



Hosting higher education and progression activity at your school or college: the essentials for organisers

Young people in our schools and colleges today face a future that will be very different from that experienced by their parents and teachers; opportunities in higher education and apprenticeships are changing rapidly. Developing provisions for career learning to help young people develop the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to make successful choices and manage transitions can be a job in itself. This brief guide is intended to aid and support any teachers or advisors tasked with organising and providing activities to support this learning.

Engaging with higher education providers

Higher education fairs provide a great way for students and parents to get information about a lot of different colleges at once. Many high schools choose to arrange and host their own fairs, sometimes in tandem with other local schools. It is worth highlighting at this point that UCAS runs a series of regional higher education fairs across the UK and Northern Ireland. These run every year from March onwards and tend to be a student's best opportunity to speak to the biggest variety of higher education providers across the UK under one roof and in one day. If not UK based, the British Council runs a series of international exhibitions aimed at those considering studying in the UK.

How can you organise and conduct a fair at your school?

Scheduling and planning

- Choose the date early — several months in advance.
- Check the regional UCAS events calendar to avoid conflicts.
- Send out invitations or provisional dates to hold as soon as possible to universities you hope will attend your event.
- Coordinate scheduling with other school events and activities to ensure adequate space and parking.
- Depending on space, your fair may require use of the whole building, so check for conflicts.

Budgeting finances and space

- Set up a budget early in your planning. Typical expenses may include table rental, food (if you intend to provide catering) and bottled water for the representatives.
- If the budget is tight consider community partnerships — local companies may want to support the event.
- Determine how much space you have available. Keep in mind that popular universities might need larger spaces, maybe even separate rooms.

Coordinating invitations

- Invite universities that:
 - Are local
 - Previously sent representatives to your school
 - You have visited
 - Your students plan to apply to.

- Make announcements about the college fair at planning nights and in your school's newsletter. For a September fair, for example, you would make announcements in February and send a reminder in June.
- Send invitations to universities at least four months before the fair. Be aware that some may send alumni or student ambassadors rather than staff members.
- Communicate directly with the university staff attending.
- Send formal invitations to students and their supporters at least a month before the fair.

Preparing for the event

- A week before the fair, have students think about who they want to speak to and the questions they want to ask.
- Provide a directory for students and families.
- List each college and its location at the fair (note if a particular university has its own room).
- Provide a detailed description of each college including size, location and subject areas.
- Provide an evaluation form so that universities, students and families can give you feedback to use in planning the next fair.

University speakers

Using assembly slots or parents' evenings as platforms for university speakers can be a worthwhile activity in engaging students and their supporters in higher education choices. Many universities offer a range of standard presentations such as 'choosing a university and course', 'study life', 'writing a personal statement' or 'student finance'.

It is possible in most cases to request something more bespoke if you have particular objectives or learning outcomes in mind. For example, you might wish to request a specialist subject speaker to talk about studying a particular topic at a given university. Similarly, it may be something along the lines of a speaker to deliver a workshop to parents to demystify university applications and guide them through the finance, or even a practical session with staff at your school or college to guide them through reference writing.

As a general guide, the earlier you get in touch with a university to discuss what presentations, workshops and support they may be able to offer and how this might best fit in with your objectives and, of course, the school calendar, the more successful this activity will be.