped £18,000 in 2020 and is expected to continue to rise.

## How do students apply to be a degree apprentice?

Degree apprenticeships differ from university courses in that they are employer-led, meaning students must apply directly for the opportunities they see advertised. Apprenticeship programmes can be advertised at any time of year, so prospective apprentices should ensure they check apprenticeship websites regularly and sign up for email alerts.

Entry requirements for apprenticeship programmes vary. Most employers ask for five GCSEs at grades 4-9 and then a number of UCAS points from Level 3 qualifications. Others however, will base their decisions largely on candidates' experience and interest in that area.

It is crucial that students research their prospective employers, and clearly articulate their transferable skills in both their written applications and interviews. The UCAS process sits separately to the apprenticeships system, therefore, students can apply to both without harming their chances in either.

# How your school or college can effectively build links with a university

**By Chris Mullen, Education Liaison Manager at Edge Hill University and HELOA North West & Northern Ireland Group Chair**

## First contact

Identify who is the most relevant person to contact. You may have already received communications physically or digitally from a university so that can always be an excellent starting point.

Instead of sending a generic email to several teams across the university, it is always worth a quick look at the university's website which will have details of that institution's student recruitment team or a variation of that name (schools and colleges or education liaison to name a few). Each team will generally have a team email inbox (where you'll be signposted onto your relevant contact) or a specific contact for your region, school or college.

At some universities, each faculty may have their own recruitment members of staff rather than a centralised team. Always make sure you sign up to any newsletters, communications and follow teams on social media to keep up to date with latest news and events!

We are used to travelling up and down the UK and, after initial contact, always enjoy meeting you face to face or through virtual platforms to discuss how we can build the relationship with you. We find it extremely important to know what you want from us, rather than what we can offer you, as we value building these relationships and links just as highly.

## Building and maintaining the relationship

It is important to regularly keep in touch with your university main contacts across the academic year, especially regarding staff updates or contact details so we can ensure

you continue to get the most relevant and up to date information. Letting us know about events as early as possible always helps our diary too, especially in busier periods (September-November & June-July), even if it is just a save the date for the time being!

As named contacts we can also act as gatekeepers to the wider university, providing you with departmental contacts or signposting you to the correct support team. Our team regularly receive phone calls and emails from teachers and advisers, asking anything from an admissions query to how we can support a young adult carer.

A top tip is to keep an eye out for teachers' panels, teachers' and advisers' conferences, surveys etc., where you can give institutions honest feedback to help us ensure we are supporting your students effectively. We as institutions won't be offended and value any feedback you can provide, constructive and positive.

Developing and maintaining these two-way relationships with a range of universities, both locally and nationally, can provide you with a wealth of extra contacts, resources and information. This will benefit the students you are working with, as well as other colleagues within your school and college to enhance your careers offering.



# A school and college guide to university league tables

**By Erin Wilson, Student Recruitment Assistant at Lancaster University**

## What are university league tables?

To universities, university league tables are a firm representation of their calibre as an institution.

To some students, they form the cornerstone of a decision that will influence their lives for the next few years. To others, they are merely a needle in the haystack when it comes to their search for a university.

## What might a university league table measure?

League tables measure aspects of university considered important for a prospective student:

1. Proportion of graduates with 'good' degrees (i.e., those with a 1st or 2:1)
2. Entry standards
3. Staff numbers
4. Staff research scores
5. Student satisfaction
6. Graduate employment
7. University spending

To give you an example – shall we take Lancaster University? Current rankings place it at 11th according to The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide 2022, 13th in The Guardian University Guide 2022 and 11th in The Complete University Guide 2022. Naturally, these are fantastic rankings and rightfully earned, however it is important to note that league tables are complex calculations and should not be considered in isolation. Lancaster has dropped from 10th to 11th in the Complete University Guide – this does not mean the university has worsened, merely the algorithm for calculating rankings has tweaked. So, it is wise to take rankings in context and to weigh them up alongside other data.

## League tables do not tell students everything they need to know

Those who create league tables aim to give as good an overview as possible for prospective students. However, they do not tell students everything they need to know. For example, they do not include information on resources - and scientists will want great lab facilities. For humanities and social sciences students, a good library with little competition will be vital. What about modules? How many are available and how flexible are they? Finally, assessment methods; some universities assess modules 100% by exam, some by coursework, and most a mixture of the two – but students may have a specific preference.

Institutions could be high ranked, but still not the right fit. The best way to gauge this is by talking to current students, visiting institutions and viewing facilities to get a 'feel' for the university. As we've learnt through the pandemic, there is no real replacement for the value of an in-person open day.

League tables are a good foundation for a decision, but at least from my perspective as a recent graduate, a student's decision should not be focused on whether a university is ranked 1st or 50th.

So, whilst league tables can be a useful guide to decide 'where next?' or even 'where?' on the journey into higher education, that's all they should be – a guide. Ultimately, it's about conducting wider, in-depth research beyond the league tables to discover the amazing opportunities and experiences students can gain at university.



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# Working with universities during the new normal - tips for organising online and physical university events

**By Oliver Rossetti, Outreach Manager at the University of Leicester**

Restrictions have eased and with less uncertainty, we can all begin to think about how to organise events to support the achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks and ignite that *lightbulb moment*. Planning an impactful event can seem daunting but you're certainly not alone and as higher education institutions, we are here to advise.

## Do you want an online or a physical event?

This question was originally largely based on whether you have the space for social distancing; however, now with universities awash with digital resources and platforms to support information, advice and guidance sessions and also largely available to travel... you now have options!

I suggest you weigh up the benefits of face-to-face delivery, could that talk simply be shown on a live screen and resources sent beforehand to have the same desired impact? Could pupils be off timetable for a virtual work experience day, meeting universities and employers alike? Particularly with older year groups, young people know which format they prefer so why not empower your pupils and see which format they would find most beneficial?

## Choosing digital...which online platform should you use?

If the pandemic has shown us anything, it's that there is an abundance of online platforms to choose from such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Adobe Connect, which all promote a different level of interactivity. Providers will likely have access to some of these platforms so you don't necessarily have to use your budget.

If you have concerns about safeguarding, restrictions can normally be applied such as a password or enabling the teacher themselves to admit students from a register. Don't be afraid of requesting the university to lock down settings in order to meet your safeguarding policy and risk assessment.

## Physical considerations

If face-to-face delivery is appropriate then I suggest for the short-medium term, ensure you send PPE guidance to all visitors beforehand and have hand sanitiser upon entry. As visitors, we want to arrive prepared and be good examples for your pupils.

An appropriate distance between the speaker and students within a classroom should be maintained, so that everyone feels comfortable and safe as life within schools starts to return to normal.

## Organised chaos is better than no organisation

Universities receive a number of requests so do 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 Academy Trust or a local school to help encourage a larger variety of providers to attend. Alternatively, you could schedule your event a day either side to allow providers to book accommodation and attend both local events.

## What information will universities need?

The more details, the better! I suggest including the following details in your first email and then your confirmation email two weeks before the event:

- Date, times and location
- Expected size of audience\*
- Car parking information
- Schedule of the day
- Refreshment information
- Anything that may impact the day - such as construction work
- The main organiser's contact details
- If possible, information about the key learning outcomes of any workshop sessions.

*\* We appreciate audience size can fluctuate so an approximate number is fine, it helps universities bring the correct quantity of literature.*

### **Maximise speaker efficiency**

Avoid booking multiple institutions to deliver the same talk to a handful of students. Universities have finite resources and particularly this year will be trying to cover as many events as possible to support gaps in knowledge.

### **Refreshments - to be or not to be, that is the question?**

This will always be budget-dependant! As a general rule, tea/coffee/water goes a long way, particularly for those colleagues who may have left at sunrise, travelling from afar. Food is always welcomed, but you don't have to provide this. Simply let those attending know in advance if they need to bring their own food – nobody likes a room full of hungry stomachs!

### **A passionate event will make a world of difference!**

Be creative and don't be afraid of asking for feedback 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 as we all get back to a sense of *normality*.

“ **Planning an impactful event can seem daunting but you're certainly not alone and as higher education institutions, we are here to advise.** ”



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# A guide to the different types of online university events

**By Andrew Cooper, School & College Account Manager at Liverpool John Moores University**

Our understanding of technology and the benefits this can bring to university events has increased dramatically over the last two years.

I expect online events will continue to be offered in the future – alongside on-campus and in-school provision, with three broad options of online events being offered by universities: university virtual, university hybrid and school virtual. I will outline these below.

## University virtual events

Since the start of the pandemic, most university events have been completely virtual. We would much rather show facilities in person, but running virtual events has meant they can be more accessible geographically and include a wider range of speakers.

Moving forward, most of these events will take place on standard video platforms (such as Zoom, Teams, Google etc.) Some universities will run events to replace traditional on-campus events which would need teacher involvement, whilst others will arrange events in the evening outside of school timetable commitments. These events will range from traditional talks to full outreach schemes such as summer schools.

## University hybrid events

With on-campus events returning there is a new opportunity to stream events live, so if you or your students can't travel to the university, you can still participate in them. These hybrid events may not be able to fully replicate the day itinerary, such as tours, but can enable students to see guest lectures and participate in Q&As from school or home - alongside those joining the event on campus.

## School virtual events

Virtual talks into classrooms have been the norm for many since September. Like with university virtual events, schools hosting virtual events will mean you can access a broader range of speakers and providers to support your event.

Universities from across the country may be able to deliver a short virtual talk, or a virtual careers fair can include more institutions able to offer advice to your students.

## Getting buy-in from universities

Virtual events can be problematic when it comes to engagement, so it is good to get buy-in from students in advance to ensure sessions run smoothly. Due to safeguarding restrictions, we know why students don't always have cameras on, however using microphones or chat functions is a great way for them to participate and give feedback to the higher education speaker.

The increase in online events means that universities can now support a far wider range of students - and be even more accessible. When speaking to higher education providers, ask for details of what to expect, such as interactive quizzes and if breakout rooms will be used, so you can plan your school or college resource.

**“ Keep asking university colleagues what they can offer, you may be surprised by the level of support you can receive. ”**



# The advantages of online university events for school groups

**By Farrah McGurk, Outreach Project Lead at the University of Greenwich**

Over the last two years many of us will have experienced an online event, whether that was attending a virtual conference or webinar, hosting an online event or teaching virtually.

Online events have provided the opportunity to change our approach, shift the focus from a more traditional view and explore the ways in which we could develop and continue the use of online provision into our 'new normal'.

## Five key advantages of online events

1. **Accessibility** - you can attend from the comfort of your own home which allows for a more diverse audience.
2. **Cost and time efficiency** - which reduces expenses and gives you back more time.
3. **Variety of learning** - you can experience presentations, workshops and group sessions all in one event.
4. **Flexibility** – you have the opportunity to catch up on recorded sessions in your own time.
5. **Sustainability** – the activity has a lower environmental impact.

A great example of successful online events have been virtual open days, which universities have held over the last academic year. Due to not being limited by geographical location, students could get a taste of universities further away from their homes.

For this upcoming academic year, universities will be reviewing the successes of these virtual events and building them into a new approach, for example, hosting a hybrid event, which would have both an in-person and virtual element.

## Universities are using online teaching too

A lot of universities are taking forward a blended learning approach this academic year. This could be in the form of online lectures, in-person seminars or practical sessions. This enables universities to be more accessible, offering students a greater level of flexibility and helping them to study alongside their other responsibilities and commitments.

Students will be able to watch lectures live through a virtual platform and many academics now record their lectures for students to watch back later, which can support their learning and aid revision. These can be accessed through the university's online portal, which also provides additional reading materials and resources, as well as student support and careers services. These services will also be available in a blended way, with in-person workshops and counselling sessions, as well as the option to reach out through virtual support platforms.

With online study comes the opportunity to improve skills such as independent learning, self-motivation and organisation. Students will ultimately need to motivate themselves to study in the absence of that 'classroom' environment. These students will also have full access to university facilities if they would like a change of scenery or if it would benefit their learning.

Your students now have access to a variety of higher education learning styles alongside the traditional view of full-time on-campus learning, which we should advise students of, and encourage them to engage with, so they can choose the route best for them.



# A guide to booking a campus visit during a pandemic

**By Tara Murphy, Schools and Colleges Liaison Manager at Royal Holloway, University of London**

Gatsby Benchmark 7 requires by the age of 18, all pupils who are considering applying for university to have had at least two visits to universities to meet staff and pupils. When this benchmark was created, we didn't know a global pandemic would come along and shut down almost all UK university campuses.

As restrictions lift and campus policies change, here are my top tips to getting students out of the classroom and onto campus.

## 1. Be flexible

While government restrictions may have lifted, most universities will still have strict policies and protocols regarding external guests on campus. Each university will be different depending on size, location and management.

Contact the provider you would like to visit and see what their policy allows. Speak with them to create a visit that works best for both of you. Do consider it might not look like your previous visits. For example, you could organise multi-day, half-day, or mini-visits with multiple smaller groups, run activities outside (weather dependent) and/or host carousel sessions.

## 2. Consider your dates

Room bookings are often one of the biggest challenges for a university when organising campus visits, being flexible with your dates will help immensely. Wednesday afternoons and university reading weeks will often have greater room availability.

Dates that are in the school term but outside of university term-time may also work better. These traditionally are just before or after Christmas and Easter breaks, as well as for most of June and July.

## 3. Prepare a backup

We all hope that there isn't a return to lockdowns, but after the last year, it is good to be prepared. Speak with the university about a backup plan should a class go into isolation or a lockdown happen. They will likely already have a pre-recorded or an interactive virtual tour available and could probably move workshops online.

## 4. Be understanding

Whilst students have been back in school since March 2021, many university staff and students haven't yet fully returned to campus. Understand that their policies are likely to be stricter than current government guidelines and that having large groups on campus may make some nervous. Please speak with your visit provider before arriving on campus about their procedures.

## The benefits of campus activity

Campus visits are a fantastic way to let students experience what university life is really like. Students often get to speak directly with current students and explore the campus first-hand.

As we adjust to a world with Covid-19, universities and schools can work together to ensure that these key experiences can go ahead in the safest way possible.

**“ Room bookings are often one of the biggest challenges for a university when organising campus visits, being flexible with your dates will help immensely. Wednesday afternoons and university reading weeks will often have greater room availability. ”**



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# How universities can support schools seeking subject specific events

**By Nia Stokes, Student Recruitment Officer at Swansea University**

When researching universities, students are often questioning what the university can offer them when they get there. However, it is also worth finding out what an institution can offer before the application process even starts.

Subject specific events come in many forms and are a great way for your students to start exploring higher education. Student recruitment teams can offer talks and workshops in person or online on a range of subjects, from course tasters to student life and personal statements.

On-campus visit days are also beginning to return this year, which allow students to experience university facilities first-hand whilst receiving sessions from academics. Furthermore, summer school programs can encourage students to gain independence and meet new people.

## **The benefits of subject specific university events**

Subject events are highly beneficial for prospective students. Deciding what subject to study at university can be a daunting task, especially if they are considering areas that are not taught at their school or college. Trying out a subject with their chosen university can give a real insight into whether they can see themselves pursuing it as a career.

Doing so can also provide a taster of university teaching. Lectures, seminars and tutorials differ greatly from Key Stage 5 education, as does the independent study that university courses often require. Experiencing this at a summer school or webinar session can indicate to students whether university is right for them.

Another advantage of subject specific events is that university academics are leading researchers in their fields, so discussion of a specific subject through a webinar session can also develop students' knowledge and improve their academic skill in preparation for their exams.

Mentioning this event participation can look attractive in a personal statement too, demonstrating interest and commitment - especially if it involves a student's chosen university.

## **Subject specific events have school and college benefits**

As well as being of great benefit to your students, organising these events can also help school and colleges to achieve their Gatsby Benchmarks. Incorporating regular sessions into your timetables will increase encounters with higher education (Benchmark 7), link your curriculum to careers (Benchmark 4), and create a stable careers programme (Benchmark 1).

Each institution will have their own event provision, but as an example, at Swansea University, we offer a termly Current News webinar series for year 12 and 13 students, which runs over 2 weeks.

**“ When researching universities, students are often questioning what the university can offer them when they get there. However, it is also worth finding out what an institution can offer before the application process even starts. ”**



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# The benefits of participating in practical workshops

**By Florence Newsome, Student Recruitment Officer at Plymouth College of Art**

Practical workshops can take on many different forms and will normally cover a specific subject or skillset taught through a hands-on approach. These workshops can vary in length from one hour to a week-long, and may consist of exercises, activities and experimental work to encourage participants to work through a range of skills and objectives led by a facilitator.

## Introduce your students to a hands-on learning environment

Hands-on learning is a way of learning by doing, where experiential learning takes place and can be effective for specific types of learners, where a more practical environment will enable them to feel more comfortable and relaxed. This approach can be a more engaging way to learn and can help with problem-solving, critical thinking and concentration.

By taking part in active participation, students can be introduced to new concepts and methods through visual demonstrations and experimentation. This allows students to become more familiar with subject-specific techniques while promoting a new way of learning.

A hands-on learning environment will also allow for participants to learn in a safe space where students can explore ideas with the additional help of a facilitator who will be available to assist. It can also provide a platform for students to thrive within a creative environment and have fun participating in a new way of learning. This can lead to building upon their new skills after the workshop, taking what they have learned, and applying them to their GCSE or A-Levels studies.

## Knowledge from a professional

In-person workshops are also easier to follow and understand when delivered face-to-face.

They are normally delivered by experienced individuals who are specialists within their field. This allows students to learn, start conversations and ask questions!

This expertise can bring additional benefits for personal statements and interview stages if students apply for further or higher education. This can enable them to talk about their experiences from the workshops and how this has helped them progress within new skills and areas of interest.

## Building connections between student and subject

Subject-specific workshops can create a connection between a subject and student. Individuals can immerse themselves in a subject and begin trial-and-error processes which can lead to them understanding the subject in more depth. Practical workshops deliver insights into a diverse range of disciplines and interest areas, allowing students to explore different areas that can then lead to their future career and education plans.

## Develop creativity and critical thinking skills

Practical workshops are often open-ended meaning that the final outcome is subject to the individual's interpretation of the brief. Students also have to problem solve and come up with ideas that can help with their ability to think critically.

Since Covid-19, we have seen a shift in practical workshops being adapted to be delivered online, with students benefiting from the do-it-yourself practical element of self-directed learning. Practical workshops will always be the preferred method of teaching, however the challenge of a global pandemic has shown how approaching problems with creative solutions can still create effective learning outcomes.

**“ Finally, have fun! Hands-on learning is about exploration and creativity where experiences will allow for new ways of thinking and for new ideas to take place. ”**



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# How can universities support school and college staff with CPD opportunities?

**By Rachel Wier, Senior Outreach Officer at the University of Essex**

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an opportunity for teachers and school staff to interact with external mentors, share best practice and enhance their knowledge in specific subject areas, including the higher education journey. It is also a way of keeping teachers 'in the loop' with current issues that young people might be facing and providing the tools needed to manage concerns within the school environment.

Universities recognise that teaching/support staff can have limited time and resources, so when delivering CPD activity, they ensure it is relevant, informative and high quality.

Throughout the pandemic, CPD became widely available online, encouraging school staff to sign up for events offered by institutions across the globe, not just in their local area.

## Explore CPD opportunities

### University conferences

This is a one- or two-day programme of higher education updates, workshops, Q&A sessions, and networking. Conferences are typically held on university grounds to showcase their facilities, however virtual conferences are becoming increasingly more popular, allowing attendees to join from home.

### Subject-specific CPD sessions

These are interactive workshops focusing on upskilling, generating discussion and/

or providing teachers with resources to integrate into their lessons. These sessions would usually run for 1-2 hours and are now commonly available as online webinars. Examples of previous sessions delivered at the University of Essex during 2020-21 include, Mental Health and Covid-19, Teaching Generation Z, Supporting Care Leavers and Estranged Students, Building Bridges to Higher Education for the GTRSB community, Sociology and Criminology, and an Introduction to Data Science.

### Teacher and adviser webpages

Universities tend to hold useful links, resources and print outs for teachers to use in their day-to-day teaching on a teacher/adviser webpage within a schools and colleges section of their website. Many institutions also post their past CPD sessions on their website as pre-recorded videos. This makes it possible for teachers to research what is out there and build their own CPD programme to access in their own time.

### Podcasts

Podcasts are the perfect way for teachers to keep up to date with student finance, UCAS and employability related information. Universities record episodes with academic staff, current university students and external experts and then stream through platforms such as Apple Music, Spotify and Soundcloud. For teachers, it's an enjoyable way of connecting with institutions in their own time and can be easily shared amongst student cohorts too.

## Need something else? Please request it

University recruitment and outreach teams are more than happy to provide bespoke sessions or materials upon request. Get in touch to suggest topics, providers and resources that you would like to engage with!



# How universities can support you to achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks

**By Oliver Stacey, Regional Student Recruitment Officer at the University of South Wales**

Looking at my own transition from a History Teacher, to Careers Adviser, to University Student Recruitment Officer, I have seen how careers and higher education outreach can enrich and enhance learning from a variety of perspectives. Due to our growing familiarity and confidence with technology, it is an exciting time to explore new practise and embed Gatsby in a 'blended' world.

## Be creative when providing experiences of a workplace (Benchmark 6)

I am sure at some point we've all been guilty of simply repeating, *what has worked before*. However, having worked with so many Careers Advisers, we are involved in many projects that have helped to push the boundaries of what is possible.

In one example, using a combination of employers, apprenticeships and higher education providers, the school facilitated work experience with a range of career paths. This consisted of a formal application based on student preference, a blended delivery of physical and remote working, then finally feedback from the employer on the application and performance of each student.

Other examples have included a staff CPD session to share their top tips on how they engage with higher education and careers in their subject area. Utilising their creativity and problem solving, as well as some examples I shared from workshops, this session gave

school staff a number of 'takeaways' they could replicate in their own curriculum area.

## A personalised approach (Benchmarks 3 and 8)

Benchmarks 3 and 8 focus in on *the needs of the individual*. This is something we all as a sector could do better by empowering student choice. Rather than just booking a university in for a talk or one workshop for the whole year group, why not book in several providers and give students a choice on the session that they attend? For example, *Pathways into Policing, Financial Trading and Design Problems*. This greater breadth of subject and university providers gives students a much broader exposure to their next step.

Whilst it may be impossible in the immediate term, it is worth considering whether mixing age groups and allowing the student to select a sector led/taster session? Certainly, Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 could be mixed, and this would provide a more industry led environment as often we work with a variety of different ages, experience and expertise.

Another outcome of the pandemic has been the amount of one-to-one support we've been able to offer Schools and Colleges with sessions on *Personal Statements* and *Impressing at Interviews*. The improved flexibility and ability to view and edit the document live ensures valuable feedback is available after the conclusion of the session.

## Improving the use of labour market information

One area that has improved over the past 18 months is that many School Liaison teams understand requirements on schools through the Gatsby Benchmarks. As a result of this, many universities have developed more faculty sessions. For example, *Careers in Sport* which not only helps link elements of the curriculum to future careers for students by raising awareness of the breadth of the subject area, but also provides examples of sector specific labour market Information.

**“ Rather than booking a university in for the whole year group, book in several providers and give students a choice on the session that they attend. ”**

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“

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MEET THE TEAM



# What is university widening participation and fair access?

**By Rachel Brookes, Widening Participation Officer at Harper Adams University**

When you hear the term 'Widening Participation' or 'WP' for short, it vaguely speaks for itself, but there is a lot more to the widening of participation into higher education.

In a nutshell, WP focuses on underrepresented groups of society that either won't or don't want to go on to higher education. The reasons could be purely down to a lack of knowledge and support, but also, unfortunately, because of the stigma attached to that characteristic, either by society or personally.

Fair Access on the other hand, is the fairness attributed to the admissions process for someone accessing higher education.

## The who

You may have already worked with WP teams at various universities and be aware of some WP characteristics. It is important to know these characteristics, to ensure that no student misses out on opportunities or potential support. Understanding WP and having conversations with higher education institutions could help to uncover an underrepresented student within your school or college. A well-known group that WP focuses on are students in receipt of free school meals, usually from a low income family and with a low socioeconomic status.

Young people that live in disadvantaged areas are five to six times less likely to progress to higher education than those that live in the more advantaged areas (UCAS, End of Cycle Report, 2018), so it is no wonder these groups are targeted within WP schemes.

The lesser-known underrepresented groups (all showing a lower participation rate to higher education) are those from minority ethnic groups, mature students, disabled students

and anyone that is care experienced/a care leaver. There are also groups which have similar equality gaps and are therefore defined as underrepresented, including carers, estranged students, travellers, refugees and service children.

## The what

So, what is in place at universities to ensure that these underrepresented groups get the extra support they need to access university?

Perhaps the most important thing to note here, is something called the 'Access and Participation Plan' (APP). Monitored by the Office for Students, these plans set up how universities will improve equality in not only accessing university through outreach targets, but also adhering to success and progress throughout their university journey.

## The how

Every university differs in their approach and their targets, but their outreach offerings for underrepresented groups will always include Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) sessions, course specific workshops (now both in person and virtually), campus visits, experience days, open days and project-based events. Universities will have their own fair access admissions opportunities too, such as contextualised offers and various accessible programmes if entry requirements or work experience criteria aren't met.

Every university that has an APP will have a dedicated person or team to deliver the WP and fair access agenda. There will be specific programmes and events for certain students identified, which is why it is important for you to discover these students so that any barriers they may find in accessing university can hopefully be removed by WP teams.

## Get in touch

I would encourage anyone to contact university WP and Access teams to ask about engagement opportunities and be sure to sign up to any newsletters to remain up to date. We are here to provide your students with the best advice to break down those barriers and to start the journey in accessing higher education, so use us!

# Admin, evaluation and targeting - be kind to your outreach practitioner

**By James Elliott, Higher Horizons Evaluation and Evidence Manager and Katie Coombe-Boxall, Higher Horizons Data and Research Manager**

The Uni Connect programme is a national outreach initiative that supports young people who are likely to achieve the grades needed for higher education but are unlikely to go. To justify spending, it considers 'what works' – this means tracking learners to see where they end up, and evaluating activities to assess their impact.

Our unique ways of working can be seen as inconvenient and demanding. We hear you! But let us explain...

## Awful admin

Tracking the learners we work with means collecting data about them. This isn't as scary as it sounds – put simply, we want to see if our activities influence their future educational decisions.

We request registers of attendance because we need proof of our work; and learners and parents are asked about their background when we add them to tracking databases.

We understand that this causes sleepless nights for your school data protection lead, but each Uni Connect partnership has its own data protection lead too, trained in the latest data policy and legislation, backed up by a university Data Protection Officer. Our data requests are not opportunistic or ad hoc; we have got your back.

## Tedious targeting

Then there's the mean targeting. We want to widen participation, don't we? Why not do it for everyone? Well, because resources are few we prioritise.

More importantly, we have been charged with narrowing the gap between the most and least privileged entering higher education. It would be far meaner of us to help those who don't need it over the wall, while just teasing those at the bottom of the ladder with a few rungs.

'Widening' Participation is the name of the sector, but 'narrowing' the gap is the name of the game. This is why we target.

## Endless evaluation

And then we are constantly asking Johnny how he feels about each activity and about higher education. We need to show that activities meet a standard, and have 'impact' with learners undergoing 'shifts' in their attitudes towards higher education.

'What works' must be tested and replicated. Outreach is not always about converting forlorn youth from a state of Dickensian despair to that of climbing every aspirational mountain; it is more nuanced, and we need data to understand it fully. Besides 'conversion', it is about consolidation – ensuring that those interested in higher education are not lost to the forces of disillusion and misinformation; and about contemplation - getting young people to consider higher education and scrutinise their futures.

## In short

Your outreach practitioner only asks of you what is being demanded of them. We know that our requirements place a burden on you but be kind to your outreach practitioner; if they can't track the learners they engage and evaluate the impact of activities, the days of impartial university outreach are numbered.

**“ Widening Participation is the name of the sector, but narrowing the gap is the name of the game. This is why we target. ”**

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# Event targeting - why are certain events only available for certain students?

**By Stephen Pomfret, Head of Make Happen, one of 29 Uni Connect networks in England.**

The targeting of outreach activity has been a topic of conversation and debate for as long as outreach has existed. Should we work with all students or should we target?

## Event targeting – the background

The Office for Students have often favoured a targeted approach, with many Access and Participation Plans identifying key student groups, as well as programmes like Uni Connect focusing on a specific demographic. This targeting is designed to help reduce differences in progression to higher education based on socio-economic differences or student demographics.

The differing experiences in the education system, and society more generally, are leading to certain student groups progressing at significantly higher rates than others. Across all English higher education providers over 30% of entrants in 2019-20 were from areas of the country with the highest progression rates, compared to 12% from those with the lowest. The rate of progression to higher education for those with experience of the care system has been reported as low as 6%. The gaps in progression rates have been largely stable for a number of years.

Gaps in progression rates still exist when you compare students with similar grades but varying socio-economic backgrounds. Many of these groups of targeted students face significant challenges in their day to day lives

whether that is estranged students, those with a disability or students from areas of high deprivation.

There are a variety of student groups each with unique challenges and the research into how this affects their progression to higher education continues to grow. Whilst this research base increases, it is important that we do all we can to try to reduce these gaps and level the playing field as much as we can.

## The inequality of information access

By restricting activity to certain groups of students we are trying to reduce inequality of access to information. By allowing all students to benefit from activity we slow, or eradicate, the intended effect of reducing the gaps within student groups. This is especially important for high cost or limited capacity events, by prioritising those groups with lower progression we aim to reduce the disparity that has been caused by other external factors.

Many of the student groups that are often targeted may have barriers to accessing information, if you are the first in your family to go to university then you will have less exposure to it. Those from areas of low progression will not see as many role models in their community who have progressed to university and succeeded. These factors can often be confounded by headlines in the press, especially around factors such as student finance or career prospects. This is why many programmes will seek to work with parents and carers as well to help myth bust some common misconceptions about university.

In an ideal world there would be no need for targeted activity or widening access work as all students would have the information to make an informed choice. Unfortunately we are not there yet, targeting will continue to be an element of widening access work to try and help all students access the information that they need to make informed decisions.



# How to support underrepresented students to progress to selective universities

**By Richard Hall, Access and Outreach Recruitment Manager at the University of York**

As educators, we all aim to ensure that students can make informed decisions on their future and access competitive university places based on merit and potential. Whilst these objectives drive us more than ever, delivering on these goals can be challenging.

There are still students who are less able to access higher tariff university destinations, particularly students from Black ethnicity backgrounds, students from Asian ethnicity backgrounds and mature learners. This article looks at how we can empower these students to make an informed decision and consider selective universities.

## Being willing to learn

That well-worn phrase - "You never stop learning" is particularly pertinent. Each student faces distinctive challenges in accessing selective institutions. We can all learn more about the outlooks and understandings students hold, particularly when these are different to our own.

We know that a majority of teaching professionals are from a White ethnicity background and around 75% are women. Reflecting on our own policies and curriculum to celebrate a diversity of cultures helps students tackle ignorance and misunderstanding. Opting to listen, acting as an advocate and thinking critically about our own assumptions/biases can help to create more accurate predicted grades and an inclusive environment.

## Role modelling

Some students feel uncomfortable with accessing selective university places as they

feel there are no students representing their journey. Providing positive role models who have taken similar steps generates positive attitudes towards higher tariff university progression.

Highlighting materials like blogs, vlogs and talks which reflect an authentic higher education experience, especially when from current students, is key. The more we combat what a 'typical student' looks or sounds like, the greater the mobility of all students.

## Look beyond local

There can be fantastic opportunities for students to stay within an area they know well. However, it is also important that we present students with a genuine choice to help them make an informed decision. Providing guidance about amenities, facilities and culture in different areas of the country can help reduce the unknown elements of moving away from home. Within the Russell Group, there is variety and unique experiences - students should consider more than just the selective institution closest to them.

## Get with the programme

Selective universities have a raft of targeted activities and programmes to help tackle the barriers mentioned above. Researching institution provision might open the door for your students. At the University of York, we have innovative programmes such as 'Black Access', designed by our current students to showcase their experiences as Black students. We also have programmes such as 'YorWay to York' to help students overcoming distance, and sector leading care experienced and independent student provision. Selective universities might also utilise contextual offers to help provide fairer access to higher education where inequalities still exist.

**“ The more we combat what a ‘typical student’ looks or sounds like, the greater the mobility of all students. ”**



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# What works? Demonstrating impactful university engagement

**By Izzy Kelly, Aimhigher Project Officer at  
Aimhigher West Midlands**

For those of us who work with students specifically to help widen participation in higher education, it is important to reflect upon the work that we do with our young people. What is even more important is analysing that work and evaluating the impact of it.

### What works?

In a recent study (1), it was revealed that the types of engagement that were most strongly associated with UCAS acceptance were summer schools, campus visits and information and guidance. Additionally, combinations of activities that included summer schools were particularly effective in predicting acceptance into higher education, while the second most effective combination was of information, campus visits and masterclass activities.

Interestingly, the research also showed that taking part in five to six outreach activities provided the optimal balance between input and impact, with the benefits of each additional engagement (after five or six) being small.

Research also showed that learners engaging in outreach activity (specifically the Uni Connect Programme in this research), even if just once, are linked to a higher chance of being offered a place in higher education. This is true even when looking at other variables that can determine UCAS success (school, sex, ethnicity or deprivation).

If you're a fan of data and want to learn more about the findings in this study, the reference is below. The study analyses the effect of a multi-intervention outreach programme (Uni Connect) in higher education acceptance by comparing learners who engaged in this programme's activities and those who did not.

*(1) A.P. Burgess, M.S. Horton, E. Moores, Optimising the impact of a multi-intervention outreach programme on progression to Higher Education: recommendations for future practice and research.*



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\*(2021 Times University  
Guide)

# How do universities help students in need of additional support?

By Shirley Wang, Senior Access Officer (Communications) at UCL

Universities can offer support in many ways to ensure that the needs of students are addressed. Under-represented students come from an extremely wide variety of backgrounds, subsequently there is no one way to support them.

Many universities have a wellbeing, disability and mental health team that are dedicated to providing a confidential and non-judgemental space, in which students can discuss any issues that may be affecting their ability to study.

Some universities offer support for all students at a base level. At UCL for example, every first-year undergraduate student is assigned with a personal tutor. First-year undergraduate students are also matched with a transition mentor to offer guidance and advice in the transition to university.

## What support is available for students?

The additional support offered by universities varies but can include:

- **Academic support:** Universities can offer additional guidance for learning and studying effectively.
- **Financial support:** Finances can be concerning for students. There can often be a range of funding available to students who meet certain criteria. It is worth encouraging your students to research different universities to find out what types of funding is available. This can include scholarships and bursaries.
- **Mental health and wellbeing support:** Universities can have different support systems in place to support the mental health and wellbeing of students.

- **Disability support:** Students with disabilities face certain barriers and universities can offer appropriate help, reasonable adjustments and personalised support. The earlier universities know about a student's disabilities, the earlier students can benefit from support options.

- **Social support:** Social support networks are an important part of students feeling connected with people of a similar interest or background when joining university.

- **Careers support:** Some universities may offer additional activities and support for careers if students meet certain criteria.

## Please ensure students are aware of what support is available to them

Universities are accessible and the support is available to enable students to study as independently as possible during their time there.

Different universities will offer different types of support as mentioned above. To support your students who have additional considerations, it is worth advising them to research what support systems are available at their chosen universities.

Often students in need of additional support can contact universities prior to joining to discuss support to help with the transition to higher education.

Some groups that may be able to access additional support at universities include care experienced students, estranged students, disabled students, forced migrants, mature students and young adult carers.

**“ Students in need of additional support can contact universities prior to joining to discuss support to help with the transition to higher education. ”**



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# A guide to supporting care experienced and estranged students into higher education

**By Wendy Price, Head of Widening Access and Participation at the University of Sunderland, and North East Regional Representative for the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers**

Care experienced and estranged students are currently under-represented in higher education and we need your help to change this. As a teacher, you can play an important part in inspiring and supporting these young people to achieve their potential.

Here are my five top tips to ensure the transition to higher education can be as smooth as possible for your students.

## 1. Find the right higher education provider

Look for providers who have made a public commitment to supporting care experienced and estranged students. Have they signed the Stand Alone Pledge and the Care Leaver Covenant? Are they members of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL)? Engagement with these organisations is a clear message that support is available and these institutions have committed to developing their offer for these students.

## 2. Consider alternative routes into higher education

Not all students feel confident about their ability to progress directly to higher education. Would they prefer to study an Integrated Foundation Year to prepare them for undergraduate study? Or perhaps an

apprenticeship or foundation degree would help to build confidence? There are a range of options available to suit all students.

## 3. Encourage students to inform universities about their circumstances

When universities know that a student is care experienced or estranged, we can support them through the entire application process and work with you to guide and reassure them through their journey.

Also, encourage your students to find out what support is available to them. At the University of Sunderland, we provide bespoke support for all care experienced and estranged students. This includes a named contact, guaranteed accommodation, a bursary of £2,000 each year, regular check-in meetings, help finding part-time work and so much more.

The Propel website, developed by national charity Become, provides access to full information about the support offered at each institution and is a useful starting point.

## 4. Help with planning ahead

Work with each student to create a to-do list which clearly shows key actions in the lead up to starting university. Applying for accommodation, bursaries and student finance may have deadlines so these need to be included too. Care experienced and estranged students may be eligible to receive additional financial support, guaranteed accommodation, personalised support and priority places to attend summer schools so it is important to plan ahead.

## 5. Be the difference!

So many students tell us that they never considered higher education until a teacher encouraged them to do so and actually believed that they could! Ask students how they're feeling about university and reassure them that you're there to offer support.

**“ Many students tell us that they never considered higher education until a teacher encouraged them to do so and actually believed that they could. ”**

# Additional financial support for students at university (outside tuition and maintenance loans)

**By Kate Nelson, Marketing Co-ordinator at Teesside University**

Grants, scholarships, bursaries, allowances, funds – there is so much available to your students it can be difficult to keep track of it. We explain it all here.

## Scholarships and bursaries

Universities offer incentives to students in the form of scholarships and bursaries. These might be based on academic, sporting or musical achievements, household income or subject specific relevant to the course they are applying for.

Types of incentives include discounted course or accommodation costs, iPads and laptops, money towards travel expenses and books.

Scholarships and bursaries don't need to be paid back and applications are made directly to the university. Students should check individual university websites to research what is available.

## Funding for health and social care students

Various funding is available to students studying specific health and social care courses. Applications for funding are made directly to the NHS learning support fund and include:

- exceptional support fund
- parental support
- training grant
- travel and dual accommodation expenses.

Terms and conditions apply so students need to research eligibility criteria. Further information can be found on the NHS Learning Support Fund website.

## Support for students with children or adult dependants

Students with children or adult dependants might be entitled to additional financial support. How much they are eligible for depends on household income and what other types of funding and support they receive. These grants don't have to be repaid in the future and are applied for as part of their main student finance application. Funding includes:

- adult dependants' grant
- childcare grant
- parents' learning allowance.

## Disabled students' allowance

This funding is designed to support students with specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, travel and day-to-day costs during their studies. Students may need to submit evidence and attend an assessment to discuss what support is required. Applications are made to Student Finance England after the main student finance application has been submitted.

## Independent students

Students who have been in care, or consider themselves estranged from their parents, could be eligible for additional funding through their local authority. Some universities, such as Teesside, offer care leaver bursaries to support students during their studies and also provide assistance with travel costs to open days and campus visits.

These are the main sources of additional financial support available for students, but there are others that are sector specific. Encourage your students to research what is available as early as possible to avoid them missing out. Open days are a great opportunity for students to find out more.

Universities will have a team of finance advisers on hand to offer support and guidance to students. They can discuss what the student might be eligible for, how and when they apply and even support them when completing their application.



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# How to support students transitioning from Year 11 to further education

**By Izzy Kelly, Aimhigher Project Officer at Aimhigher West Midlands**

We often talk to post-16 students about how important it is to strongly consider whether university is right for them and which course would suit them best. But what about before higher education, at college and sixth form? Further education can also have an impact on what future options are available to students.

Through working with sixth forms and colleges, my team and I have identified a gap in support for Year 11 students taking their next steps to transition from school into further education. Here, I have compiled a list of key ways you can support students when making this transition.

## Identifying course options available

Making sure students are aware of the full range of qualifications they can access at further education level is important to ensure they choose the most suitable option for them.

A Levels, T Levels and Apprenticeships vary in course structure, teaching style, subject options and student assessment. Creating clear distinctions between these qualifications, detailing what they entail can help learners to

identify what environment they learn best in and therefore what type of qualification will improve their chances of success.

## College or sixth form: what's best for them?

There are a number of differences between college and sixth form. Firstly, students who are adaptable and seeking independence may be more suited to college as they will be in a completely new environment with lots of new people. Colleges can also allow free periods in student timetables and often require more self-motivation, so students will need to be disciplined and committed to their chosen courses to succeed in this environment.

Sixth forms will often suit students who prefer familiarity and structure. If their school has a sixth form, they will already be familiar with the environment, teachers and other students, making for a shorter transition phase. There is also potential for more academic support in sixth forms where teachers check in with students more regularly, reminding them of their deadlines and encouraging them to manage their time well.

## Preparation for further education

While being prepared for the academic progression to further education is important, the life skills students need as young adults are also imperative. Highlighting the value of time management and organisation will help to ensure they have a good balance between work and general life.

The sooner students begin to prioritise their mental health and reduce stress levels, the higher chance of good wellbeing and high achievement in their studies.



# How to support students making their Post-16 course choices

**By Erin Tungate, UK Recruitment and Schools Liaison Assistant at City, University of London**

Offering support at post-16 level means being ready to facilitate a wide range of possibilities when it comes to higher education. One of the best ways to support students is by providing enough resources and information so that each of your students can make their decisions confidently.

Here are some tips on how to tackle a couple of the fundamental questions students may ask you.

## Options after GCSE qualifications

Making sure that students know their A Levels from their BTEC Diplomas and BTEC Certificates is the first step to making the right decision when it comes to picking their subjects at further education level. You can make sure they have time with a tutor or post-16 dedicated class to view and share resources, ask questions and discuss their plans with a teacher or their fellow students.

For those still unsure of the course they would like to study at university, or the job they would like to do afterwards, you can encourage them to keep their options open by studying a range of subjects, whilst other students may have a clearer idea and will need individual guidance on how to best succeed. Either way, relating

further education courses to post-16 options is a great way to encourage students to start thinking about what subjects might be right for them to choose.

## University events and visits

Arranging visits from universities is a great opportunity for your school or college groups to ask staff questions and speak directly with current university students.

Universities take part in many visits. From smaller, focused talks, to larger events like higher education fairs or UCAS events. Talks on topics like UCAS applications, personal statements and student finance are always popular, but many universities can deliver talks and workshops on lots of different areas depending on your students' needs.

To help students make the most of these sessions, schools and colleges can help by creating a space to promote resources and events hosted by universities. This space could be used to demonstrate the different types of events and their purpose, as well as being a hub for upcoming in-person events and online opportunities for students to experience what university is like.

Universities will be able to deliver talks and workshops at schools, either in-person or online, and some will be attending higher education fairs and exhibitions in the coming months.

You will be able to find out more on their websites or by getting in contact directly. Some universities will also have a wide range of online resources readily available for students to access in their own time.





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# How to support your students to make option choices with university in mind

**By David Handy, Senior Student Recruitment Manager at Newman University**

As students progress through Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, they will be exploring lots of different opportunities in the wider world. Through their exposure to colleges, higher education institutions, apprenticeship providers, employers and other opportunities, they will have a myriad of choices to navigate.

As teachers and advisors, you will have signposted them to potential futures, whilst as part of your programmes (and through the Gatsby Benchmarks) they will have had their eyes opened to them. It is important that we are guiding students through the process, making sure they have an ambitious but also a realistic vision for the future.

## GCSE pre-requisites

English Language and Mathematics at GCSE are imperative for students who are looking to progress to higher education. It is important that you reinforce the significance in achieving a Grade 4 or above for them to progress onto both Level 3 and higher education provision.

For some courses GCSE Science will also be very important, particularly if your student is thinking of studying courses such as Science (including Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Psychology and Veterinary Science).

## Level 3 course selection

When students are investigating their Level 3 courses, I would recommend that they always have one eye on their next steps and to make sure that the courses they are selecting are going to enable them to progress to it.

Some students will have ideas that are potentially going to prove challenging for them in terms of their academic abilities and you will no doubt have to spend time steering them towards appropriate opportunities.

It is important that whilst a student may not be able to progress towards a Medicine degree, there may be other opportunities within the NHS or healthcare sector that they could explore. It may be that you show the different pathways to both the students and their families, in order to demonstrate that you are suggesting good alternatives looking ahead to their future.

## Entry requirements

It is important that throughout the process your students are guided to review entry requirements for both their Level 3 and higher education options. I would recommend they take time to review sixth form/college prospectuses to find out what would be required to move onto their chosen Level 3 courses.

Alongside this, it is also important for them to closely look at university prospectuses and websites to ensure they are considering making the right option choices for the higher education course they may wish to pursue in the future. Certain university courses will need students to have completed particular post-16 subjects, and it is important students are aware of this.



# A guide to providing information to parents and carers

**By Nina Antell, Marketing Officer, UK Schools and Colleges Liaison Team at the University of Northampton**

Choosing what and where to study has a huge impact on a student's future. For parents and carers, we know that this means balancing the offer of support with enabling their independence, however far away or close to home the student may choose to study.

When it comes to preparing for university, it is vital that parents and carers are kept informed of the provision available at your school or college as this will enable them to guide and support the student throughout the process.

## Legal bits

As young adults, students form a professional relationship directly with the university, so our communication about everything from attendance to exam results will be directly with them.

## Open Days

We encourage parents and carers to attend open days with students. Many universities have dedicated sessions for parents and carers as well as information on personal statements and student finance. They can speak face-to-face with the university staff who deal with these specific areas to ask any questions they may have.

## UCAS

It is essential that parents and carers are informed of key deadlines and how they can support the student whilst completing their university application, particularly the personal statement. They can also sign up to the UCAS monthly parent newsletter.

## Student finance, what parents and carers need to know.

The parent or carer will need to submit their National Insurance number and details of their household income as part of the student finance application. This is to assess how much funding will be available in relation to their personal circumstances.

Managing money and understanding that every penny counts whilst at university can be a big adjustment, encouraging parents and carers to have a conversation with the student about budgeting can really help with this.

## Support available from universities for parental engagement

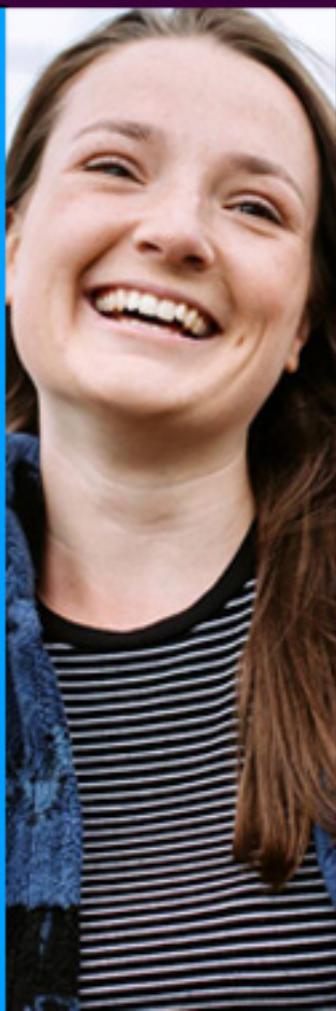
Many universities will offer dedicated support for parents and carers of students applying to university, this may include:

- **Presentations for parents and carers:** university representatives can come and deliver a session at your school or college to cover everything they need to know about the application process.
- **Information stands at careers and higher education fairs:** these provide an opportunity for parents and carers to speak to staff or current students about studying at a specific institution.
- **Online resources:** parents and carers can access information tailored specifically to them on most university websites as well as UCAS.





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# A guide to the university admission process and the offers students may receive

**By Bethan Howe, Schools and Colleges Engagement Officer at Anglia Ruskin University**

With multiple deadlines and key dates for students to remember during their last year of school or college, it can make the university admissions process appear daunting and confusing. To support you to guide students in the correct direction, I have provided a short guide to the admissions process with some key points to take away.

## Pre-application pointers

Once a student has decided on a course(s), and they've chosen one to five universities on UCAS, it's time for them to submit their application. This should always be completed before the application deadline in January (October if they are applying to Medicine or Oxbridge). These deadlines can be easily accessed on the UCAS website.

## Once the application is in

After applications are received, universities will begin their decision-making process. They will take into consideration the academic entry requirements, the student's personal statement and reference, plus the skills and experience demonstrated throughout the application. In short, it is the university's role to ensure every student has the capability to succeed on their chosen course.

Now is the exciting and nerve-wracking part for students, waiting for their offers. Students are likely to hear back at different times from their friends. Offers are emailed to them and displayed on UCAS Track, where each student will need to log in to accept or decline them. Additionally, if the course requires an interview, audition, or portfolio, this will be displayed here.

## University offers

If a student has been offered a university place, it will show as either unconditional or conditional. An unconditional offer means the student has already met the entry requirements and has a place. If they choose to accept an unconditional offer, they are committing themselves to the course and university. On the other hand, if the offer is conditional, the student will have to meet the conditions to secure a place. The criteria is shown on UCAS Track and will often mean waiting until results day in summer to confirm it.

Alternatively, students may receive an unsuccessful or an application withdrawal. If they are unsuccessful, the university has decided not to offer them a place. The student might be able to add extra choices if they'd like to, and this will show on UCAS Track if they're eligible. With regards to withdrawal, this can mean that either the student has withdrawn/not been in touch, or the university has removed their course choice. If this happens, there are plenty of options for students, our best advice is for the student to get in touch with their chosen University.



# How to support students to write a great university personal statement

By Orla Kirkland, Outreach Officer for the Midlands at the University of Exeter

“ From the day that I was born I wanted to write about Personal Statements. ”

Clichés, jokes and bending the truth have no place in a professional university application. You may have read a few of these yourself and have been surprised at your students’ hidden talents. Many are unsure of how to start, but it is easy, with the truth!

Passion and motivation can grab attention and quickly provide a real understanding to a student without the classic procrastination of the perfect opening line. Remind them it is not a detailed personal monologue but like a job application which needs to be formal, clear and concise.

## Where to start

Identifying a student’s favourite module, topic or experience in a subject will shape the start of the personal statement, allowing the focus to be on the skills and knowledge acquired which are relevant for their chosen course.

If they are unsure which skills would be relevant, then a quick look at course modules on the website will show what may be appropriate to discuss. Identifying common research themes/modules/skills between university courses is key to ensuring that the statement will be applicable to all courses the student applies to.

## Work experience

To say facilitating work experience has been a challenging task in the last year is an understatement. However, the skills needed can be gained and, in an increasingly competitive environment, it is vital students try to identify any skills gaps to increase their confidence and success.

It would be effective to try and gain these online, for example:

- A student applying for Environmental Science may undertake an online course on sustainability (pro-active, passion & motivation, learning outside classroom).
- From this they create an eco-schools club for younger students online (creativity, project management, leadership & teamwork).
- As a result, they designed an online proposal (written communication, problem solving, analytical skills).
- They then presented this at a virtual assembly (verbal communication, inspiring others, marketing).
- And subsequently removed single use plastic from classrooms (implementation, negotiation, evaluation).

This will benefit them on the course where they would need to find appropriate solutions to environmental problems by assessing, reporting and quantifying environmental risks.

The good news for pro-active students is that there is an opportunity to develop effective skills and knowledge without the fear of excess time, historic networks or cost of travel. An example of this is the Discover University programme at the University of Exeter. We deliver free evening sessions for students on writing a personal statement which dispels myths and gives top tips from our admissions team. I would highly recommend encouraging students to attend this style of session at the institutions they wish to apply for to gain an insight into a successful application, ask questions and learn about their process.



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# What do universities look for in a school or college reference?

**By Helena Ziegler, Manager, UK Student Recruitment Team at the University of Aberdeen**

Just like applicants who dread writing their personal statement, there are no doubt some form teachers/guidance & career advisers who approach the annual exercise of writing the matching UCAS reference with some trepidation and anxiety!

First, I want to reassure you that those references are indeed read, and even appreciated, by university admissions selectors. Your references help us to understand your pupils better, to gain a greater insight into why they want to study the chosen degree subject and ensures that we have as complete a picture of the applicant as possible.

The 4000 characters (or infamous 47 lines!) in the UCAS reference provide university admissions teams across the country with vital information that supports every applicant, and therefore is a key component of the overall application.

## My top things to consider when writing a UCAS reference:

### 1/ Tell us what we *want* to know

We value your opinion on the suitability of the applicant for their chosen degree subject. An honest reflection on their abilities, motivation, and potential for the subject of study and/or career is very helpful to our admission selectors.

You can also include information about their skills and attributes that will help them succeed at university, using specific examples from their academic and personal achievements if possible.

### 2/ Tell us what we *need* to know

We especially need to know if there are extenuating circumstances which affected your pupil in their senior phase of education, for example serious illness, bereavement, were they in care or are they a carer, did they experience financial difficulties, etc.? It would be helpful if this information included when or how long it was a factor, or an estimate of how it may have influenced school exams. This information can support that given in the personal statement by the applicant and can also be very helpful in explaining any discrepancies in the academic performance of your student.

### 3/ Tell us what you think we *need* to know

You know your students best. This is an opportunity to give us a personal insight into them. From their school and classroom activities, to extra-curricular or community engagement, please share with us how your pupils have engaged with their world.

Moreover, given your experience and insight, it is very helpful to draw attention to stand-out applicants within a cohort. This can be extremely valuable information for those reviewing thousands of applications.

Finally, I would add that most universities welcome ongoing dialogue with guidance teachers/careers advisers, even after an application has been submitted - at the University of Aberdeen, we certainly do! If new information comes to light that you feel would be important for the admission team to be aware of, please get in touch.

**“References help us to understand your pupils better, to gain a greater insight into why they want to study the chosen degree subject and ensures we have as complete a picture of the applicant as possible.”**

# A school and college guide to university accommodation

**By Melissa Grindon, Creative Projects Officer at Liverpool Hope University**

Settling in at university and growing to create memorable experiences will happen in every student's life, so it is important for applicants to make an informed choice as to which accommodation option best fits in with their individual financial circumstances, personal preferences and lifestyle.

In order to make this process as smooth and as easy as possible, it is worth your students researching the different options available in advance of the application process and exploring all possible types of accommodation on offer within each institution of interest.

## Tips to share with your students when considering university accommodation

The first step is to find out the accommodation options each institution has to offer. Opportunities such as open days, applicant events and campus tours are the perfect chance to explore this.

University staff often appoint student ambassadors to show prospective students around campus, and therefore it is a great way to gain a true insight into campus life and the accommodation which would be best for each individual.

## Private accommodation

As well as campus accommodation, there is also the option of private halls of residence. These are often located in the same town or city, or very close to campus.

It is important to consider that these can have additional costs and may have completely different contracts to residential halls within the university campus.

It is also useful to take a note of the length of time these rooms are available for. For example, most accommodation contracts may run during the term time only, but some allow students to stay throughout the summer months too - this could be ideal for international applicants, or students who choose to live away from home for the entire academic year.

Financial preparation is key in this whole process, so it is a good idea for applicants to plan ahead regarding student finance or perhaps scholarship opportunities they are entitled to - in this case, how much of a maintenance loan or bursary they are given. In addition to this, saving ahead of time is also a great investment for students, as it allows for easier budgeting of rent and utility costs in the long term.

It is also worth noting that many universities ask for a deposit ahead of the term, which they will return at the end of the academic year, should no damages be made to the facilities. This cost will vary - but may range from £100-£200.

Of course, the application and selection process of university should be fun and exciting, so rest assured that each student will be going through the same stages when choosing their accommodation.

**“ Planning and preparation will keep the application process steady and simplify it in the long term - which hopefully will pay off on move-in day! ”**





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# Preparing your students for the university transition - how things are different from school

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

Studying in a university environment can seem like a big change for students, especially after completing much of their studies at home over the past year.

There are many differences between school and university, the biggest being that students can expect a lot more independence both academically and socially. For many, this is a big reason for choosing to attend university, but it may also take a bit of getting used to.

Below are some of the key differences you may wish to highlight when discussing university transition with your students.

## Time keeping and deadlines

University lecturers and tutors don't chase students for drafts of their work or give regular reminders of when their work is due for submission. Similarly, although attendance is usually monitored centrally, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that they turn up for their study commitments.

It is important that students manage their time effectively, especially when balancing what is on offer socially with succeeding in their studies.

## Academic writing and research

Students are expected to do the majority of their work independently. Topics, key themes and concepts are outlined by academic staff through lectures and seminars, but students are then expected to go away and research these in detail, using their own initiative. This requires a lot of self-motivation, choosing a subject they are passionate about will help with this.

The style of writing expected of students is also different at university with an expectation to think critically when researching topics, offering balanced arguments in essays, backed up by quotes and references from their background reading. This is why referencing is so important. There is usually lots of help on hand to support students with this when they start their university course.

## Student life

After spending much of the last year studying from home, student life at university will, more than ever, seem very different to what students have become used to. The opportunities available to learn new skills and meet new people are really exciting and an excellent way to build valuable skills that employers value such as confidence, resilience and willingness to try new things.

The Student's Union organises most social activities which include the many clubs and societies on offer. Joining a society is a great way for your students to meet like-minded people and try out new activities.

## Support available

Although moving to university study can seem like a big step, there is lots of support available to transition to a new way of working. Students aren't expected to adjust to the change overnight and allowances are made, particularly for first year students when it comes to skills such as referencing. Universities may also offer a 'buddy' system where new students can call on support from others who have previously faced similar challenges.

**“ There are many differences between school and university, the biggest being that students can expect a lot more independence both academically and socially. ”**

# A higher education jargon buster

By **Meg Griessel, Student Recruitment Officer (Schools & Colleges) at St Mary's University, Twickenham**

With hundreds of higher education providers in the UK, researching university courses can already feel like a daunting prospect for students. After visiting universities or navigating the UCAS website, learners will likely come away with more questions – particularly on the new phraseology they will encounter for the first time.

## The key university and UCAS terms you may run into

### Undergraduate and postgraduate

Undergraduates are students studying their first degree, usually following the completion of their A-Levels, BTECs or equivalent. Postgraduate students have typically completed an undergraduate degree as this is required for admission.

### Degree classifications

There are various classifications of degrees which can be studied at UK universities. The main undergraduate level degrees are outlined below:

**BA:** Bachelor of Arts

**BSc:** Bachelor of Sciences

**FdA:** Foundation Degree

**FdSc:** Foundation Degree Sciences

**PGCert:** Postgraduate Certificate

**PGDip:** Postgraduate Diploma

**LLB:** Bachelor of Law.

### Levels 4, 5, 6

There are three levels of study within an undergraduate degree. Level 4 is the next level up from an A-Level or equivalent qualification. Level 5 is the second year of an undergraduate degree. Level 6 is the third year of an undergraduate degree.

### Foundation degree

A qualification which combines work-based learning with academic study. The course is equivalent to the first two years of a bachelor degree (Level 4 and Level 5).

### Foundation year

A foundation year is a one-year course that is taken prior to commencing an undergraduate degree to bring students up to the required academic standard.

### Degree apprenticeships

Different to a higher apprenticeship; they provide learners the opportunity to gain a full bachelor's degree alongside working part-time in their field of interest.

### Joint honours degree

This is two subjects studied at degree level together. A student's time will usually be split across the two subjects equally, but some courses do offer students the opportunity to spend more time on one than the other (this is known as 'majoring' and 'minoring').

### Semester

Most school and college terms are divided by three in a single academic year. At university, there are typically only two semesters. One before Christmas, and one after.

### Lectures and seminars

These are both methods of teaching at university. A lecture usually takes place in a large classroom, with a teacher speaking at the front whilst students take notes. A seminar usually follows a lecture, with a smaller group. Students will discuss the lecture's topic, their research and any other reading relevant to the class, with an academic and their peers.

**“ After visiting universities or navigating the UCAS website, learners will likely come away with more questions - particularly on the new phraseology they will encounter for the first time. ”**

### Placement year

A degree with a placement, will usually be 4 years long with a year working in an area relevant to the field of study. These are sometimes known as 'Sandwich courses'.

### Students' Union

An organisation which is found at UK universities. It is run by students, to support and represent students during their time at the institution. They are the heart of student social life and politics.

### Study abroad

Universities will have partner organisations across the globe, allowing students to spend a year or semester studying in a different country.

## UCAS Terminology

### UCAS

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, the organisation which deals with the majority of higher education applications.

### Tariff points

UCAS has a tariff system, more commonly known as 'UCAS points'. This allows qualifications to be converted into points e.g. an A at A Level or equivalent is worth 48 points. These are added together to give a total which can be used as a requirement for a course. For example, a course may require a student to achieve 104 points.

### Conditional offer

An offer from a university which requires a student to achieve certain grades.

### Unconditional offer

An offer of a place on a course with no conditions – the place is theirs if the student wants it.

### UCAS track

Students can log into UCAS track to check the progression of their offers as well as amend any personal details.

### UCAS extra

If a student finds themselves without an offer, UCAS extra enables them to have an additional choice through UCAS.

### Firm choice

An applicant's preferred or first choice higher education institution on their UCAS application.

### Insurance choice

An applicant's back up or second choice higher education institution on their UCAS application; a reserve if they do not meet the requirements of their firm choice.

### Clearing

An opportunity for students to find a place on a course which still has available spaces if they did not make their firm or insurance choice, or have decided to study a different subject or elsewhere. This usually takes place after students receive their results.

### Adjustment

If students achieve higher grades than expected, they can 'adjust' their offer and do a course which requires more tariff points at a different institution.

### Still unsure?

Higher education providers are always happy to help! If there are any terms we haven't mentioned, most universities have jargon buster pages on their websites, or you can ask them directly at events or via email.



## Useful links

If you would like to arrange university events for your school, you can search through over 1,000 opportunities using: [www.unitasterdays.com/search](http://www.unitasterdays.com/search)

If you can't find the university event you are looking for on the search area, do please request one - this request is then sent directly to the universities you select: [www.unitasterdays.com/request](http://www.unitasterdays.com/request)

If you would like university event updates to be sent directly to your inbox, you can join our events-by-email service at: [www.unitasterdays.com/email](http://www.unitasterdays.com/email)

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