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30 higher education practitioners.**



UniTasterDays.com

Teachers' Guide to University 2021

The key higher education facts for school and college staff.

EDITION FOR



Produced in collaboration with **HELOA**

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"Decisions about studying at University are ever more critical, given the financial as well as the personal investment students are required to make. Teachers and Year Tutors are a vital source of information and advice for young people and the Teachers' Guide to University brochure is a valuable resource in ensuring students are well equipped for their choice of where and what to study."

Kieran Gordon - Executive Director, Careers England

careersEngland >>>>

Welcome to the UniTasterDays.com Teachers' Guide to University

This guide anticipates 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 September 2020.

It 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 now offer so many ways for your students to look into higher education, before committing to 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 during the current climate, online. The following pages show you the sort of activities your students will find useful.

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 should be 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
Jon@unitasterdays.com

"This Guide clearly lays out higher education's offer, how to take up those opportunities, how to prepare your students, how to make contact with the right people in institutions, some of the pitfalls to look out for and some of what is currently going on around Covid-19. You can be confident that universities and colleges are accommodating and welcoming, endeavouring to do their best for **all** your students as well as giving specific help and support to enable those students that might need it to succeed whether they are socially disadvantaged, disabled or facing other barriers to success."

Andrew Rawson - Director, Action on Access



"The Career Development Institute is delighted to endorse the 2020 Teachers' Guide to University brochure - at a time when high quality, independent and impartial information and personal careers guidance is more important than ever. This is just one of many great resources provided by UniTasterDays, to support schools and colleges with their university links."

Jan Ellis - Chief Executive, Career Development Institute



"This year has been an unprecedented year in the higher education sector and has presented many challenges. Our HELOA members have come together and have developed innovative and creative ways to provide continued access to university advice and guidance not only to students, teachers and advisors, but also to the organisations that we support. Now more than ever it is important to ensure that students feel supported and empowered to make decisions about their future, and HELOA are pleased to continue to work with UniTasterDays in our shared mission to do just that."

Rebecca Hollington - UK Vice-Chair for Partnerships, HELOA



A school and college guide to working with universities during the new normal - organising online and physical events

By Oliver Rossetti, Outreach Manager at the University of Leicester

It is fair to say that the next year is likely to be turbulent and I imagine it can seem daunting when thinking about how to organise events to support the university guidance you provide and achieving your Gatsby Benchmarks. You're certainly not alone and as universities and other higher education institutions, we are here to advise.

The *new normal* is here to stay for a little longer yet, so here are some tips for organising a university event.

The decision of an online or physical event?

This will largely be based on whether you have the space for social distancing. Weigh up the benefits of face-to-face delivery, could the talk simply be shown on a live screen and resources sent beforehand?

A careers fair is a great way to impart advice from organisations but how will you control literature being given out and ensure it is not being left around the school? Allowing students the opportunity to consider which university they would like to speak with beforehand could mitigate this and help you know the likely pinch points, so you can schedule time and ensure busier stands can maintain social distancing.

Which online platform to use?

There is now an abundance of online platforms to choose from when running events. Examples include 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 own budget to facilitate access.

Do you have concerns about safeguarding?

Restrictions can normally be applied such as passwords or enabling the teacher themselves to admit students from a register. Don't be afraid of requesting a university to adjust settings in order to meet your safeguarding policy and risk assessment.

Physical considerations

If face-to-face delivery is appropriate there are some factors to consider when ensuring it is COVID-secure:

- PPE guidance sent to all visitors beforehand and hand sanitiser upon entry.
- A process in place for distributing literature and for pupils who no longer need it.
- Single-use refreshments such as bottled water and prepared lunch bags - or having a dedicated colleague in PPE serving tea and coffee.
- Ensuring appropriate distance between the speaker and students within a classroom.
- Support for busier stands and talks, including implementing a schedule if required.
- Providing a track and trace process, noting down visitor details and providing guidance if either a student or visitor needs to get in touch with you after the event.
- Universities may have individual travel policies which prevent the use of public transport or other factors, so do check with all providers during planning.
- If space is limited, consider prioritising disadvantaged groups as evidence shows these groups will have been more affected with a lack of university guidance during lockdown.

When should I request support?

Universities receive a number of requests so ensuring your date is in the diary first will help the institution best allocate appropriate resources.

Don't worry initially if you're unsure whether it will take place virtually or physically, flexibility from all involved will be key over the next year.

Ensure speaker efficiency is maximised

Do not book multiple institutions to deliver the same talk to only a handful of students. Universities have limited resources and particularly this year will be trying to cover as many events as possible to support gaps in knowledge.

Good luck with your event

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 event during such an unsettling time.

“Universities receive a number of requests so ensuring your date is in the diary first will help the institution best allocate appropriate resources. Don't worry initially if you're unsure whether it will take place virtually or physically, flexibility from all involved will be key over the next year.”



#OursToChange

Teachers and Advisers

We provide expert information, advice and guidance to students, parents and teachers through from Primary School to Mature learners, wherever you are in the world.



Teachers

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A school and college guide to working in partnership with universities to support your Gatsby priorities

By Grace Sheldon and Jamie Bytheway, Operations Managers, Greater Manchester Higher, part of the Uni Connect programme

Since the Gatsby Benchmarks came to prominence in the government's statutory careers guidance, they've become increasingly important in shaping school and college relationships with universities.

Many universities and collaborative partnerships (such as the Uni Connect programme) map their outreach provision to the Gatsby Benchmarks so schools/colleges can easily see how activities support their CEIAG priorities.

Benchmark 7 is our 'bread and butter' and yes, we can organise campus visits (with restrictions) but we can support with so much more!

Below is a very brief summary of how universities can provide support across ALL 8 of the benchmarks:

1. A stable careers programme

University outreach is most effective when delivered as part of a progressive programme. Careers Leaders should work closely with local outreach staff to plan a package of activity that helps deliver their strategic careers plan.

2. Learning from career and labour market information

Whilst university outreach teams are not labour market specialists, many will be working with local organisations such as the Careers and Enterprise Company to deliver activities that reflect the local high-level skills need. An example would be a STEM taster day, that brings together employers and academics to highlight industry routes.

3. Addressing the needs of each pupil

Most universities deliver activity targeted at specific groups such as looked after children and care leavers, disabled students, young carers and other specific pupil groups. Some will also deliver 1-2-1 interventions such as mentoring. If specific student needs are discussed in advance, outreach staff can tailor support appropriately.

4. Linking curriculum learning to careers

The government has been encouraging universities to do more to support attainment raising in school over the last few years, therefore some universities will offer activities that directly support the national curriculum such as English and Maths tuition or teacher CPD.

5. Encounters with employers and employees

A number of university outreach activities will involve employers (usually alumni) as guest speakers to talk about their journey into employment. Some mentoring programmes will also connect learners with people in industry.

6. Experiences of workplaces

Some university outreach programmes may include visits to workplaces alongside sessions delivered in school/college and on campus.

7. Encounters with further and higher education

Universities offer talks, visits and taster sessions that support all elements of Benchmark 7. These activities are most effective when delivered as part of a whole school strategic plan. Targeting those students that will most benefit from the activities is also important. Most universities do not have the capacity to support whole year group visits and some activities will have specific learner targeting criteria due to how the activity is funded.

8. Personal guidance

Some universities will also deliver 1-2-1 interventions such as mentoring or personal statement support.

Top tip: The key to making the most of what universities can offer is effective planning and collaborative working. Discuss both your school/college priorities and those of the university/collaborative network, then work together to create a plan that works for both! This is more likely to result in sustainable impact than a *one off request*.



A school and college guide to effectively building links with a university

By Chris Mullen, Penny Dunne and Rebecca Barritt, Education Liaison Officers at Edge Hill University

You've got an idea for a careers programme and you want University X to be part of it. You've not contacted them before, so where should you start? Here we'll provide a few tips on the process.

Initial contact

Firstly, identify who is the most relevant person to contact. You may already receive communications from a university, so that can always be a good starting point. If the institution is a UniTasterDays member, that will make finding a contact and contacting them much easier too.

When approaching institutions directly, instead of sending a blanket email to several teams at the university, it is always worth a quick look at the university website which will provide details of the student recruitment team, or a variation of that name (*schools and colleges or education liaison* for example).

Each team will either have a generic email, where your enquiry will be forwarded onto the relevant contact, or a specific contact for your region.

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, comms or follow teams on social media to keep up to date with the latest news and events!

University colleagues regularly travel the various motorways of the UK and, after initial contact, always enjoy meeting you face to face or virtually 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 just as highly.

Maintaining contact

It is important to regularly keep in touch with university contacts during the academic year, especially to provide staff updates and new contact details so we can ensure you continue to get the most relevant information.

Letting us know about events as early as possible always helps our diary too, especially during busier periods (Sept/Nov and June/July), even if it is just a save the date!

We can help put you in touch with the wider university as well, providing you with departmental contacts or signposting you to the correct support team, for example. At Edge Hill, we receive regular phone calls and emails from teachers and advisers asking anything from an admissions query to advice about a careers event!

Keep an eye out for teachers' panels, teachers' and advisers' conferences, surveys etc where you can provide feedback to help us ensure we are supporting your students as much as we can too!

Developing and maintaining two-way relationships with several universities, both locally and nationally, can provide you with a wealth of extra contacts, resources and information, to benefit the students you are working with and other staff within your school and college. This will enhance your university guidance offering and we are only a call or an enquiry away.



A school and college guide to university decisions and offers

By Chris Rogers, Student Recruitment and Outreach Manager at the University of Chichester

After the long process of students researching, visiting and applying to universities, they will begin to receive their offers. Here is a simple guide to what each offer means.

Unconditional Offer

This offer usually means that the student has met the university entry requirements for the course and should they accept the offer, will have a confirmed place at the university.

Conditional Offer

This is where the student will need to achieve specific grades or meet other conditions in order to secure their place at the university.

A conditional offer may mean a student is asked to achieve certain grades e.g. ABB at A-Level, DMM in BTEC or 28 Points in the International Baccalaureate; or it could be achieving a specific number of UCAS points (all of these can be found on individual institution websites and on the UCAS website).

Unsuccessful

This unfortunately means that the student does not meet the entry requirements or is not predicted to. Therefore, they have not been offered a place with the university. Sometimes the student will be given a reason. They can also contact the university to ask if they will discuss their reason with them.

Interview/audition

Students may be invited to interview and/or audition before they are made an offer. Interviews are used more commonly for vocational and highly subscribed courses. Auditions are for those creative courses such as Theatre, Music and Dance.

UniTasterDays Note - You can find out more about interviews for creative programmes on page 26 of this guide.

Contextualised Offers

Something else that may be used in decision making processes at universities is contextualised offers. A student may meet other criteria often referred to as contextualised admissions, where universities use data to assess an applicant's prior attainment and individual circumstances. There may be factors such as an individual having been in care, participation data of their home neighbourhood or other qualifying information.

Responding to university offers

After having been made all of their offers, students will be asked to respond accordingly.

Firm acceptance

This is the course and university they most want to attend. Grades for this choice are usually higher than their insurance choice.

Insurance acceptance

A student's insurance choice is their back up should they not get the grades they have been predicted. This is usually a lower offer than their firm choice.

The Student Recruitment and Outreach team deliver a range of presentations and workshops to support and guide students through the higher education application process including:

- THE BENEFITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
- WRITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS
- RESEARCHING UNIVERSITIES AND COURSES
- TASTER DAYS AND CAMPUS TOURS
- STUDENT FINANCE WORKSHOPS

Contact outreach@chi.ac.uk to see how the University of Chichester can support your students.



UNIVERSITY OF
CHICHESTER



YOUR STUDENTS

- We can arrange bespoke workshops and presentations at your school. Past subjects have included: personal statement workshops, what is a two-year degree?, options post-Sixth Form, and student fees and financing
- Book online or in-person school visits to explore our campus, which can include subject taster sessions, talks with students, and tours of campus life
- Join our range of online workshops
- Join our virtual subject taster sessions

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With over 1,000 teachers and school leaders studying with us, the University of Buckingham's School of Education is now one of the country's leading providers of teacher training and professional development. We train the teachers of the future.

Find out more:
buckingham.ac.uk/study-education

A school and college guide to how universities can support you with subject specific events

By Fiona Curry, Student Recruitment & Widening Participation Schools & Colleges Manager at the University of Gloucestershire

Whether your students are considering their GCSE or Level 3 options - or deciding which university course or higher/degree apprenticeship they might want to consider, universities offer a wide range of subject experiences and events. They may even support you to meet Gatsby Benchmark 4, *linking curriculum to careers* in the process.

Flexible to suit you and delivered by experts

Subject experiences are often available to be tailored to timings and topics to suit your needs - and can be delivered in school/college or on a university campus. These could be delivered by outreach and student recruitment officers, but you may get the opportunity to work with academic staff too. They can talk about placements, research in their field and where their graduates progress to, providing engaging content that will inspire and educate your students on subjects they are considering.

Some universities also have postgraduate ambassadors or officers who can share their experience of studying at the university with your students, through subject workshops and talks.

On-campus subject tasters

Evidence suggests that on-campus activity is more impactful to inspire students to apply to university*. Where possible, it is great to organise an on-campus visit for your students to see and use the facilities, hear from the academics and meet current student ambassadors who can share their unique experiences and routes to university. This gives them the chance to try out student life.

You may also be partnered with a local university who can offer travel bursaries for coaches, particularly for students from underrepresented

backgrounds to higher education. It is always worth asking for more information on what is available.

Virtual subject content

During 2020, there has been a boom of digital events too, for students to access from the comfort of their own homes, including (but not limited to) webinars, subject specific summer schools and challenges for students to gain virtual experience. Many academics and school and college liaison teams are on social media platforms, so students can follow them on Instagram, read blog posts and attend Facebook live events on hot topics in the field they are interested in as well.

Supporting your events

As interactive school and college fairs become more popular, academics and university staff are becoming more creative with their university stands. From demonstrations using portable equipment to subject-in-a-box style tasks and mini-sessions which can be delivered in 10-15-minute rotations, get in touch with universities to find out what they can offer to support your events.

*Anthony, A., Edgar, R., 2020, Exploring the relationship between on-campus outreach and HE entry, HEAT.



A school and college guide to supporting students when they are choosing courses and universities

By Lydia Greenhalgh, Regional Schools and Colleges Recruitment Coordinator at the University of Portsmouth

With so many courses to choose from, students can often feel overwhelmed when they start their university research. Advising these four essential steps will help them to get started with the all-important decisions they are making for their future.

Step 1: Choose the course first and the university later

Students can get carried away with looking at the aesthetics of a university, the reputation of its social scene, the location and so on. However, enjoying and thriving in their studies is the most important factor they need to consider to help them to succeed. Start by asking your students to shortlist university courses which interest them based on module content alone. This will provide them with a shortlist of open days to attend which will in turn, give them a 'feel' of the university during their visit.

Step 2: Look at entry requirements

You will want your students to be aspirational with their choices, but being realistic in terms of university entry requirements will give them a greater chance of receiving offers. Based on their predicted grades or mock results, encourage them to pitch their choices in line with how they're performing academically. However, it's good to have a couple of choices to aim a little higher for and to spur their ambition.

Step 3: Research and comparison is key

University degree titles often confuse students as they look similar at first glance. But this is where your students will need to focus their research. Once the student has shortlisted their courses, it is then a case of comparing them to see how they differ and which one will best align with their interests.

For example, a Business and Management degree at one university might include compulsory

modules in Years 1 & 2 but a course with the same title, at another university, might allow the student to be flexible with their module choices throughout their degree.

Encourage your students to look at the mode of assessment in each year of study as well – how is the degree weighted? Some students excel through coursework assessment and others will perform better in exams. They should also consider how practical or theoretical the course is, depending on how they like to learn. University course webpages should provide them with this information.

Step 4: Use league tables for further research

League tables are a great way to compare universities, but do promote them with a disclaimer.

Firstly, there are numerous league tables, each with different assessment criteria. Therefore, students will find that a university's ranking will change depending on which league table they are looking at.

Secondly, and most importantly, make sure your students are comparing universities according to the subject they want to study and not to its overall ranking as an institution. Each university has specialist disciplines so they shouldn't assume that a university will be highly ranked for all subjects, even if it is positioned well in the main league table.

UniTasterDays Note - Find out more about league tables on page 42.

Along with these tips, encourage students to speak to academic staff and students at open days, as well as signposting them to university course pages and websites such as UCAS, UniTasterDays and DiscoverUni. Doing this research will guide them to make well-considered decisions and will equip them to approach these decisions with confidence.

“ You will want your students to be aspirational with their choices, but being realistic in terms of university entry requirements will give them a greater chance of receiving offers. ”

A school and college guide to CPD opportunities through universities

By Lauren McWilliams, Higher Education Adviser at the University of East Anglia

As a teacher or adviser, to provide effective information and guidance, you must be equipped with accurate and in-depth information on a plethora of ever-changing subjects relating to higher education. This could be challenging with the ongoing COVID-19 related restrictions.

Luckily, help is at hand. Universities offer a number of ways to help you stay up to date – from podcasts and webinars to residential and virtual conferences, there's something to suit everyone.

I will provide an overview of some of these here.

Teacher and adviser conferences

Teacher and adviser conferences are hosted by universities and other higher education institutions nationwide, and are often free to attend and CPD accredited. They are usually one or two days, with the latter including accommodation and a networking dinner – giving you the chance to meet other professionals to share challenges and best practices.

The format and content will vary, but you can generally expect a mix of internal and external speakers, workshops and Q&As. Most offer break-out sessions, enabling you to tailor your programme to maximise personal development in an area of your choice.

Lots of universities moved their conferences online in 2020, with great success, so this is something that we could see more of going forward.

Podcasts

Some universities offer podcasts designed specifically for teachers and advisers. They are a great way to top up your knowledge throughout the year, listening to episodes at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Podcasts often feature higher education advisers, academics, admissions tutors, current or past students and external speakers. You can subscribe to podcasts for free, meaning that you'll get new episodes automatically as soon as they are available.

Interactive webinars

As you would expect, webinars are now more popular than ever. They have evolved in recent years so instead of sitting passively or typing in online chat forums, a number of universities now run interactive sessions that offer the next best thing to being in the same room as the speaker (you may have even arranged for some of these sessions for your classroom of students). Register in advance and you'll be sent a link to log-in and join the session. The number of participants is often limited which means you'll be able to ask questions and discuss key points.

Keeping you up-to-date

These opportunities offer you the chance to stay informed about the latest developments in higher education from industry experts, giving you the tools and skills needed to foster the talents and aspirations of your students. University school liaison and outreach teams understand how important it is to deliver the best careers guidance this year and we are here to support you to achieve that.

There's no place like Surrey

At the University of Surrey, we support activities for Year 5 to Year 13 school students in order to raise aspirations and attainment, and to provide information, advice and guidance related to higher education.

We also have a wide variety of new teaching and learning resources on our website, including monthly webinars on a variety of topics designed to support you and your students.

To find out more, visit:
surrey.ac.uk/schools-colleges



Durham University Conferences for Teachers

Find out more about what Durham has to offer your students by attending one of our forthcoming virtual conferences. These will be running in October and January.

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Graduate employability: the key skills for success

In conversation with Marc Allera, CEO, BT's Consumer Division

An exclusive interview with one of the UK's most successful business leaders to inspire your students. You're welcome to scan and share this page.

After a successful early career with brands including Sega and Three, Marc Allera joined EE in 2011 as Chief Commercial Officer and was appointed EE's CEO in 2016. He was appointed to the role of CEO of BT's Consumer division in September 2017.

As head of the UK's leading mobile and fixed communications businesses across the BT, BT Sport, EE and Plusnet brands, Marc is ultimately responsible for connecting more than 30 million people to the internet – and to each other.

Marc studied International Business at Sheffield Hallam University, graduating in 1995. He also sits as a Corporate Board Member at Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Marc went straight to university after finishing his secondary education and chose to study Geography, Business Studies and Sociology at A Level.

He has kindly offered time to answer some questions for UniTasterDays. We hope his experience and advice will help inspire the next generation of business leaders.

On his university participation choice and decision to study International Business at university:

"I wanted to continue my learning and to have a better chance of finding employment, a degree was an important part of that. I was interested in business and A level Business Studies got me more interested. I wanted to have an international perspective and the chance to study and work abroad, which my degree choice gave me".

On how university helped his career:

"I think I became career-minded after work experience as part of my degree, and in the early stages of my first couple of jobs. The opportunity to study and work abroad really benefitted me – real vocational experience that I was lucky to have in a great company with fantastic colleagues who believed in me. All of that, together, gave me so many valuable experiences in the world of work. I never imagined I would have a job as big or as fun as this though!"



On the key skills required for a student to build a successful career:

"Be adaptable and flexible, because technology is driving so many changes in so many different roles – and in how companies think about talent".

"Also remember that, in the end, your career is only in your hands. You have to take control of it. You have to drive it yourself. Yes, your tutors – and later, your managers and your leaders will be interested and enthusiastic in your development. But you'll be thinking about your career and where you want to go way more than they will. It's naturally more important to you than it is to them. Have a plan, talk about it with your tutor (or manager), review it periodically, and adapt it if necessary, to the company or industry situation as things evolve. You have to have the mindset that you are driving this. No one else is going to do it for you".

On the key attributes when recruiting business leaders:

"When I recruit leaders today, one of the most important things I look for is passion. You want to

work with people who care about the business you're in. I want great team members to have around the table, who are fantastic collaborators with others".

"I also look for different perspectives; people who can bring different ideas and give you the overall picture from diverse backgrounds. Business is about solving problems. We face different challenges, big and small, every day. I look for people who can think around problems, and people with resilience who are not going to give up at the first hurdle".

And some final advice for students to maximise their career potential?

"You can take something from everyone – no one person has all the answers. And, if you're interested, willing to learn and give it a go, you'll find you are given the opportunities you are looking for."

"Technology is evolving rapidly, with new platforms changing the way we live, work and connect. So you can never say you know everything. It doesn't matter if you're a CEO or if you have just joined the company – you can always be learning".

"The most important investment you can make is in yourself. Develop your skills, your knowledge, to give yourself an advantage. That's more important than ever. Invest a few minutes every day. An hour or more if you have it. With the right skills, attitude and mindset, you can be successful."

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www.unitasterdays.com/tuesdays





A school and college guide to international university study opportunities

**By David Hawkins, Director,
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 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 111 universities in 9 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!

A school and college guide to supporting students with their personal statements

**By Michelle Tang, Widening Participation
Manager (Post-16) at the University of
Cambridge**

In my experience, students often think of the personal statement as the most important part of their application because it's the part they have the most creative freedom over. But with freedom comes a lot of potential pitfalls! Here are my top tips to steer students in the right direction.

Tip 1: Engage in supercurriculars early.

Early on, when students are narrowing down their choices and considering what courses are out there, it shouldn't just be about reading prospectuses. Instead, encourage them to engage in some supercurricular activity. These are academic activities which go beyond the curriculum in the courses they are considering. This could take the form of reading an article, watching a documentary, listening to a podcast, developing their academic skills and much more!

This serves a double purpose in helping students figure out whether they enjoy the subject, but also starts to build up the list of potential things they could write about in a personal statement.

Tip 2: Help with drafting and proofing, and enlist others!

Everyone knows how valuable it is to have another pair of eyes on something they've written. As a teacher, you're in a great position to proofread but don't let it all rest on you! Encourage your students to share their personal statements with family, friends and peers – especially someone who knows a bit about their subject.

As well as looking out for grammar and spelling mistakes, you should also check that all the content is relevant to the subject they're applying for. The statement should be in the students' own words, avoiding clichés and quotes, avoiding jokes which might get misinterpreted. Encourage students to put their best foot forward and keep things positive!

Tip 3: Understand what Admissions Tutors are looking for.

When you're proofing, emphasise quality and depth of understanding over quantity. Admission tutors at top universities are looking for students to write about a specific topic in detail in order to demonstrate their understanding. They are less impressed by broad sweeping statements or generalisations, so students will need to back up anything they include.

Furthermore, many of the top universities are less interested in a student's extracurriculars, work experience or general 'personal' life so these things should be kept to a minimum; instead, think about including personal details (particularly extenuating circumstances) in the teacher reference instead.

Overall, tutors want to confirm that the student is motivated about their subject and is someone who would be well suited to studying it for at least the next 3 years. With so few characters to get this across, you want to help applicants make every word count!



A school and college guide to the transition from school to university

By Laura Haveron, Marketing Coordinator at Teesside University

The transition from school or college to university can be a big step for students, and the uncertainty of the present climate may make that step feel even larger for some.

University study is very different to how many school students are used to learning, particularly as many universities are offering hybrid teaching models at the moment (combining online and on-campus study) to manage social distancing regulations.

To develop independence, it is important for students to do plenty of research before applying for university. There are lots of things you can do to help your students with this, which I will outline below.

Study skills

Encourage your students to hone their independent study skills. Reviewing study skills guides provided on university websites or through UCAS can prepare students to develop efficient solo study skills.

Time management

Time management is important, especially as students may be studying at home more often. At university, students are required to take much greater control over when, what and how they study. Make students aware of this and encourage them to think about how they study best, what kind of learner they are and how to create study schedules.

Self-motivation

Although university colleagues will be extremely supportive both online and in person, new undergraduates need to be aware that they must take responsibility for their learning. Choosing a subject they are passionate about will help with this.

Academic writing

Academic writing is a skill many students need to develop at university. Written assessments can be very different at university to what students are familiar with, particularly in terms of research and referencing. Students may find that their university offers free academic writing sessions before or when they begin their course. At Teesside University for example, sessions are offered online and through our library.

Universities also offer resources and learning tools to help students manage their learning to aid their transition to undergraduate study. Teesside University provides all new full-time undergraduates with support through its Teesside University Advance scheme – giving students the latest Apple iPad, keyboard case and £300 of credit to spend on course resources and/or data to ensure they begin university with access to all they need to succeed.

Student life

Your students may have preconceptions about student life. Inviting universities to speak online or in-person to your students will help them build an accurate picture of this. Here at Teesside, our staff and student ambassadors deliver presentations online and at schools and colleges to debunk myths about student life.

Things may be a little different in the current climate but universities and the students' union are working hard to make sure there are many safe and accessible activities, online and on campus for their students. Encourage your students to make the most of what's on offer.

Top Tip #1: Most universities have dedicated outreach teams who will be happy to deliver helpful online or in-person sessions for your students on study skills and more.

Top Tip #2: Check if universities have any online resources your students can access.

“The transition from school or college to university can be a big step for students, and the uncertainty of the present climate may make that step feel even larger for some.”



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This is City.

Find out more www.city.ac.uk/schools-liaison

A school and college guide to university widening participation and fair access

By Sophia Mousoulides, Partnership Manager at the University of East London

More young people from all backgrounds are going to university – however there is still inequality in higher education and beyond. Students with certain characteristics are less likely to enter higher education, less likely to stay on, and/or less likely to gain highly skilled employment after completing their degree.

White students on Free School Meals are the least likely group to enter higher education, followed by those from Gipsy/Roma backgrounds (Working Class Heroes – Understanding access to higher education for white students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. NEON, 2019). There is also a significant difference in the proportion of Black, Asian and minority students awarded a good (First or 2:1) undergraduate degree when compared to White students (Office for Students, July 2020).

Access to university, drop-out rates, attainment and post degree outcomes for underrepresented groups will vary by institution, but there are significant gaps in comparison to the general student population. To resolve these gaps, each higher education institution charging the higher level tuition fees has an Access and Participation Plan (APP). The APP takes into account the gaps that are most salient for the institution and specifies targets in order to tackle inequalities, not only for the institution, but also higher education as a whole. Within the APP are targets set against various stages of the student life cycle, i.e. access to university, continuation (not dropping out), attainment and progression into higher study or highly skilled employment.

In line with their APP, different universities will tackle gaps in different ways, but ultimately they are aiming for the same outcomes that you want for your students; to ensure that every young person is able to make the most of their potential and to remove barriers to success. This is where schools can work with universities to achieve the best outcomes. For the “Access” part of the

APPs, it is important that university Widening Participation and/or Access teams work closely and consistently with students before they arrive at enrolment age.

Meaningful and stage appropriate activities are on offer to schools and colleges to ensure that young people are familiar with higher education and able to make informed decisions about their futures. Research conducted by UCAS indicates that having university as a goal from age ten or earlier makes a significant contribution to future success. There is also evidence that the earlier young people understand the opportunities available through higher education, the more likely they are to be motivated to apply (Through the lens of students: how perceptions of higher education influence applicants’ choices. UCAS, July 2016).

I would recommend that teachers take up these activities at a number of different institutions, choosing those that suit the needs of your learners - but also to show students different universities. No two are the same; some will offer a broader range of subjects, some will be geared up to a more hands-on approach to learning.

Don't be afraid to speak to Widening Participation / Access teams about what works for your students. As teachers, you can offer an insight into what they need to know and skills they need to build. Our job is to be as effective as possible in ensuring barriers to access, progression, attainment and success are removed.



A school and college guide to university courses

By Kat Knight, UK Marketing and Recruitment Officer at City, University of London

There are over 35,000 courses available for your students to consider when making their university choices. It's not just the course name and content that students must get their head around; they'll also need to understand the different types of courses, the length of a course and what each choice would mean for them as well.

For example, two courses may have the same title, but students can choose a BA (Hons) or a BSc (Hons) route.

We've broken down some of the typical types of undergraduate degrees to help you articulate the different attributes to your students.

Levels

We use levels to help explain the different degree stages. A-levels, BTEC's and other similar qualifications are usually level 3. Most undergraduate degrees are known as Bachelor's Degrees and usually end at level 6 (1st year level 4, 2nd year level 5, 3rd year level 6). Other degrees may end at different levels. For example, a Foundation Degree ends at level 5 unless the student does a Top-Up to level 6.

Bachelor's Degrees

The standard degree classifications are 'BA' and 'BSc'. All Bachelor's degrees are equal in value; the abbreviations just refer to the type of subject. Honours (Hons) refers to the higher standard of study within a degree; a student can graduate without honours if they don't meet the academic requirements.

BA – Bachelor of Arts – usually arts or humanities focused.

BSc – Bachelor of Sciences – usually more science or maths focused.

BEng – Bachelor of Engineering – a course focused on Engineering, that can be the beginning of the journey towards becoming a chartered engineer.

BMus – Bachelor of Music – The majority of work consists of prescribed music courses and study in applied music, usually requiring proficiency in an instrument, voice, or conducting.

LLB – Bachelor of Laws – This degree allows students to continue to become a lawyer.

Graduates who have a non-LLB law degree may still need to do a law conversion (Graduate Diploma in Law) alongside non-law graduates in order to gain the equivalent of LLB status.

Joint Honours

Joint honours courses are ideal if a student is interested in studying more than one subject within one qualification. A combined course focuses on two subjects in the same timeframe as a single honours degree, but with a level of flexibility and a greater choice of modules.

Integrated Masters

Many courses now offer students the opportunity to study for an extra year and graduate with an integrated masters. Common acronyms to look out for are MEng or MSci from the engineering or science related subjects. These degrees finish at level 7.

Foundation Degrees vs Foundation Years

Foundation Degrees and Foundation Years often get confused given their similar names, but they mean slightly different things. Foundation Degrees go up to level 5 and usually take two years. They are work-focused degrees with a large practical element, and potentially reduced time in lectures.

Foundation Years are usually level 3 or 4 and are a stepping stone to a degree from level 4. Students may take this because they don't meet the entry requirements for degrees beyond level 4, or if they are exploring new subjects and need to gain more specific knowledge in a particular area.

“ **There is a wealth of choice available for students as you will see, and university colleagues will always be happy to guide you through their course portfolio.** ”

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. There was a radical change to student finance in England in 2012, anyone who started uni before that is on a different system, so beware their student finance war stories, which may not apply to you. This information only applies to English students in England – in the other UK nations things work differently.

1. The student loan price tag can be £50,000, 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 £50,000. 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 £26,575 a year (and that threshold is set to rise each year - from 6 April 2021, it'll be £27,295). 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 2020/21 starters, the loan is reduced from a family income of just £25,000 upwards, until at 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 wrote to the government asking them to change that, a recent government-commissioned report agreed my suggestion should be followed – but that doesn't mean it will happen.

So when you get your letter saying what living loan you get, you'll need to work out the parental contribution yourself. Subtract your loan from the maximum loan available (eg for all 2020/21 starters, it's £7,747 if living at home, £9,203 away from home, and £12,010 away from home in London).

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 2020, it's 9% of everything earned above £26,575.

In other words the amount you owe and the interest is mostly irrelevant. As proof, for a graduate who earns £35,000...

- Owe £20,000 and you repay £758.25 a year
- Owe £50,000 and you repay £758.25 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 £758.25 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 a 9% increased rate of income tax (not including National Insurance) for 30 years. At current rates, it works like this:

Earnings	Uni goers	Non-uni goers
Up to £12,500	No tax	No tax
From £12,501 - £26,574	20%	20%
From £26,575 - £50,000	29%	20%
From £50,001 - £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 5.6%, 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 2020 it has been 5.6%.



From the April after leaving: It depends on earnings. From September 2020, for those earning under the repayment threshold it's RPI (2.6% at the time of writing), rising on a sliding scale to RPI + 3% if you earn over £47,835 (£49,130 from 6 April 2021).

So many graduates aren't actually charged the full 5.6% 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'. However the government recently commissioned the 'Augar' report which included changes to student finance. It proposed many big changes, like reducing tuition fees, but extending the repayment to 40 years.

Whether they'll 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 in September 2021, 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 <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-loans-tuition-fees-changes>.

Note from UniTasterDays - please do share these pages with your students - you're welcome to print and pass on!

A school and college guide to the Uni Connect Programme

By Ant Sutcliffe, Head of Higher Horizons +. One of 29 Uni Connect networks in England

In 2017 I wrote in these very pages about the launch of the (then) government's latest effort to "improve social mobility" via the creation of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). The aim was simple: double the amount of the most economically disadvantaged young people entering Higher Education by 2020. It seems like a lifetime ago now, given the political changes through two general elections, and a global pandemic.

I'd like to think, though, that all avid readers to this fine publication, who had not heard of NCOP in 2017, now have heard of us (or 'Uni Connect', as we have recently been re-branded). I'd also like to think that, like many teaching colleagues across our region, the first thoughts you may have are ones of good, solid, reliable provision; creating straight forward pathways for our working class students as they navigate 'what next?'

Continued progress and collaboration

The 29 Office for Students funded English partnerships, made up of your local universities and colleges, have certainly made excellent progress. 655,454 13-19 year olds have engaged with the programme since I penned my 2017 piece. Over half a million of those young people are entered onto tracking systems so we can monitor what they have engaged with and see what their ultimate educational destination is. Many are choosing higher education. Something, UCAS statistics suggest, would not have been their route without the Uni Connect interventions. In fact, at Keele University, our local lead institution, the proportion of students from postcode areas with the lowest rates of young people going on to university have risen from 12% in 2014 to 20.1% in 2019. We are on the right track, for sure.

Uni Connect teams, along with teaching and school staff are now - through deep evaluation and monitoring - starting to get a real grasp on 'what works'. The days of one-off careers and higher education fairs are behind us. We now know that sustained and multiple touch point

interventions over the years - relationship building and barrier breaking - will see more of our young people going into university or wider higher education. The evidence is there to see.

Covid-19 and communities

Like all educationalists, we were, and are, worried about the impact of COVID-19 on our hardest to reach communities and young people. From August 2019 until the first signs of COVID-19 and with pending school closures, Uni Connect had worked with 1,722 schools and colleges across England. When COVID-19 really hit us, activities, summer schools, video sessions (and even tik toks!) were moved online, with print-out packs left at schools and materials dropped at food-banks for those with little access to ICT at home. We were part of the national effort, standing with teachers to keep our young people engaged with education.

What is next for the Uni Connect programme?

As things return to some form of a new normal, we again turn attention to securing more funding to continue to support schools, colleges and communities who will need it most in the post COVID-19 world. The noises seem positive so far, and we know that we now have the ability to work with a broader range of young people via our Outreach Hub Programmes, something that I expect will expand even further should we move into our fifth year of the programme and beyond in 2021.

Learn more:

Would you like to find out more about Uni Connect, and what the programme can offer your school or college?

Please visit www.ofsuniconnect.org - where you can quickly find your local Uni Connect partnership as well.

“ Maybe we are not really here to create social mobility, but, actually, as many of us like to see it, we are enabling social justice. ”

A lockdown success story - sharing best practice

By Sasha Quigg, Project Coordinator at the FutureMe Programme, part of the Uni Connect programme

The impact of Covid-19 and the resulting school closures has provided many challenges for the education sector, but it has remained a priority for Uni Connect Programmes across England to continue to support young people, their parents, and teachers and advisers to access high quality, impartial information to help them make informed choices about their futures.

At the end of the summer term, two Uni Connect regional partnerships delivered a week of online activity aimed at creating positive messaging surrounding progression to higher education, to further support students in post-16 education and their key influencers in the lead up to results day 2020. Here I will tell you about it - should similar initiatives be explored for your own school or college.

In the North East

The North East Uni Connect Programme delivered HE Fest 20, their first online higher education festival. The week-long festival saw 16 of the partner institutions and a number of employers and key sector organisations come together to deliver a number of sessions, with each day of the festival focussing on one of the learning outcomes from the North East Regional Progression Framework. Attendees also had the opportunity to speak to institutions and employers in the region during a virtual exhibition and could network with peers in the online 'social spaces'.

In West Yorkshire

Go Higher West Yorkshire's Higher Education Week featured a wide range of activities in collaboration with their 13 partner institutions. Progression pathways and subject areas were highlighted through a range of sessions including live discussions about alternatives to work experience, information about apprenticeships and blogs covering a range of different subjects.

The benefits of these initiatives

Both weeks of activity drew upon areas of expertise in the region and, although they

showcased the local offer, the online nature of these activities meant that they were able to be accessed nationally. The wide range of activity available meant that festival goers were able to create a truly unique programme, allowing them to get the most out of the event and access information to suit their goals and prior knowledge. The support for students, parents/carers, and teachers didn't stop as the week came to an end, with many sessions and resources being made available on-demand as well.

The last few months have created uncertainty for young people and their influencers so the activities provided an opportunity to create a positive message and to celebrate the achievements of students, parents and teachers, as they have adapted to new ways of working, studying and making decisions about their futures.

These events have showcased what is possible with online delivery and have provided future opportunities to bring people together in the new virtual world - which the education sector is embracing.

“ These events have showcased what is possible with online delivery and have provided future opportunities to bring people together in the new virtual world - which the education sector is embracing. ”



A school and college guide to supporting students with creative profiles and university interviews

By **Jasminne Gwalter, Senior Student Recruitment Officer at Plymouth College of Art**

Preparing for a face-to-face interview can be daunting for a student. This is one of the most important steps they will need to take in preparation for a career in the creative industries. It is vital that they feel comfortable expressing their individuality, passion for their chosen subject and subsequently communicating their work in a successful manner.

Here are some tips to prepare your students for their university interviews and begin their journey into a rewarding and prosperous career in the creative industries.

1. Creative processes can be demonstrated in a range of portfolios, sketchbooks, showreels or digital collections of work. These can be in the form of written blogs, social media pages, drawings, moving image, research and critical thinking, poetry and photographic work, just to name a few. It provides evidence of creative thinking and problem solving that sets creative graduates apart in the workplace.

2. Students should consider the world around them, how this inspires their work and decision-

making, and be able to discuss this in a clear and concise manner. Showing a variety of work helps to initiate conversations at interview and prompts thoughts and reflections which will help the interview flow.

3. Many universities will offer bespoke sessions for your students in the form of workshops to help prepare them for interviews and produce a portfolio. I would encourage you to take advantage of this! We are here to work alongside you, and it is a great opportunity to tick off some of the Gatsby benchmarks at the same time.

4. Encourage your students to ask questions! University interviews are a perfect opportunity for students to establish if the university is the right fit for them, their goals and ambitions. Think of it as a two-way interview, prepare some questions beforehand such as what access to facilities will I get? What is the amount of 1-to-1 contact I will have with my tutor? These types of questions can help when exploring if this will fit in with a student's preferred style of learning and what type of university experience they might receive.

Choosing where to study is a big decision and universities have lots of support available to both applicants and teachers. Utilise the huge variety of helpful information, advice and guidance sessions they have to offer and encourage students to attend open days, whether virtual or face-to-face.




Now more than ever we understand the importance of providing fair and impartial advice to applicants and we're happy to support schools and colleges to achieve that.



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A school and college guide to providing university information to parents and carers

By Jack Fox, Head of Student Recruitment and Widening Participation at Queen Mary University of London

Applying for a course in higher education can be a daunting experience. Not only for students, but also for parents and carers, especially if there is no experience of higher education within the family.

Both the Quality in Careers Standard and the Gatsby Benchmarks make specific references to involving and supporting parents/carers in careers education, information and guidance. It is therefore useful to be aware of the range of assistance available from universities to support you with this important area of work.

Support available for schools and colleges:

- **Presentations at school or college parent's events** - topics can vary, but typically include information about the benefits of higher education, the UCAS process and student finance.
- **Information stands at a school or college** - these provide a great opportunity to speak to either staff or current university students about entry requirements, progression opportunities and the experience of studying at a specific institution.
- **Online resources** - increasingly universities will provide information written specifically

for parents. The UCAS website also produces a comprehensive guide for parents.

- **Open days and applicant days** - most universities will actively encourage parents to attend open days and applicant days. It can often be reassuring for parents to learn about the environment, course structures and the financial/support services available to students.

The key higher education messages to disseminate to parents/carers:

Many of you will be aware that parental engagement can be difficult. Often, the time you have to disseminate information can be limited. With this in mind, here are three of the key messages that you may find helpful to share with them:

- **The benefits of higher education** – this offers more than a qualification. Students can develop a genuine enthusiasm for a subject, working alongside experts in their field. It can also help develop a student's interpersonal skills, provide a platform to make life-long friends and participate in a range of opportunities such as studying abroad.
- **Start the conversation early** - it is never too early to start talking about choices including university participation and courses with students. Questions focussing on interests inside and outside of school or college and career ambitions can be a great starting point.
- **The support available at your school or college** - ensure that parents are aware of the support available for students. This may include the provision for attending open days, support in completing the UCAS form and information evenings for parents.

A school and college guide to supporting students applying to Russell Group universities

By Jennifer Barton, Student Recruitment Manager at Durham University

What is a Russell Group University?

The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities. Through their world class-research, they help to create a dynamic economy, stronger communities and a better future for the UK. These universities provide students with research-led teaching, which means that most teaching staff will be activity involved in research. Their teaching will be informed by their research - so students will be learning from some world leading experts and learning about some of their findings as they are being discovered!

Applications to Russell Group universities

Students won't find the application process much different to applications outside the Russell Group. But the level of competition, especially for certain courses, tends to be more intense, making it more important to stand out from the crowd. You can usually tell if a course is competitive as it may have very high entry requirements and it will probably rank highly in the subject league tables.

We often find that our applicants will have similar academic profiles. Their opportunity to stand out is therefore through the personal statement. This is often their only opportunity to 'speak' with those making admissions decisions.

Personal statement tips for Russell Group applications

Most leading universities will look for an approximate 80% / 20% split of academic vs non-academic information. It is important for universities to see an applicant's subject knowledge and keen interest in the subject area.

Within that 80% we want to see evidence of critical engagement and I would advise applicants to include a research paragraph to their personal statement. By that I mean that we want to see evidence of how they have engaged with the subject beyond what the school curriculum demands.

For example, an English applicant might do this by evidencing some wider reading. They should write about a text that they have read and tell us their opinion, providing a critical reflection of the text. Also describing any further studies it might have inspired them to undertake. Or it could be that they are applying for Law and they write about a case that they have been following and discuss what they have learned about the English defence system as a result of it - and what questions were also raised.

“Universities are really interested to hear from motivated students, who are inquisitive and have the potential to study the subject at university. The personal statement is a real opportunity for your students to stand out and show us this, to give them the best possible chance of being made an offer.”

A school and college guide to the *new* process for students wishing to qualify as a solicitor

By **Chloe Warsop, Student Recruitment Manager at The University of Law**

From September 2021 there is a new way to become a solicitor in the UK. For context, the current route requires students to:

1. Complete a Qualifying Law Degree (QLD) or non-law degree followed by a conversion course such as the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)
2. Pass the Legal Practice Course (LPC)
3. Complete a 2-year training contract
4. Apply to be admitted as a solicitor

The Solicitors Regulatory Authority (SRA) is now changing this route by introducing the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE).

What does the SQE route look like?

One of the most notable changes is that to become a solicitor you will not now have to pass a prescribed course, instead you will have to pass a set of exams - SQE. A student who holds an undergraduate degree in **any** subject can take these exams, in theory straight after graduating. However, whether there will be many students who decide to self-teach and risk the near £4,000 cost of sitting these exams without any formal preparation course is yet to be seen.

Providers, like The University of Law, will continue to offer courses to students who want to become a solicitor to help them prepare for SQE and build the skills they will need to be successful in their career.

Another big change is the removal of the training contract. This is now replaced with 2 years of Qualifying Work Experience (QWE). Unlike the training contract, QWE can be accrued before, during or after SQE assessments are taken. It can also be gathered from up to four different

organisations. Just like the removal of the need to have a QLD or GDL before sitting SQE, the introduction of QWE aims to increase flexibility and widen access to the profession.

When will the changes affect your students?

SQE will be introduced in September 2021. However, there will be some transitional arrangements as we move from the old system to the new.

Crucially for new undergraduate students - anyone who has accepted an offer for a place on a QLD before 1 September 2021 (with the course starting no later than 31 December 2021) will be able to choose whether they follow the old LPC route or new SQE route.

Any students starting university in September 2022 will have to follow the SQE route.

Hopefully, that whistle stop tour has shown you two things: the path your students need to follow to become a solicitor and how much the legal sector loves an acronym!



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A school and college 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.

“ **Encouragement, support and belief can change lives so never underestimate the difference your words can make.** ”

A school and college guide to how universities support students in need of additional support

By Rebecca Breen, Student Recruitment Officer at the University of South Wales

A main priority for universities is to ensure students who require additional support and advice whilst studying know where to find, and how to access the support that is available to them.

University student support teams exist to help those students to realise their potential, get the most out of their studies and thrive at university, and are the first point of contact for students requesting additional support.

Encourage students to let universities know if additional support will be required

It is important that universities are aware of the specialist support students require, early on in the application process, so that the appropriate support can be put in place for them in sufficient time, before arriving at university. Students can let their selected universities know what additional support they require through the UCAS application process, at open days, or by contacting student support departments at universities directly.

An outline of the available support

Here are some of the services available at the University of South Wales as an example. Every university will have similar services:

The disability service

Provides information, advice and guidance to and co-ordinates support for disabled students. This includes students with physical, sensory, mental health or unseen disabilities, specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) and autism.

The team offers help and advice, ranging from organising note taking services, library support, overnight transition events for students who have an autistic spectrum condition, to specialist mentoring support.

Counselling, mental health and wellbeing services

Provide impartial, confidential, non-judgmental advice through one-to-one appointments via telephone or Skype. They offer a range of practical support in a confidential and professional setting, and try to respond sensitively to the effects that challenging circumstances can have on individuals. This will help them to explore their situation and make appropriate choices. Students who experience mental or emotional distress can access support through this service as well.

If students do experience mental health problems whilst at university, it is a good idea to seek help as soon as possible. Students who are struggling with overall wellbeing, including physical and mental health and social welfare, can also seek help to address these issues.

Student development and study skills services

Offer advice, information and resources to help students raise their aspirations, improve their academic performance and develop transferable skills for employment. From referencing and critical analysis, to help with mathematics and statistics, students who require additional support will have access to one-to-one or group support sessions through this service.

The student money advice team

Provides support and advice to help students manage money, and can provide emergency support to students who experience financial difficulties whilst at university.

“ **A main priority for universities is to ensure students who require additional support and advice whilst studying know where to find, and how to access the support that is available to them.** ”



A school and college guide to online and blended learning university courses

By Amy Knott, Outreach and Recruitment Officer at Arden University

Higher education looks very different this year than it has done before due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Universities have adopted new approaches for their courses; including delivering courses fully online and also through a 'blended' learning method. However, these types of courses did already exist pre-COVID, and there are universities that specialise in this type of delivery. So what do they look like?

Online and blended learning courses offer something a bit different to what university can look like by enabling increased study flexibility – vital for many who need to fit university around other commitments.

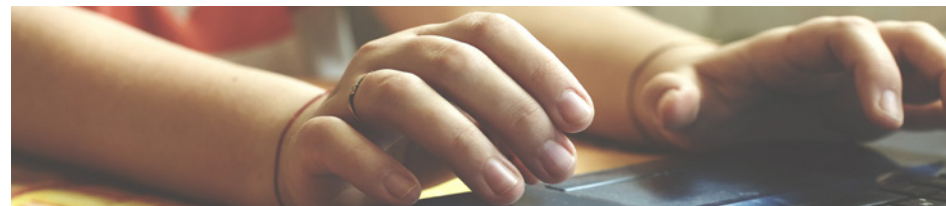
Here, I will introduce what we mean by **online** and **blended** courses.

What are online university courses?

Fully online courses prevent the need for a student to physically travel to and attend lectures at a university campus – all they need is a device and an internet connection to study.

This means that students can study anywhere, at any time, providing unmatched flexibility for their studies. All lecture content, books and journals, discussion forums, student support, careers services and more, can be found via online learning portals which students access as and when they can and need to.

It is key that a student is able to self-motivate and be self-disciplined as an online learner; they must take more responsibility for their learning when studying this way.



What are blended learning university courses?

Blended learning may offer a *best of both worlds* – students don't have to be at university all the time but can still get that experience of physically attending lectures.

Reduced contact hours mean that blended students can juggle other responsibilities alongside university study, but they can still do things such as ask a question to their lecturer in person, or grab a coffee with a classmate after their lecture finishes. This learning mode offers more structure which some students prefer.

Who may online and blended learning suit?

Students benefitting from this learning style may include, but are not limited to those who:

- Have caring responsibilities
- Have work commitments
- Travel extensively
- Live in a remote location with no physical university nearby
- Don't want to move away from home for university
- Have other commitments, such as volunteering
- Have medical needs that prevent them attending a physical university regularly
- Simply prefer working independently.

“ **Online and blended learning courses are vital in widening participation into higher education by appealing to a different type of student and enabling increased study flexibility - vital for many who need to fit university around other commitments.** ”

As higher education continues to adapt in this post-pandemic era, it is important that these courses are promoted to young people so that they are aware of the variety of options available to them, and can choose the pathway that suits them best and enables them to achieve their goals.



A school and college guide to degree apprenticeships

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

Most universities in England are now registered to provide degree apprenticeships. This may be a comprehensive range of subjects, or sometimes just a few specialist subject areas. This is partly due to funding and local employer demand.

At the University of Winchester for example, we have a range of health apprenticeships on the way in collaboration with the local labour market demands, but it can take years in the planning to see large recruitment numbers. Conversely, students who perhaps enjoy humanities and creative subjects will often struggle to find opportunities with less employers investing in degree apprenticeship opportunities for these sectors.

What will students interested in degree apprenticeships want to know?

Once degree apprenticeships are explained, the interest and enthusiasm from both students and parents tends to grow – no tuition fees, a degree and earning a wage.

But when it comes to applying there may be concerns when picking a specific sector, employers choosing the studied content and a student missing out on the support and wider opportunities that going to university full time would involve.

We find students often want more information and advice on whether a degree apprenticeship would be right for them. I would suggest they look for *meet the employer* events and use company websites to find case studies of current degree apprentices to find out more. They should still visit university open days as academic staff will often teach on both the full-time degree and degree apprenticeship routes as well.

The application process and some useful tips

Although the study component is offered by the university, it is often the employer who makes the final decisions about who to recruit.

Each employer will have their own application process, typically involving an online application perhaps with a covering letter and CV, an invitation to attend an assessment centre and then an online interview session or group interview day. Employers will be looking for a range of skills and knowledge of the company/sector so students need to do their homework to make a successful application, which can take time on top of their academic studies.

“ **A degree apprenticeship can be a great opportunity for those who are looking to combine work with study. But they are not an easy option. Apprentices must balance their university workload with a full-time job.** ”



A school and college guide to what students should expect at a virtual open day

By David Handy, Senior Student Recruitment Manager at Newman University

During the last twelve months, the way in which we have facilitated open days and events has had to shift owing to COVID-19 and the challenges that this has brought about.

As universities we have had to adapt rapidly to be able to support your students, their families and yourselves through the journey to higher education. As such, open days transitioned to online events.

With continuing uncertainty regarding future events, it may be that events during the 2020 / 2021 academic year remain in the virtual world.

What to expect from a virtual open day?

Quite simply, expect for your students to be able to ask all the questions that they would have at a face-to-face event to both staff and students!

Different universities will do this through a range of platforms, but there will be the chance to ask course specific questions of academic staff, as well as getting the perspective of current students on their studies and the experience they have had at the university.

Not only can your students ask questions of our academic staff and students, but those crucial support services will also be represented – finance, admissions, accommodation, student support, the students' union etc. We know that your students and their families may have very specific questions relating to their individual circumstances and there will be opportunities throughout events to ask them.

Virtual open days are more than just a chat platform

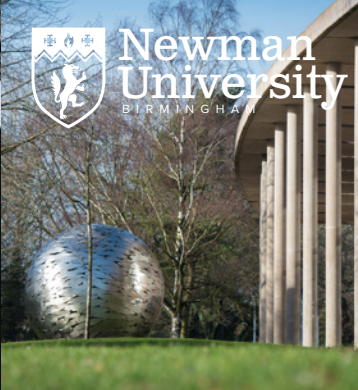
For many prospective students, participating in presentations during open days is very important, to find out more about the subject area they are interested in or about topics such as student finance and the applicant journey.

Universities have also been able to make these available virtually too. There may be live webinars running at specific times during an event or through pre-recorded videos that students can watch at their convenience.

Students should make sure they plan their time at the virtual event in order to ensure they can attend all of the sessions they hope to – in the same way they would when attending a campus event. If time is tight, they can always check if the university is running any webinar sessions at a different time.

Students can still see the university and campus

In terms of experiencing the university itself, your students will find virtual tours or campus tour videos available to showcase university facilities. There may also be the opportunity to book campus tours at another point to explore the facilities on offer at the university.



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A school and college guide to why students should consider university

By Melissa Grindon, Creative Projects Officer at Liverpool Hope University

In the final years of school or sixth form college, a question students may ask is *should I go to university?* Many students can feel afraid and uncertain in making this big decision, and often are reliant solely upon advice and support from their teachers, especially if they are the first in their family to make a university application.

Each student will have their own reasons for considering university, but here are some reasons why you may wish to encourage your students that university participation would be a great choice for them.

Key reasons to consider university

1. An opportunity to study a single or combined honours subject they are passionate and excited about.

One of the most rewarding benefits of university is that the student can gain more knowledge in their field of interest, advancing and specialising as they move forward throughout their degree. Encouraging students to dig deep and find their enthusiasm for what excites them can ultimately lead to a successful and rewarding university experience.

2. A chance to grow in independence and gain life experience.

Along with academic learning and opportunity, university offers so much for students regarding life experience. Moving to a city, regardless of how far away it is or how large the university may be, can still be daunting. However, university life moves quickly, and with an array of activities and welcome sessions, the settling in process comes fast, and the real-life learning can begin.

3. Career opportunities.

One of the key reasons students may consider university is the promise of greater job prospects and career development. University encourages students to network and seek experience, perhaps

working towards placement and internship opportunities. This actively builds confidence and encouragement, working up until graduation, and the career opportunities that follow. A degree is truly an investment, but for a lifetime of better job opportunities, it is one worth considering.

Remember - university does not just offer a degree, but many kinds of education.

For some students, university is not something they wish to pursue, and they may go on an alternative path which can still bring them the same amount of success and adventure. Yet, undeniably for others, their university years are truly rewarding and will help them shape both the person they are – and the career they go on to, far beyond the degree they graduate with.



A school and college guide to how universities responded during the lockdown

By Arione McQueenie, UK Student Recruitment Manager at the University of Buckingham

Moving university teaching online

On March 16th 2020 the UK went into lockdown - and our students found out that all teaching and learning would be moving online. So how did universities respond to this? Here, Venessa, one of our students will share her first-hand experience of learning virtually.

"A few months ago, virtually every student worldwide was forced to transition from studying in class and in person to an online platform. When I first found out about the news, I was quite scared: I was concerned about missing out on university life, on social life, on university networking and if this would have an impact on my grades. Luckily the university put measures in place to make sure the students still received quality education, even though it couldn't be in person."

"We started using video calls, which really helped because I could see my classmates and interact

with them, so I didn't feel like I was completely missing out on that social interaction. Our libraries also transitioned online so we still had access to all of our books. Meetings with lecturers and personal tutors were also all moved online, so we weren't just interacting through email. You could also book appointments with other departments online such as student welfare, so if you needed to speak to a counsellor you could book a meeting with them and know you could still have the conversation that you would have had if you were on campus".

Studying during lockdown – Venessa's top tips:

1. Scheduling and organising every day.
2. Imagining you are in an actual classroom during lectures. Including access to a notepad and pen - just like on campus.
3. Staying involved with all the different virtual events that the students' union are putting on.

"Overall, transitioning to online learning wasn't as scary as I thought it would be! Even though it is not the same as an in-person university experience, it is still a really good quality learning experience".

"In terms of focus and concentration, just remember that as long as you're doing your best - that is okay. We are in the midst of a global pandemic, therefore the simple fact that you are out there and doing your best needs to be applauded. So keep going, we have got this!"



A school and college guide to the education system in Scotland: qualifications and university opportunities

By Mari Higginbotham, Scottish and RUK Manager at Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh

The secondary school education system

In Scotland, we have always done things a little bit differently when it comes to education. In the final years of secondary school, students can sit a range of qualifications suited to their ability. These start with National 4 and National 5 qualifications (similar to GCSE level) in S4 and, sometimes, S5 - and go on to Highers which are our typical university entry level qualifications. Most students sit up to five Highers in one year, starting from S5, compared to the three A-Levels elsewhere in the UK.

More advanced students can go on to Advanced Highers in their final year (S6). These are required for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary degrees, but not typically for other subjects. They can also study a mix of Highers and Advanced Highers depending on what they have already achieved and what they want to do next. Advanced Higher students also have the opportunity to benefit from advanced entry into the second year of a degree in a related subject.

As you will see, the number of qualifications students can study means they have access to a broad range of subjects, which often increases their options after school. One pupil who wants to study a Science degree can also choose a Language and Music qualification at Higher Level

as well as the Sciences because they enjoy those subjects. If they don't know what they want to do after school, they would be encouraged to keep their subject choices broad - not to limit their options later on.

The university system in Scotland

Typically a degree in Scotland is four years long and is called an Honours degree. With the exception of professional qualifications, the first two years usually offer breadth of study, with the final two years providing the specialisation in their subject.

At Heriot-Watt University for instance, we have a common first year for Accounting and Finance, Business and Economics, giving students a strong background knowledge to draw upon after graduation. It also offers more choice throughout their studies; we often see students switch degrees during their four years and graduate in a different subject.

What does this mean for A-Level (and equivalent) students interested in university opportunities in Scotland?

“Typically A-Level students apply to the first year of a degree in Scotland, however those who have A-Levels with strong grades in related subjects should also consider advanced entry into year two.”

This means their degree would take three years to complete, just the same as elsewhere in the UK. These two points of entry from A-Level, with different entry requirements, means there is a lot of flexibility on offer for A-Level students looking to study in Scotland.

A school and college guide to online university event platforms and preparing for events

By Rebecca Denmark, UK/EU Student Recruitment Manager at the University of Surrey

Before Christmas, if someone had said to me “I’ll see you on Zoom,” I would have had no idea what they were talking about. Now I feel like I live my whole life on Zoom or equivalent. Virtual events have become the new normal for universities across the world.

Universities will have a preferred platform for their events and this will vary from institution to institution. I have outlined a few of these platforms below:

Zoom Webinar/Google Meet/Microsoft Teams

These are all simple, straight-forward webinar platforms that allows the host to share a presentation. All the platforms have a Q&A, chat and a record function.

Adobe Connect

An online training platform. As well as all basic webinar functionality, Adobe Connect has many other components that will allow the user to participate in interactive online activities.

Ivent/Easy Virtual Fair/VFairs

These are large scale event platforms designed to support thousands of users. Fantastic for online careers and university fairs.

How to prepare for online events

For all online events you will need access to a computer, laptop or mobile phone with speakers. Most computers and phones will also have a webcam. Webcams are not necessarily needed for events but if you are attending online training, a webcam may be beneficial.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when attending and preparing for events:

- Most online events will be recorded by the host, so it can be made available later on. It is the duty of the host to make you aware of this, so you can leave or turn off your own video if you do not wish to be included in the recording.

- Instead of physical handouts you may be sent digital documents during the event, be sure to download these. You may also find that links to useful websites may be sent to you during the webinar through the chat function. A useful tip is to click on these links during the session and bookmark them so you can come back to them later.

- Some events may be hosted over a few platforms. For example, content, videos and pre-recorded sessions could be on the universities website, but the live webinars may be delivered on Zoom.

- When you are sent the joining instructions before the event, do read them fully. They will include the timings and any other practical information like the equipment you may need and if you need to prepare anything in advance. A further top tip is to make note of the contact details of the host, so you can contact them if you run into any technical difficulties.

“Before Christmas, if someone had said to me I’ll see you on Zoom - I would have had no idea what they were talking about. Now virtual events have become the new normal for universities across the world.”



A school and college guide to university league tables

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

When navigating university league tables, it is important to recognise more than just an institution's 'overall position'. Plus, one league table shouldn't inform a student's entire decision. They need to consider multiple university league tables with their top priorities for higher education study in mind.

If a student discovers that the institution they want to apply to doesn't rank highly on one league table, this doesn't mean this university isn't for them!

Which league tables are available?

There are three 'major' league tables: *The Sunday Times Good University Guide*, *Guardian University Guide* and *The Complete University Guide*.

There are also student experience rankings such as *WhatUni?* whose figures are primarily based on student surveys and opinion. Then there are international league tables, the most notable being: *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* or the *QS World University Rankings*.

What will league tables tell you?

League tables tell you more than simply which university is the best at teaching. When you look at league tables it's important to understand the methodology that the publication is using. Each source will state which criteria they've prioritised or considered. This will include, but is not limited to: teaching excellence, research or student experience. This will explain why an institution might rank differently between university league tables.

It will also help learners understand how the strengths of different institutions are displayed. If you have two students interested in the same subject, one may be more concerned about the quality of teaching and student experience, whereas the other may be more attracted to the quality of research. The significance of each table really comes down to the individual student and their specific needs.

The different metrics a league table is presenting should also be considered. When viewing tables online, you can adjust rankings to view where a university ranks on the specific criteria your student has prioritised as key to their university experience. For instance, if a student thrives better in environments where staff support is frequent, you can arrange the *Guardian University Guide* to see the student-staff-ratio at each institution, determining how much access learners will have to their tutors.

Don't forget subject league tables too!

Major university guides will also provide rankings at subject level. Often learners will not consider a university because it's in the bottom half of a league table. But they may discover that the same institution offers the best course in the country for their desired subject! This is especially true for areas like medicine, veterinary science and dentistry, where a smaller number of institutions offer these programmes.

“ A league table can't tell you everything. They should be one tool that is used as part of a student's research. It's important to encourage learners to also visit universities, reach out to potential lecturers, and to speak to current students studying at the universities they wish to apply to. ”



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If you would like events matching your chosen criteria to be sent directly to your mail box, you can join our events-by-email service at: www.unitasterdays.com/email

Credits

A special thanks to all our guest contributors (in order of when they feature in the Guide)

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