FRESHERS’ WEEK
A SURVIVAL GUIDE
theguardian.com/freshers-week
Inside

A new beginning ‘You will have some fantastic experiences’ Sarah Jewell

You're now in charge of your own life starts here! You are about to experience all the joys and challenges of being a student - and freshers’ week is just the start. Now is your chance to try new things out maybe join a society or sports club, or indulge a passion that you’ve never had time to pursue before. As Hope Williams says: “I was so tired by the end of freshers’ week, but it sets you up really well for the first term as you’ve done all your introductions and you’ve tried new things.”

In this special supplement we talk to students about their experiences of freshers’ week. We also have an interview with Radio 1 DJ Scott Mills and Chris Stark, who describe the pleasure of appearing all over the country at freshers’ week student nights, where “the vibe is a young excited crowd who have often never seen anything like this before in their life.” If going out and partying is not really your thing, then there are other ways to live the student life, as our articles on healthy living and teetotal activities show. “There is a growing trend for students to be more healthy and move away from the outdated stereotype of junk food eating,” says Keele University’s Prof Fiona Cowie. Whatever you do, it’s going to cost money, so be cautious with your entire loan in the first few weeks of term!

Have a read of our tips for living on a limited income and for everyone. “Drinking alcohol is an unexpected expense and that all new students are required to unload their inner superhero or wonder woman during a series of fancy-dress events.”

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There’s a first time for everything at uni

It’s also the first time you may need your own TV Licence. If you watch or record live TV programmes on any channel, or download or watch BBC programmes on iPlayer, you must be covered by a licence, no matter what device you use. Check if you need one.

Ten to try The best things about freshers’ week

1 Get involved in things maybe an athletic club or something more unconventional, such as a Quidditch society.
2 Assert your independence. Now and no dad, it’s up to you…
3 Nobody can tell you when to get up – or go to bed for that matter.
4 Dance like no one’s watching - because nobody actually is.
5 Discover a whole new city, and make the most of it – it’s your new home.
6 Make new friends - some may even become lifelong.
7 Be whoever you want - or even better, just be yourself.
8 Learn to cook something other than an egg. A good starter recipe is spaghetti bolognese - the student staple food.
9 Get a student discount card – loads of places suddenly start giving you 10% off. Cinemas are cheaper than before, and a new computer becomes that little bit more affordable.
10 Enjoy it and learn something new. Not just about your chosen subject, but also about yourself.

Welcome to freshers’ week...

It can provoke a range of emotions, but university welcome week need not be an intimidating experience for new students, says Gavan Naden – you just need to make it work for you.

The best things about freshers’ week include the idea that crates of beer are essential to proceedings, and that all new students are required to unload their inner superhero or wonder woman during a series of fancy-dress events.

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But freshers’ week is certainly not just a booze fest. Even the name is a slight misnomer, as it can last anything from three days to two weeks. And, surprisingly as it may sound, not every student drinks. Some students are even abstinence.

The University of Bath students’ union president-elect, Lucy Woodcock, says: “Freshers’ week is simple – we bring together every new student to begin their shared experiences. There are hundreds of different events on offer, from sport club taster to open mic nights, inflatable challenges and headline events – so there is something for everyone.”

She reassures the more abstemious students: “Drinking alcohol is an unexpected expense and that all new students are required to unload their inner superhero or wonder woman during a series of fancy-dress events.”

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### Checklist

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A laptop</td>
<td>A personal computer with software</td>
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<tr>
<td>A doorstop</td>
<td>For closing doors and windows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memory stick</td>
<td>For photo and video storage</td>
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<tr>
<td>A printer</td>
<td>For printing documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal documents</td>
<td>For important information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pack of cards</td>
<td>For playing games and entertainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earplugs</td>
<td>To block out noise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highlighters</td>
<td>For marking notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>One smart/formal out</td>
<td>For dressing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mattress topper</td>
<td>For comfort and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earplugs</td>
<td>To block out noise</td>
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<tr>
<td>A tin opener and bottle opener</td>
<td>For opening bottles and containers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic rations and an easy cookbook</td>
<td>For nutrition</td>
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<tr>
<td>One glass, one mug, one bowl, one plate, plus cutlery</td>
<td>For meals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condoms</td>
<td>For protection against sexually transmitted diseases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flip-flops</td>
<td>For comfort and convenience</td>
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<tr>
<td>A pack of toiletries</td>
<td>For personal hygiene</td>
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### Stick to the bare necessities

Your room will be tiny, so don't bring furniture, pets or your mum, advises Gavan Naden.

The road to university can be an exceptionally packed one. Choices are your car will be bundled up in the point of discomfort with “just in case” items. Bournemouth University’s transitions and wellbeing officer, Caroline Earth, urges freshers to think carefully: “Don’t bring too much; storage in halls is limited. Your flatmates will all bring kitchen equipment, or sauces too, so consider waiting until you arrive to buy kitchen equipment, or bring the real essentials.”

“Don’t lug around entire summer wardrobes making their way into halls of residence. Keele University’s money and welfare coordinator, Alison Felton, says keep things simple and just bring a few home comforts. “We encourage students to bring photos and cushions, towels, bedding and toiletries.”

These concerns are endorsed by a spokesperson at the University of Gloucestershire: “Something that has happened more than once is new students bringing their mums to live with them for the first couple of weeks. One student also flew in the face of the no pets policy by bringing 11 giant African land snails – apparently a leaving present from a friend who worked at a nearby zoo. The snails can grow up to 10 inches long and were spotted being kept in a fish bowl under a blanket.”

Felton is quick to identify a few no-go items, especially furniture, heaters, electric blankets, candles and oil burners. If you want your room to smell nice, bring reed diffusers or plug-in air fresheners. “A few years ago a large delivery van turned up on campus with a brand-new fridge-freezer. And earlier this year we discovered a student with a hedgehog in his room,” she says.

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University of Manchester student Jane Montgomery says: “I never thought about having to take everything home again; it just never occurred to me. And I took several things along with me that I never saw the light of day, including my pointed shoes and a sieve!”

There are reports of pets and entire summer wardrobes making their way into halls of residence. Keele University’s money and welfare coordinator, Alison Felton, says keep things simple and just bring a few home comforts. “We encourage students to bring photos and cushions, towels, bedding and toiletries.”

Also sports equipment, board games, packs of cards and a bottle opener. “We encourage students to bring photos and cushions, towels, bedding and toiletries.”

Gavan Naden
My story

‘We were all lost together’

Hope Williams, 19, recalls her freshers’ week experiences at the University of Sheffield

I was really nervous before freshers’ week as I was moving a long way from Southampton, but keen to get stuck in. After Mum and Dad drove three and a half hours, I was the only one of three from my family who’d already had ice-breaker chats.

We were all lost together.

As I didn’t want to feel awkward in front of other housemates, I went to the freshers’ sports and society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer. You can choose from the giving society fair to see all the things on offer.

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You’ve got to bring a lot of commercial dance, a lot of songs that people really know, and not to make it too niche or too cool because they’re actually not interested in that. By the time we’re on, people have had a couple of drinks and they’re well up for a bit of St Club 7 – and you see people that you would not ever see dancing to One Direction.

One thing has changed over the years, though. “I used to go with a marker pen and sign everything,” Mills says. “Now they ask for a selfie and they generally give you the camera as well, so you’re kind of in charge of taking everyone’s photo for the night, too.”

It’s unclear whether Mills, who famously dressed as a crab for one of his Strictly Come Dancing routines in 2014, will be reprising his moves for this year’s events.

“Scott gets a lot of people wanting him to act out the dance moves; which I always encourage,” Stark says. “I’m always like: ‘Go on, they want you to do the crab!’ But he’s often reluctant to do that, even though he does keep the outfit in his locker.”

Mills laughs. “It’s very rare that I bring out the crab. I’m not sure it’s even relevant any more. It’s two years ago, but people still ask me to do it almost every week.”

Radio 1 DJs Scott Mills and Chris Stark bring the party to multiple freshers’ events each year

Radio 1 DJ Scott Mills knows how to handle freshers’ week, having been a regular on the student circuit for more than 10 years. Last year, he transmitted his show live from five UK universities as part of the Radio 1 Student Tour with his co-presenter, Chris Stark.

“There are so many people who are genuinely excited about going to university, and they’re Radio 1 listeners, so it’s just nice to go out and actually meet them,” Mills says. “They’re all experiencing university for the first time and worrying about making new friends, going out partying and moving somewhere that they’ve probably never been to before, so it’s really exciting to go out and connect with them and put on a show.”

“The thing is, it’s not just a job,” Stark says. “We want to be able to go there and enjoy it as well, and it’s easy for me to get carried away because we get such a positive response from people. I’m usually the embarrassing one jumping up and down on the dancefloor, but Scott is more level-headed and he does have to rein me in a bit sometimes.”

The duo have appeared all over the country at student nights and have different opinions on which universities have the best atmosphere. Stark says Loughborough was “just ridiculous, absolutely huge,” and while Mills agrees, “Loughborough is amazing!” he insists that the Scottish universities are the crame.

“Anywhere you go in Scotland, whether it’s Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stirling or Aberdeen, there are a lot of students there and they just seem to party harder than the rest of the UK,” Mills says. “The vibe is always the same, though – a very young, exciting, almost naive crowd, who have often never seen anything like it in their lives. A lot of them are from towns where they’ve probably never seen any live music or DJs before, so it’s a kind of bonding experience for them.

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A funny thing happened on the way to the lecture theatre ...
Budgeting: do the maths

Being a student means financial responsibility. Lucy Tobin offers advice on managing money.

Even if you’re not studying maths at uni, you’ll have to become an expert at numbers. Because student life is expensive and learning how to budget is one of the most important skills you’ll learn – possibly even more useful than anything you’ll pick up at a lecture.

If you’re terrified by the fact that universities can now charge up to £9,000 a year in tuition fees, don’t worry – it’s not upfront. You only begin to pay this fee after graduation and when you’re earning £21,000 or more. After 30 years, if the debt is not repaid, it is written off.

But there are other costs: rent, food, having fun. How do you pay for these? Full-time students in England starting fresher life this year can apply for a maximum maintenance loan of £10,700 – but that’s for students from a low household income living away from home, at a London uni; the amount you’ll actually receive depends on your family’s finances. The support is different for students from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, so check with your local funding institution.

If you’re from a low-income background, are disabled or a carer, or have kids, there are other grants available, such as the Disabled Students Allowance to cover the cost of specialist equipment and/or a non-medical helper. It’s also worth searching the internet to find other sources of student funding: local charities, educational trusts and even some schools offer grants to uni-goers. Universities also offer hardship bursaries, so speak to the finance officer if you think you might be eligible.

But most students top up their income with a job. There’s the usual bar and shop work, and irregular jobs such as doing deliveries, babysitting, or IT support locally can be a good way to earn cash around your studies. Some big companies – accountancy, legal and consultancy firms – the NHS and armed forces sponsor students throughout uni, usually on the understanding that they work for them before or after university, or during holidays. Most unis recommend students limit their paid work to a maximum of 15 hours a week in term time, so they can stay up to speed on academic work too.

Other potential sources of funding are your parents - well, it’s worth asking - and an overdraft from the bank. When you’re comparing student accounts, pick the one with the biggest overdraft - that’s interest-free cash – rather than the juiciest free gift, because it’ll be worth far more over your student career. And always avoid an unauthorised overdraft - when you go into the red without asking the bank - as this comes with expensive fees.

Tips for living on a shoestring

Discount cards and communal dinners

Sure, you get a student discount at Topshop, but that’s not the only way you can save money as soon as you start university. You’ll probably be spending a fair amount on travel - to and from home if you’re living on campus, or to see friends and family - so work out if you’ll make savings with the 16-25 Railcard (full-time students who are over 25 can also be eligible). It costs £30, but comes free with the Santander student bank account. If you prefer travelling by coach, National Express’s £10 student card gives one-third off fares.

For food, try to shop and cook with other students to make the most of multibuy offers, and don’t rely on the supermarket - you might find cheaper food at local markets or pound stores. And always ask about discounts in stores, restaurants, cinemas and more: not everywhere advertises their student deals. You can even get money off online shopping: at Amazon, for example, students get 5% off, but you do need to have the NUS Extra card, which gives access to lots of discounts but costs £12.
Health food for thought

It’s not all about booze and kebabs – students are now adopting healthy lifestyles, reports Suzanne Bearne

Knocking back pints of cider and black and eating Pot Noodles used to be de rigueur at university. However, thanks to the unstoppable rise of the clean-living trend, many students are whipping up recipes by healthy food bloggers such as Deliciously Ella and Instagramming selfies post-workout rather than having boozy nights and grabbing a bacon sarnie in the morning.

“We have seen a growing trend for students to be more healthy and sustainability-conscious in recent years, moving well away from the outdated stereotype of the junk food-eating student,” says Prof Fiona Cownie, pro-vice-chancellor for education and student experience at Keele University. Tapping into this trend, the university has introduced a number of initiatives to help students lead healthier lives, including a weekly fruit and veg box scheme, and making the ground floor of its students union building alcohol-free.

“We worked together with our student union to respond to feedback from students, reflecting the diversity of our student body and recognising that the option of a place to socialise away from alcohol is something modern students want,” says Cownie. On a similar note, universities such as the University of Bristol now offer alcohol-free accommodation.

When University of Warwick students last year updated Simple Scoff, a university cookbook first published in 1972, it had a strong health focus, with more than half the recipes vegetarian or vegan, and dishes including raw-food pizzas and spaghetti made from spiralled courgettes.

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“More and more students are starting to realise the value of eating right while studying,” says Jo Karlström, a history and politics student at the University of Warwick who contributed to the book.

“To me, a healthy lifestyle is vital. I feel healthier and better about myself when I eat a well-rounded diet.”

Forget nursing a hangover after a night out. Universities are now offering students the chance to participate in fun evening activities minus the alcohol. The University of Warwick hosts UV roller discos and squash evenings with lights dimmed and the music high. At the University of Hull, students can get stuck into clubbing while sober, thanks to Clubbercise nights, an upbeat dance workout involving strobe lights and glow sticks. “Clubbercise is extremely popular with our students because the workout feels like a night out rather than just an intensive exercise session,” says the University of Hull’s sports development officer, Sophie Johnson.

In a bid to cater for the healthy student and promote healthy living, from October, Liverpool Hope University will offer students free membership of its sports complex. Never has it been so hip to be a teetotal, vegetarian student.

Spin and shake How to stay active and fit

Healthy doesn’t have to mean bland salads. Find nutrition-packed recipes on websites such as BBC Good Food and Allrecipes, and be inspired by the Instagram accounts and blogs of Green Kitchen Stories and Hemsley + Hemsley and choose a few meals to make that week.

Do a big weekly food shop. It’ll often work out cheaper than buying on the go, and it’ll stop you from buying packaged meals lacking in nutrition.

Another easy way to make sure you’re getting your vitamin fix is to make a smoothie every day. Pack in vegetables, herbs and fruit – you can make everything from a strawberry and mango smoothie to a green juice filled with kale, spinach, ginger and apple, to ensure you start the day with something healthy at least.

While there’s no stopping the appeal of the student bars and nightclubs, try to take up a sport and mix up your exercise routine – or join a weekly class in pilates, yoga or spin if you don’t fancy the gym. Cheaper options include going for a run or joining a local walking club and seeing the local sights.

Instead of hopping on the bus, buy a bike or walk around town. It’ll also save you money as well as burning calories. On nights out, order a glass of water for every drink you have. It’ll keep you hydrated and help ease the hangover in the morning.
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Campaigning for a better world

Universities are the ideal place to find your inner activist and get knee-deep in political causes, says Claudia Cahalane.

Many a political movement has started with students. Meeting a new, large and diverse pool of people at university opens up many students’ eyes to the inequalities of society and the possibility of remedying them. Some students, such as Grace Casanova, a soon-to-be third year at Kingston University, decide to campaign for a better world in between lectures.

As well as being president of Kingston’s branch of Student Hubs, an organisation focused on social change, Casanova has held a number of campaigning roles at the university, including presidency of Unicef on campus. Through these she has led a number of drives to raise awareness of and funding for the effects of war, hunger, disease and violence on children worldwide.

“During my time, I have organised five outreach campaigns where we exposed the student community to the situation of children in Yemen, South Sudan, Ecuador, Syria and the Philippines,” she says. The Peruvian, who has done much through her university to contribute towards political change in her home country, has also benefitted personally from her campaigning. “During my time as the president of the Latin American Society at Kingston, the campaigns I organised were related to environmental issues and indigenous rights in Latin America,” says Casanova. “As a result, I’ve been awarded a scholarship for an indigenous rights and peace summer school in Japan this August.”

Some students look close to home when trying to effect change. Over the past couple of decades, campaigns for universities to buy more Fairtrade items and to stop selling Nestlé products, for example, have seen students encourage their universities to be more socially conscious.

Since 2013, Miriam Chapman, who is about to graduate from the University of Oxford, has been one of six core students involved in the Fossil Free campaign to get her university to clean up its investments.

There has been some success. “Last year, the university made a statement announcing that it would not invest directly in coal and tar sands, alongside reporting on its current investments,” she says. “While this is a step in the right direction, we continue to campaign for full divestment.” She first got involved through the students’ union’s environment and ethics group. “I went along to the first meeting because I was keen to get involved in environmental campaigning and then just got swept along with it all. If I wasn’t leaving uni now, I would get behind the Divest-Invest campaign, which is really exciting and has a lot of potential to help divestment campaigns move forward.”

There are also opportunities to join grassroots student activists who are aligned with the likes of Occupy. One which has sprung up recently is the Merit Student Activist group, which has a core of 10 university students from around the UK, and about 500 Facebook followers. The group writes about equality and social change.

“We are a political movement that is invested in trying to redistribute power within the UK,” a spokesperson for the group says. “So far we have taken part in many self-planned charity events such as OpSafeWinter, which helps the homeless through the winter months by giving them food, clothes and someone to talk to. Also, we work with other groups, such as Love Activists and Occupy.”