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Your guide to clearing 2019



How to apply to university or college through clearing

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Introduction

By Rachel Hall

It probably feels like a lifetime has passed since you were sitting bent over your exam paper, scouring your memory for answers. But as of results day you'll know whether you've got the grades you need to attend your top-choice university this September. That might sound like a terrifying prospect, but in reality it's not all or nothing. From 15 August, thousands of courses at different universities across the country will become available on the Ucas clearing website – for students who've changed their minds, missed their grades, or who are looking to trade up after doing better than expected. Last year, 60,000 students found a course this way.

In this special supplement, we'll guide you through the clearing process – how to prepare, the best ways to approach unis, and how to pick the right course for you. Whether it's working out how to finance your degree, choosing a laptop, or decorating your room, we've spoken to experts, students and graduates to give you all the advice you need to have a brilliant experience at uni.

Take student Sama Ansari Pour's example. She changed her mind about studying in her hometown of London, and used clearing to find a place at the University of Sheffield. "Going through clearing and coming here was one of the best decisions I have ever made," she says. "I felt I needed an opportunity to grow as an individual."

However confident you are that you've made your grades, or that the uni you've picked is the right one for you, it's still worth logging into Ucas and taking a look at what's on offer. And don't forget to approach the unis themselves – either the old-fashioned way, by picking up the phone, or via Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, SnapChat or Instagram. As one student who entered through clearing advises: "Text as many people as you can at different universities, because the more options you get, the more choices you have."

Get on board with clearing

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Clearing gets bigger every year, and 2019 could top them all

By Rachel Hall

This year two factors are set to shape the clearing process: a birthrate dip in the early 2000s means there are fewer 18 year-olds in the UK than in previous years; and universities are looking to recruit more students. This means it's an ideal time for savvy students to shop around, even if they've already accepted an offer. Perhaps they feel differently about their course or institution choice now that summer's rolled around, or maybe they think they could have aimed higher. Either way, the choice is theirs.

Last year, a record 60,000 students entered university via clearing. Lots of universities run open days and start advertising their vacancies well before A-level results day on 15 August, knowing that many students use this as a second application window. This year, clearing opened on 5 July.

"There will be lots of availability in clearing, even on very selective courses at Russell Group institutions, though I do think those top courses will go quite quickly," says Mary Curnock-Cook, former chief executive of Ucas. "It's more like universities scrambling for applicants than applicants for places, so applicants can afford to be quite choosy." This is particularly the case

for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Cambridge has entered clearing for the first time this year, but applications are only open to students from the poorest areas of the country. Edinburgh is also awarding all its places in clearing to students from the most deprived parts of Scotland.

For students who've missed out on their grades, there are plenty of quality courses on offer. Hope Clay Belsham got a place at Nottingham Trent University (NTU) through clearing last year to study animal science, after missing out on a place at its neighbour, Nottingham.

"When I spoke to NTU I was greeted with a friendly and helpful staff member who assured me everything would work out," she recalls.

While she had only considered universities in the research-intensive Russell Group prior to applying, she's now finding she's better suited to NTU's assessment style. "I love that I have assignments rather than loads of exams."

The secret is to start your preparations early. Emma Leech, director of marketing at Loughborough University, says that in recent years "the speed of folks hitting the phone lines has got quicker". She advises students

to have a list of the unis and courses they meet the grade requirements for, and to start ringing the moment they have their results.

If students are confident about their decisions, Leech says, they're less likely to fall prey to "aggressive marketing", such as offers of free laptops from unis looking to fill places. "Don't get pushed by an institution to say yes on the spot."

Curnock-Cook adds that students who have read about the government's review of tuition fees might be tempted to wait a year, in the hope of paying £7,500 in fees rather than £9,250. But, she cautions: "The timing has quite a big question mark over it, because of the political shenanigans going on at the moment, so you could be waiting a long time."

Instead, students should take the opportunity to work out which subjects most inspire them. "Don't just look at course headlines," says Curnock-Cook. "Read about all the modules and make sure you feel comfortable with them – you're going to spend three years studying this subject in depth. If the modules or choices available on a particular course don't make you feel 'Yes, I could stay up all night reading that', then it's probably not the right one to go for."

Dates to remember



Timeline



15 August

A-level results day. While students without any offers will already have been browsing for courses, today is the day when students who missed their grades are able to enter clearing. Adjustment also opens for students who received better results than expected. To find out which route you're eligible for, check Ucas Track.

31 August

The deadline for providing extra information on your application, such as other achievements, to enable you to meet offer conditions. Adjustment closes today.

4 September

For students who want to take a gap year and defer entry to 2020 rather than go through clearing, applications open for Ucas courses starting next year.

20 September

All applications to Ucas courses starting in 2019 must be received by 6pm today.

15 October

The deadline for 2020 applications to Oxford and Cambridge, and most courses in medicine, veterinary medicine, science and dentistry.

22 October

The final date for applications to courses starting in 2019 via clearing. After this date, universities and colleges can no longer accept students via clearing.

15 January

The final deadline for all applications to undergraduate courses starting in 2020.

RH

ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH

Experience

Sama Ansari Pour, 19, studies journalism at the University of Sheffield



Sama Ansari Pour planned to study journalism at City, University of London. But after her exams she decided to move further away from home. Having gone through clearing, she now studies journalism at the University of Sheffield.

I was going to stay in London, because I'm my mum's only child and she's a single parent. But I'd never been up north and I wanted to better myself – and I felt I needed an opportunity to grow as an individual.

I got the grades I needed to get into other unis, so thought I might as well go for it. I was really nervous on the day of clearing, though. University staff were nice on the phone – I was stressed, but they were so calm and soothing. I asked a lot of questions, but they didn't get annoyed.

I'm really happy at Sheffield. It took a while to get used to the city, because of all the hills and because it's smaller than London. Staying at home would have been the safer option and my mum would have cooked for me. But now I've learned to cook and I don't need to tell anyone where I'm going. I've made good friends, I'm happy here and I like the course. Going through clearing and coming here was one of my best decisions. **Abby Young-Powell**

PHOTOGRAPHY: WENDY HUYNH; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS

Take comfort in the fact that clearing works

By Helena Pozniak

It might be hard to stay calm if you've received disappointing A-level results, but take comfort in the fact that clearing really does work – last year a record 60,000 students found a place this way. “You're among thousands of people who go through this,” says Paul Woods, marketing and student recruitment director at Middlesex University. “Students can take control. But it needs to be a staged approach.”

Before the day arrives, decide whether you want to stay at your chosen university and try for a different course, or study a similar course elsewhere. Try to talk it through with teachers or careers staff. Have a plan B, advises Sarah Hannaford, head of student recruitment at Loughborough University. Gather module marks and GCSE results, and reread your personal statement. Then make a list of possible courses – take notes about what appeals.

At 8am you can check Ucas Track to see if you've been accepted by your firm or insurance choice. Some universities accept students even if they are off by a grade and you can ring to check. Track will show whether you are in clearing.

Once you've collected your results, which universities will need before they can offer you a place, and you have your Ucas Track login details to hand, you can look at the live list of vacancies on Ucas and individual university websites.

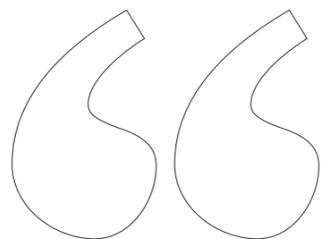
After browsing availability, you can start ringing university hotlines and using social media to ask questions. “Lines open early and peak call time is around 10 am,” says Hannaford. If possible, have a spare phone for callbacks while you ring around. Write down details, names and contacts from calls.

Some universities may offer you a place immediately over the phone – but don't commit to anything too quickly.

You can't formally accept a place until 3pm, and normally you'll have two or three days to decide. Once you've decided, enter your single choice in Track. When a uni has verified your grades, you're in.



Expert tips



There's no denying that clearing can be a bit daunting. But there are ways to get through. Here, four experts give advice for results day

By Abby Young-Powell

“Students might experience anxiety as a result of external pressure from family, friends or teachers to be accepted into university. This can be a very difficult situation for students to navigate.”

Stephen Buckley
Head of information at Mind

“You've just gone through an incredibly intense period of your life, because of exams, and then you have this horrible waiting period. When the day finally comes it's such a flurry and it moves so quickly ... It's really hard not to compare yourself to your friends. But [getting unexpected results] doesn't mean you won't end up where you're supposed to be.”

Katharine Swindells

Welfare officer at the University of Sheffield

“Don't take the stress on your own, but talk to family and staff in the school ... My advice is to follow the same process as you did when you picked your first choices. Once you've got an offer, go and visit, speak to students and do your research.”

Tom Holland

Pastoral lead at Blackpool sixth-form college

“There are so many really positive options available through clearing these days. See it as an opportunity. Take your time and see what's available to you.”

Claire Pratt

Head of student services at the University of East Anglia

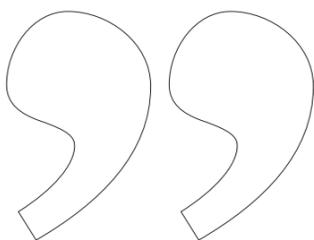


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How to make the process of clearing easier

Before the day

1 Prepare

If you suspect you haven't made your grades, anything you can do beforehand will ease the rush on results day. Clearing opened on July 5, although universities can't make an offer until you have your results. You can check which courses have vacancies – university websites and Ucas give some details before results. Ring around to register your interest in advance.

2 Reflect

Now is a good time to look at the universities and subjects you shortlisted back in your original Ucas application and consider what appealed. Are these the same things you want now?

3 Take notes

Shortlist potential courses and note contacts and names. While you're thinking clearly, note specific details of what interests you on each course – teaching methods, content, internships etc.

4 Sign up for alerts

The Ucas direct contact service allows universities to get in touch directly about courses from 15 August. It's open to students without an offer.

5 Consider alternatives

This might be a gap year, a different subject, or the same elsewhere. You can also apply for apprenticeships alongside your Ucas application, although deadlines vary.

6 Explore campuses

Social media, city guides and student portals are great for figuring out what it's like to live and study somewhere you don't yet know. Think again about campus versus city sites, accommodation and the relative cost of living.

On the day

1 Seek support

If you're feeling emotional, remember that's a normal response. Don't feel like you have to go through clearing alone – a parent or teacher will be happy to help.

2 Stay calm

If you haven't been accepted by a university, take a deep breath and thank them for their time. Once they've made a decision, it's final, so it's better to explore other options.

3 Take your time

Don't feel like you have to accept a place as soon as you're offered it. Ask how long the university will give you to reflect on your decision and make sure that it's the right one for you. **HP**



Crack on with clearing

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Parents can help ease the pressure of clearing

By Gavan Naden

Lots of schools will have teachers on hand for clearing, but parents can help ease the pressure too. Mums and dads might want to take the day off, so they can provide emotional support as well as helping with practical things, such as researching courses and unis, note-taking and advice. Ultimately, however, the choice lies with the student – parents should guide them to follow their gut feeling, rather than being forced to say yes to a course or university that's not right. In our case study, a mother and daughter talk through their experiences on the day.

Samantha Pettitt, 19,
studying biomedical science,
University of Hertfordshire

On results day, I logged in and found out I was in clearing. I started phoning any university that did a biology-based course. I got five offers and went to my mum and dad and we sorted through them. They helped find the websites and contacted anyone we knew who'd been there to get advice. They suggested writing a pros and cons list, and calmed me down as I was so stressed. It was so good to have them there, especially as they'd come to all the open days. They kept me level-headed and they just kept saying: "It's OK." In the end, they were genuinely happy that I was doing something I wanted to do.



Samantha Pettitts and mum Karen

Karen Pettitt

Samantha is the first of our family to go to university, so clearing was a whole new ball game for us – we knew nothing about it. She thought she'd failed because she hadn't got into her first choice. It was also very stressful for us – we had to put a lid on our own emotions, as she was in tears. We tried to calm her down and said: "Let's just wait and see." We trawled through universities on the internet, as she wanted a place that had accommodation on-site. My husband Neil was very practical, checking up on the campus facilities and sporting amenities.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARYAM WAHID; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS



Social media is now a core feature of the clearing process

By Abby Young-Powell

From Snapchat to Instagram stories, social media is now a core feature of the clearing process.

And this year we're likely to see universities make even more use of social media in the run-up to the big day.

Emma Leech, director of marketing at Loughborough University, says that although a small number of universities make offers through social media, most tend to use it ahead of clearing day to engage and inform students through web chats, Instagram stories or live Q&As.

Students can also use Facebook, WhatsApp groups and the Student Room to talk to current students and to ask questions. "You can connect with people and talk about any worries," Leech says.

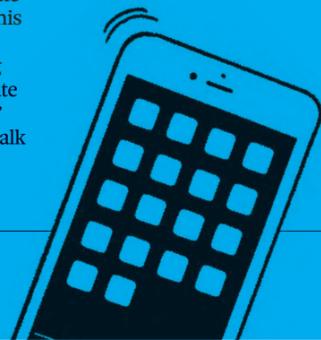
Alix Delany, head of admissions at the University of East Anglia (UEA), says this year her university will have a special team dedicated to social media during clearing. "So students can communicate with us in whatever way they want to."

How does Delany recommend you talk

to university staff on social media? "Use really simple and clear language," she says. "It can be a quickfire conversation, so by no means do you have to prepare an essay. Don't tell your A-level results through the power of emoji. Having said that, if an emoji comes our way, some of the team may send one back," she says.

Lewis Haynes, a student at De Montfort University, found it helpful messaging unis over WhatsApp during clearing. Numbers can be found on university websites. "It's good to text as many people as you can at different universities because the more options you get the more choices you have," he says.

Even though it's good to use social media to get support and extra information, it's helpful to pick up the phone and speak to people, Leech says. Delany warns against using too many social media channels and overloading yourself. "Just use whatever you feel most comfortable and familiar with," she says.



Social media tips

Social media can be useful for planning ahead. Here's how to use it

1 Do your research

"Don't leave it until the last minute, because that will just give you added pressure and stress," says Emma Leech, director of marketing at Loughborough University. "Use social to do your research and connect with student groups and institutions."

2 Make sure you have everything you need

"Have your Ucas personal identification ready and a note of your qualification results," says Alix Delany, head of admissions at UEA.

3 Look at what people are sharing on social media

Universities may post information and advice on social media throughout the day, so keep an eye on it.

4 Social media offers are like those made by phone

"Online we'll say: 'We'd love to give you a form.' Then within two hours of them filling it out we will have sent a written offer," says Delany.

5 Take your time

You don't need to take the first thing that's offered, Leech says. "Ignore some of the pressure tactics some institutions have started to use, such as rushing you into making a decision." Use social media to see what others are doing, but don't let that put you off, she says. "It's your day, decision and future. Don't feel the need to copy what everyone else is doing – it has to be right for you." **AY-P**

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY; ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH

Key pointers on paying for your degree



Work tips

There are plenty of opportunities to make some money while you study

1 Work for the union

You could work in your students' union's on-site shop, bar or coffee shops, or do administrative work.

2 Become an ambassador

Ambassadors represent the university and you'd be expected to support open days and other events. You could also work at the uni's catering department.

3 Take part in (safe) experiments

Kirsty Walker, a student at Loughborough, was paid £120 to take part in an experiment by PhD students. "I had to wear different socks and run in them," she says. "They measured how comfortable the socks were." Keep an eye out for opportunities on the university homepage and social media.

4 Get a part-time or odd job

Walker also works as a lifeguard. Her flexible contract lets her work more in the summer and less during exams. Look out for opportunities posted by your uni and on sites such as Fiverr or Gumtree, from being an extra in a film or TV show to babysitting and dog-walking.

5 Sell your things on eBay

You can buy and sell old course books, clothing and other items on sites such as Amazon or eBay, says Eesha Mohindra, senior money analyst at Money Saving Expert. **AY-P**

A government report has recommended slashing tuition fees and bringing back maintenance grants. This might sound like cause for celebration, but it won't mean much until the changes are implemented. Even then, students would actually pay more to go to university, says Martin Lewis, from Money Saving Expert.

The amount you owe in tuition fees is irrelevant because most people never pay it back in full, he says. But the government's Augar review proposes increasing the loan repayment period from 30 to 40 years, so students will likely end up paying more overall.

So, should you take a gap year with the hope of paying less for tuition later on? "I would say no," says Michael McTeague, welfare and funding adviser at the University of Northumbria. The proposed changes, which would come into effect in September 2021, might never happen, he points out.

What you should consider, however, is parental contribution. In England, the amount you get for your maintenance loan is determined by how much your

parents earn. Tuition fees are paid directly to the university rather than the individual student. But maintenance loans are paid into a student's account in instalments over the year. For students living away from home in London and starting in September, these can reach a maximum £11,672 a year, and up to £8,944 for those living away outside the capital, but they're means tested – if household earnings are £50,000, these figures fall to about £8,409 and £5,735 respectively.

When it comes to bursaries and scholarships, Lewis recommends you focus on anything that "puts cash in your pocket" now, rather than something that reduces debt. "You have to go fishing [online] to see what's available, but understand you're probably not going to catch anything," he says.

London universities - King's College, Imperial, Queen Mary and UCL – offer healthy scholarships, while outside the capital, Nottingham, UEA and Stirling are also generous, but there are many more. Professional organisations also offer funding. **AY-P**



Go fishing for funding

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If you didn't get the grades for your chosen university, don't panic

By Lucy Jolin

Clearing can be a great opportunity to completely rethink your choice of degree course – and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

"Between choosing courses, applying, and then studying and taking your exams, a lot might have changed," points out Hannah Morrish, higher education lead at online forum The Student Room. "You might have changed your mind. Clearing can be a good opportunity to review if this is really the right pathway for you. For many students, clearing turns out to be a blessing."

Justin Morris, director of undergraduate admissions at the University of Hull, agrees. "You may find opportunities in degree programmes you hadn't even thought about."

Of course, you can still do the same subject – you just might need to do it at a different university. But it's worth going for the less familiar subjects, as they may have fewer applicants. "For example, international relations isn't taught at A-level, so it just might not be on your academic radar," he says.

Morris always advises students to

think about why they wanted to do the original university subject: if it's because they want to follow a career in it, there might be another path. "For example, you don't have to do a law degree to be a lawyer. You can do a graduate conversion course. The same goes for teaching: you don't need a degree in education."

And there's never been so much specialisation available within a subject, either. Many smaller universities are now choosing to focus on specific areas and offer a wide range of specialisms within that area. Falmouth University, for example, specialises in the creative industries, while Harper Adams University in Shropshire focuses on the agricultural and rural sector.

You'll find plenty on offer in sciences and healthcare as well: the University of Bath's Centre for Addiction Treatment Studies offers a new foundation degree in addictions counselling, while the University of Hull's biomedical science BSc is popular with those who don't get the grades for medical school.



ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH

Once you've sorted your clearing offer, the next step is finding a place to live

By Naomi Larsson

Finding accommodation after clearing might feel overwhelming, but there will still be many options available to you.

The first step is to contact the university and see what they can offer, says Jonty Green, head of FHP Student Living, an accommodation provider in Nottingham. Most universities will guarantee accommodation for first years, but that's not always the case if you get in through clearing.

Some university housing can be more expensive, but it's worth going for it "for the experience" and to be with other first years, Green says.

University halls offer different living and social experiences. Accommodation search engine MyStudentHalls.com has launched an accreditation for "quieter halls", for students looking to live in more peaceful halls of residence. It takes into account things such as noise policies, and whether the building has quiet surrounding areas.

Clearing students may not get their first choice of housing, but Simon Thompson, CEO of

AccommodationForStudents.com, says housing standards are "so high now" that students will be able to find decent accommodation. "It's encouraged those private landlords who hadn't renovated properties to really raise their game."

The clearing period is also the final opportunity for providers to rent out their properties. "There are incentives at this time – they might include bills or a wide-screen TV, for example. The price that's listed isn't always the final price – you do have room to negotiate," Thompson says.

Part of that negotiation includes asking whether bills are factored into the rent. "It might be that one property looks more expensive, but the reality is it's not when you count bills," he says.

Location is important too: if you're living on campus, the property may be more expensive than somewhere further out, but your transport costs might be lower.

If you can get there, it's worth checking out accommodation open days or visiting the letting agents based in and around the campus. There are also a number of dedicated student housing websites, and some providers even have online virtual reality tours to view the rooms.



Accommodation tips

Worried about where to look for accommodation? Don't panic – there are plenty of resources to help you find the right place to live

If your university doesn't have its own halls available, there are still great opportunities for living in private houses in town or in dedicated halls. Websites such as Student.com, Bubble Student and MyStudentHalls.com list private halls and purpose-built student accommodation across the UK.

You can also look for your own flat on property sites such as Zoopla or Rightmove. Try Spareroom.com if you're looking to find a place with housemates. These sites are open to the whole of the property market, not just to students.

It's helpful to search for places online because you can see if the properties have reviews and trusted accreditation, like Anuk, which vets properties and landlords. Review sites like allagents.com look specifically at estate agents, and you can also consult Google reviews, although it's best not to rely exclusively on these. **NL**

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY; ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH

Experience

Kathryn Williams, 20, studies film and TV production at Northumbria University



PHOTOGRAPHY: JOANNE CRAWFORD; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS

I changed my mind about what course I wanted to do before results day. It seemed too late to apply for the halls at Northumbria and there didn't appear to be a lot of choice left, so I ended up going for the option of private accommodation.

I live in housing run by Unite, in a mixed flat in Newcastle, with eight of us from various universities. It's not the same as being on campus, which is a 20-minute walk away, because everyone in my building does different things. Being with people from other universities means they have a range of timetables and schedules, which was a bit isolating at first. But it's interesting to meet everyone. I now have a wider friendship group, and I'm not stuck in the campus bubble.

Living in a flat is great, because you get your own community within your building; there are always people you know you can talk to. You build a routine of cooking together and going out together. **NL**

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Guide to clearing Adjustment

If you ace your A-levels and get better results than expected, how about an upgrade?

By Tess Reidy

Adjustment gives students the opportunity to reconsider where and what to study if they have exceeded the conditions of their offer. It could be goodbye back-up choice, hello top-ranking uni.

The process is available from A-level results day, 15 August, until 31 August. It's entirely optional, and many competitive courses will be full, but other applicants might have missed their conditions or swapped a course, so it is worth seeing what's available.

You need to register for adjustment in Ucas Track and then call the universities and colleges that you're interested in. Bear in mind that not all universities and courses will make use of it. There is no comprehensive list, but some universities specify which courses are available on their website.

Around 21% of AAB applicants are under-predicted each year and yet the number of students using adjustment is small. Of the 533,360 accepted into uni last year, just 880 used this option.

Why's that? According to Manuel Souto-Otero, a senior lecturer in social sciences at Cardiff University, many people don't even know about it. Plus, after the whole Ucas process, the idea of switching can be daunting.

Shanita Jetha got into Warwick University through adjustment and says that although the process is nerve-racking, it is worth it. "My first choice had asked for ABB, but on results day I got AAB. Luckily, over the summer, I'd made a list of unis to consider if I'd done better or worse than expected. I really had no idea how I'd done in my exams."

Jetha contacted four of the unis on her list and was offered three places and given a 24-hour deadline to

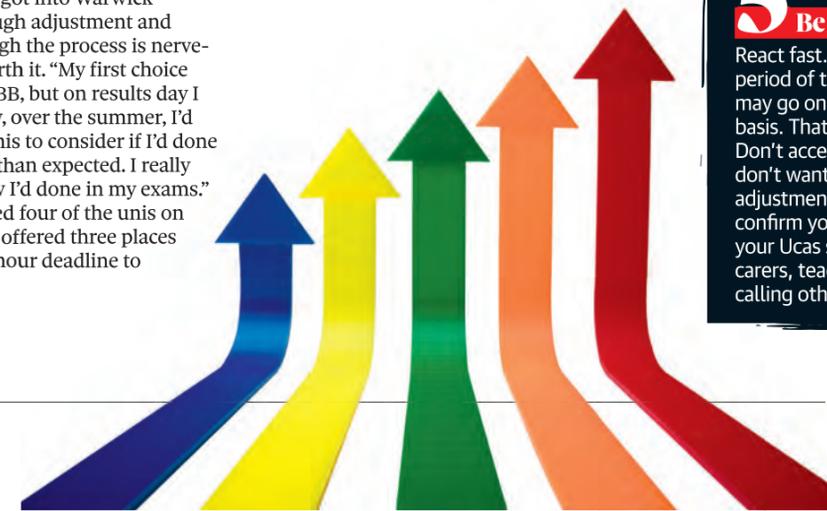
respond. She accepted Warwick's offer the following day. "I knew people's experiences of being there and I had looked into the course. I'm really pleased I did it. I've studied abroad and I don't think I would have had that opportunity with my original choice."

Although it can take some by surprise, Delyth Chambers, director of student recruitment at the University of Warwick, recommends avoiding a scattergun approach and focusing on places you are "genuinely interested in and eligible for".

If you get better marks than expected, shopping around makes sense. But be wary of university rankings as they can change from year to year.

Ultimately, make a decision that is right for you. "If you are sure about the course and uni you've chosen and that's what you want to do to, then I think that should take priority over everything else," says Souto-Otero.

21%
of AAB applicants are under-predicted each year



Adjustment tips

Before your results come out, research your options in case you are under-predicted. There is little time to react, so gather information on the courses you're interested in

1 Trade-up options

This year there will be the lowest number of 18-year-olds in the UK population since the turn of the millennium. As a result, universities will find it harder to fill their courses, so it's likely there will be more places about. This puts you in a good position to trade up. Also, remember that courses with a similar name offered by different unis can have very different content.

2 Get back in touch

You can still contact a university that rejected you earlier in the cycle to check your options. Have your Ucas ID number ready and a pen and paper to take down any information.

3 Interview by phone

Prepare for a telephone interview. Some universities may do this, but also be ready to interview them. It is a good time to ask questions on what the course covers. Are there options to study abroad? How much contact time will you have per week?

4 Take in an open day

If you can, visit the universities that you are interested in. Many universities have open days over the summer.

5 Be fast, but not too fast

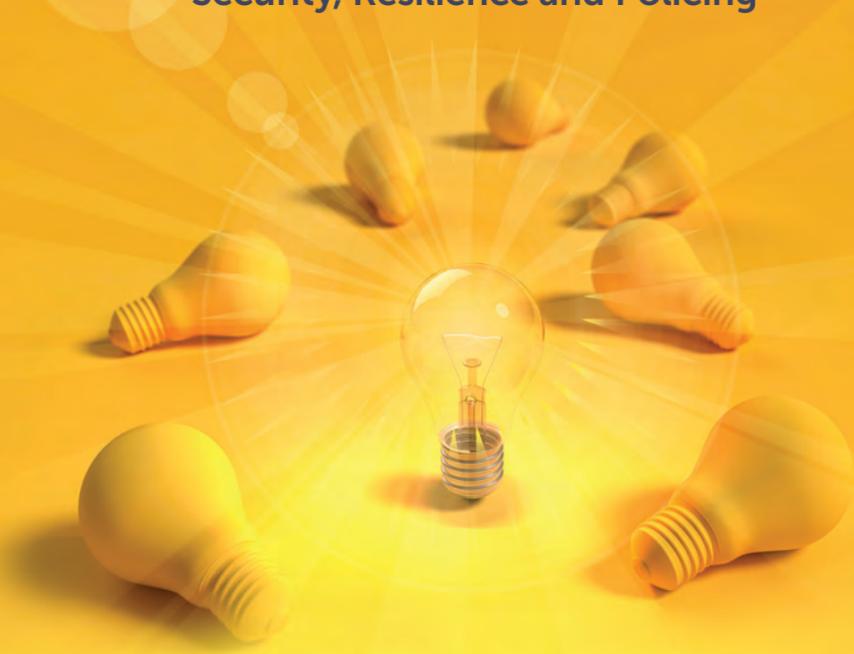
React fast. You'll be given a certain period of time to reply, but some courses may go on a first-come-first-served basis. That said, don't react too fast. Don't accept an offer verbally if you don't want it. You can only accept one adjustment offer, after which the uni will confirm your place straight away using your Ucas student ID. Talk to parents, carers, teachers and friends and consider calling other unis before accepting. **TR**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

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- Security, Resilience and Policing



Degrees bring employability



Choose your degree by focusing on your passion

By Lucy Jolin

Alice Brazil-Burns studied theatre and performance at Warwick University because she was passionate about the stage. But after graduating, and working at a major film company, she decided to make a big change and enrolled on a master's in management at the London School of Economics.

"I want to change the system in an organisation by working within it," she says. "I don't have the answers yet, and where I'm going to place myself, I'm not sure. But my theatre degree has given me all sorts of important skills: empathy, self-awareness, people skills, and studying how people think."

Like Brazil-Burns, the majority of graduates don't necessarily go on to build a career within their degree subject. Prospect's What do graduates do? report for 2018 uses Higher Education Statistics Agency data to give an insight into what graduates are doing six months after they leave uni.

Unsurprisingly, the more vocational and specialist degrees lead to a narrower range of jobs – 74.8% of civil engineering graduates went into engineering and building roles, for example. But graduates in sciences and humanities courses took on a wider range of roles.

Politics graduates, for example, took roles in business, finance and HR (22.8%), along with marketing, PR and

sales (15.4%) and retail and catering (12.9%). Meanwhile, business, finance and HR was the third most popular choice for chemistry graduates (15.8%), after roles as science professionals (16.6%) and associate professionals and technicians (19.9%).

So choose your degree by focusing on your passion, rather than worrying about your career, advises Chris Rea, a manager at graduate careers organisation Prospects. "Most degree courses nowadays are shot through with employability, whether you're studying land management, history or chemistry. They do not exist in isolation," he points out.

"But degrees aren't just about skills for the jobs market," says Rea. "They're about creating rounded people who lead fulfilling lives and who do productive work. A degree will equip you to be an adaptable, flexible worker who can take advantage of multiple opportunities."

74.8%
of civil engineering graduates went into engineering and building roles

There's still a shortage of women in tech

S hajida Akthar undertook a degree apprenticeship and gained her BSc in digital and technology solutions while at Accenture. She's never felt any different from her male colleagues, she says. "If anything, I've felt empowered. I've never encountered any issues and I've made a success of my career in a male-dominated field."

But, despite the success of Akthar and her peers in the industry, there's still a shortage of women in the tech sector. "Girls suggest that the male domination of the sector puts them off considering this as a career choice," says Prof Jane Turner, a pro vice-chancellor for business at Teesside University, who also cites poor careers advice and a lack of female role models as deterrents.

However, this shortage is also an opportunity for women to advance, sometimes more quickly, up the career ladder, she says. And the tech industry offers lots of interesting roles in areas such as artificial intelligence, information security, games development, network engineering and software programming.

When it comes to courses, picking something you're interested in is key, says Sue Black, professor of computer science at Durham University. "Think about what you like doing outside of tech. What are your hobbies? If you're not sure, go for something more generic, like computer sciences."

Bootcamps and short training courses are also proving popular among young women who want to explore the tech world. Turner says that, although they have a role to play, they're not a substitute for university. "A tech degree will build significant depth of knowledge, understanding and research capability that wouldn't be achieved through an intensive boot camp, primarily focused upon developing coding or data science expertise." LJ

'Your disability isn't a barrier, you're on a level playing field with everyone else'

By Naomi Larsson

Sean Cullen avoided getting a diagnosis for his dyslexia until he was in his second year at university. "The stigma around students not wanting to disclose disability is big. They think it will be detrimental to their studies if they have a difficulty," says Cullen, who is now studying for a PhD at Brunel University, while also working as a disability officer for the students' union.

Cullen, who became physically disabled as a result of an accident prior to attending university, is now receiving the support for his dyslexia he should have had from the start. "The message has been drummed in that because you have additional needs you're not going to perform as academically well. That's not the right message."

While university is more accessible than ever before, with almost half of young people in England going on to higher education, people with disabilities and special educational needs are still far less likely to attend. It's not due to their academic capabilities, but because of low expectations. Research from 2018 revealed disabled students are 10% more likely to have low educational expectations than their non-disabled peers with similar school performance.

This year, universities minister Chris Skidmore called on universities to do more to bridge this gap by supporting and encouraging applications from students with disabilities.

"Inclusion is vital," says Ross Renton, pro vice-chancellor at the University of Worcester, which was singled out by Skidmore for leading the way in its support services. "As institutions we should reflect society, we should enable people to have fulfilling lives."

Renton encourages students to have a clear understanding of what support is available even before applying. At Worcester, for example, there are disability advisers so students can arrange support services and work out their needs. Charity AccessAble also maps out the sites and cities on an app, so students with disabilities can work out good, accessible routes to take around campus. By having these conversations, "your disability isn't a barrier, you're on a level playing field with everyone else", Renton says.

Speaking of his disability, Cullen adds: "Unfortunately the nature of having any of these conditions is that life will be more difficult, but the more you can speak to people the more solutions you can get out of it."

Experience

Emma Dobson, 22, is a final-year psychology and sociology undergraduate at Brunel



PHOTOGRAPHY: JON TOMKES; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS

Moving to London for university was a big deal. I hadn't lived by myself before and my mum had been my primary carer since I was born. The biggest issue was making sure I could get around everywhere - I'm an electric wheelchair user for the most part, and I have cerebral palsy.

Brunel is one campus and it's mostly flat, so once I knew where I was going and which routes to use, it was better. You could be on campus and not leave for a week and you'd be fine - they have shops, cafes, a nightclub.

Before I started, we spoke to an adviser about my requirements. For example, I need accommodation with automatic doors. I went for the option without carers, to throw myself in at the deep end. I had friends in my first year who offered to help, so I knew I had that back-up on campus.

I'm much more confident now as I've learned you have to self-advocate and point out issues so you get what you need, like when the lift wasn't working and I couldn't get to my lecture.

I was a big member of the rock and metal society - I love going to concerts. I knew I could talk about that quite easily, and the disability stuff didn't have to come into it.

Dobson blogs at *Invincible Woman on Wheels* about her experiences **NL**

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DIGITAL INSTITUTE LONDON

As you prepare to leave the family home, now's the time to invest in your own gadgets

By Suzanne Bearne

If you're eyeing up a new laptop, TechRadar UK computing editor Matthew Hanson says build quality and battery life are the most important aspects to consider. "Price-wise you'll want something that won't wipe out a semester's student loan, nor something that will be attractive to opportunist thieves if you have to leave it on a desk in a library." That said, you don't want to buy a budget laptop that cuts too many features or uses outdated spec, he adds. "Chromebooks are brilliant choices for students, as they are affordable, are generally well built and have excellent battery lives. For Windows-based laptops, I'd look at examples in the £400-£600 range with 8GB RAM and a Core i5 processor as a minimum." However, he says, these don't have great battery lives.

While many people use cloud storage services, tech journalist Becca Caddy



advises that portable storage systems allow you to back up photos, videos and all your important notes and documents for ultimate peace of mind.

"They're a great option for those who rely on smaller laptops or tablets and need a simple, secure way to store their work." Caddy also recommends buying a case for your phone, laptop and tablet that will "withstand knocks, drops and even water".

Another key gadget she recommends is a battery pack to charge your phone. "The last thing you need when you're on the move, with a busy day of seminars ahead of you, is for your phone battery to die."

And remember, do protect your shiny new tech with some comprehensive insurance cover.

'The last thing you need when you're on the move, with a busy day of seminars ahead of you, is for your phone battery to die'

ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH

Top 5 apps

From looking after your health to taking the pain out of sharing bills, these apps will help manage life at uni

1 Student Health app

This NHS-approved app offers more than 900 pages of health information aimed at students. Masterminded by doctors, but with plenty of input from students and health experts, this app gives reliable answers to important health queries, including mental health and first aid.

2 Splitwise

Want to avoid arguments with your housemates and friends? Finance app Splitwise will let you split sums easily and keep track of household costs, as well as managing meals and drinks when you're out. It also sends payments.

3 Evernote

With note-taking likely to become one of your biggest pastimes at university, it might be worth downloading one of the most popular note-taking apps on the market. Notes can be made as text, photo or audio, as well as shared with others and uploaded to the cloud.

4 Students' union

Most students' unions will have their own app providing a one-stop service, highlighting what's on, information about key services, course details, event information, a map of campus and student union news.

5 Citymapper

One of the top public transport apps, Citymapper provides users with real-time information on how to get from A to B, whether it's by tube, bus or walking. It also shares how many calories you've burned. It's currently only available for Manchester, Birmingham, and London. **SB**



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All you need to know before setting up a student bank account

By Suzanne Bearne

With the start of university edging nearer, now is the time for students to consider which bank account will best suit their needs.

Banks usually pull out all the stops to entice students with shiny offers and gifts. However, one of the key considerations should be the size of the interest-free overdraft limit on offer. It's worth calculating what kind of an overdraft you might need and finding a bank that matches the amount. To apply for a bank account, you'll need your Ucas confirmation letter from your university, together with the usual proofs of identity (passport, birth certificate, driving licence) and proof of your address. As attractive as an overdraft is, remember it is a loan and you'll have to pay it back.

The perks can also be a draw. The current Santander 123 student account

offers an "up to £1,500" 0% overdraft for three years and hands full-time students a four-year 16-25 railcard, meaning you can save up to a third on most rail journeys. Some banks entice customers by offering cashback with selected brand purchases.

Mobile-only apps from challenger banks such as Monzo and Starling are raved about for their easy-to-use functionality. The upshot with Monzo, for example, is that you can set a spending budget and send transfers via Bluetooth. However, going overdrawn by more than £20 a day would set you back 50p per day, up to a maximum of £15.50 a month. The ethically minded should look out for green banks such as Triodos, which only backs sustainable companies.

If it's great customer service you're hankering after, Monzo took the top spot in Which?'s most recent best banks survey, with an 86% customer rating, followed by First Direct (85%) and Nationwide (79%).

The ethically minded should look out for green banks such as Triodos, which only backs sustainable companies



ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH

Money-saving tips

It can be a minefield learning to manage your outgoings. Here are five tips to help you save

1 Set a budget

It might sound simple but the best thing you can do is to set a budget – and stick to it. Your student loan needs to last you the whole term. Work out how much you'll need for your accommodation, bills, mobile phone, travel, food, and social activities during that timeframe. Education charity Brightside offers a useful student calculator.

2 Budgeting apps

If you like to run your life via your phone, an app could help you organise your spending habits by allowing you to view your income and outgoings in one place. Money Dashboard brings together all your accounts and lets you create a budget planner.

3 Hunt out student discounts

From restaurants to retailers, many places offer discounts to students. Wave your student card or NUS Extra card when you're out and about, to save money.

4 Choose secondhand

Starting a new term can feel expensive, with a long wishlist of things you want to take to university. Secondhand goods can be unearthed on sites such as eBay, Amazon and Gumtree, and, of course, you can try charity shops for bargains.

5 Reduce those food costs

Many supermarkets reduce food prices in the evening. Also, remember that they use a best-before date and "display until", but items can be eaten beyond this. Choose supermarkets' own brands, plot what you're going to cook for the week ahead and write a shopping list. **SB**

Try a campus tour on an open day



If you want to get real insight into a uni, book yourself in for an open day

By Suzanne Bearne

It's always a good idea if you can make an open day, but it's especially important for students entering through clearing, who might find themselves spending the next three to five years somewhere unexpected.

"A large amount of information can be found via websites, but attending the university gives the opportunity to meet the staff and current students and get a real feel for what it will be like studying and possibly living on campus," says Andrew Tedder, an academic admissions tutor at the University of Bradford.

Before you arrive at the campus, do your homework: plan your time wisely, and consider what you'd like to see and who you'd like to speak to. Open days usually follow the same pattern, with campus tours, access to support services, library visits, accommodation choices, and the chance to speak to students and staff.

Tedder says students should compile a list of questions on the course, teaching, facilities, campus and how accessible local amenities are. "Whatever the question, however small you think it is, make sure to ask so you can make an informed decision about where you are going to spend the next three years of your life," he says.

Alexandria Cutts, a second-year journalism student at Sheffield Hallam University, says the open day was a great way to meet current students and ask about the course, including whether there would be an option for study abroad. "I had a few questions and concerns that I wanted to clear up and put myself at ease before I started my studies in the September as I came through clearing," she says. "I got a real feel for the uni first-hand, I got to see the facilities and I got a better idea of what I was to expect."

'Plan your time wisely, and consider what you'd like to see and who you'd like to speak to'

City profiles

Choosing the right university city matters. Perhaps you dreamed about somewhere but went to the open day and hated it. Maybe you had your heart set on a place but you haven't hit the grades. Possibly, you're having a change of heart?

Belfast

It feels like a town, but there's a big-city vibe to it. Everything is contained in a small area and you can get into the countryside quickly. A lot of people who study there love the outdoors. There are places like Cave Hill, where you can see over the whole of Belfast, just 25 minutes outside the city centre. It's proud of its sports, music and arts venues and there are museums aplenty.

Cardiff

The top thing about the Welsh capital is that it's cheap. If you're into sport, there's the Six Nations, football stadiums, and the competitive Welsh varsity tournament. Another big plus is that everything in Cardiff is within walking distance. After a night out, you won't have to pay for a taxi and you (hopefully) won't be late for uni if you're not waiting for a bus.

Glasgow

Glasgow has an international feel to it. Although there's a sense of community on the campuses, people feel at ease immersing themselves in the city. Sport societies are popular and Glasgow is well known for its nightlife. You won't be stuck for a place to go. Music venues are near to some of the universities and the bars are student-focused.

London

Studying in the capital pushes you to be more self-sufficient than campus unis, where everything is geared towards students. You might not start out any more independent, but you'll become it, especially as students often spread across the city after year one. London appeals to a range of people, from the career focused to metropolitan types and lovers of art, fashion and music.

Manchester

If you want to go to a city uni and get that experience but you reckon London might be a bit too big, Manchester could be for you. Anyone who's into music, theatre or the arts will find something for them. It's easy to spend all your time between the main student areas and the campuses. The best thing about it? There's a real mix of people. It's got wide appeal. **Tess Reidy**

PHOTOGRAPHY: HULL UNIVERSITY

Experience

Tahmid Ali, 20, is a second-year accounting and financial management student at the University of Hull

PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON WELLS; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS



When I found out that I didn't get into either my first-choice university or my insurance offer, I felt sad. I didn't have a plan B. I frantically thought about what to do next - should I go through clearing? Take a year out? I searched for courses and spotted accounting and financial management. I liked the sound of the University of Hull.

I accepted the offer but I had doubts. I was concerned about how far away it was from my home in Kent. Google Maps showed that it was a five-hour journey. I'd never been so far away in the UK - plus, all my friends were off to unis in the south of England. I was also unsure if I'd enjoy the course as I'd really researched the modules at the other unis I'd applied to.

This was all going through my head when I went up to Hull for a clearing open day with my brother. But my concerns disappeared when I arrived on the campus, which is gorgeous. I spent 20 minutes learning about the course with a lecturer. We took a tour of the uni with some other prospective students and spoke to current students. My worries evaporated. The open day helped me realise that I'd really love it in Hull and it helped calm the nerves. I could really visualise myself walking around the campus. Hull ended up ticking all the boxes. **SB**

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What makes studying at university so different to school?

By Lucy Jolin

The most obvious difference between study at school and university is that the structure of school hours is no longer there, so you'll have to develop time management skills and work out your own timetable. How much you study depends on your course, but Pete Langley, director of study help at thestudentroom.com, advises "a reasonable day's work from Monday to Friday. Expect to burn the midnight oil sometimes, especially around exams, but also plan to have days off."

Academically, you'll need to learn a lot of new skills quickly. "A-levels are a very controlled environment to study in," says Langley. "At university, answers will be less clear. There is more for the student to think through, and a much wider range of reading. You might not be used to reading around subjects, writing 5,000 words, or reading difficult books. You'll need to develop your reading skills: finding the library, getting the books on the reading list,

not being put off by language, and techniques for skim reading."

You'll also need to learn new writing conventions, too: such as referencing and how to structure an essay.

At school, support is always there: at university, you'll have to seek it out – and don't be afraid to do so. "Being independent doesn't mean that you can't ask for help," says Langley.

Bhishak Bremanand, in his final year of a biomedical science degree at the University of Bedfordshire, agrees. "I found my personal tutor very supportive and very quick to respond on email, and I'd always stay behind after lectures if I had a question. Nobody is going to come to you, but if you ask for help, then you'll get it."

But university isn't all about studying – it's a great opportunity to widen your circle of friends, so long as you try to meet people outside your comfort zone. "The only people you are guaranteed to see with any regularity socially are your flatmates, so a lot depends on whether you become friends with them," says Lia Higgs, first-year history student at the University of Bristol. "However, there are many more random and extracurricular ways to meet people and I did end up finding my group of people in lectures."

Get down to work

Some handy tips for getting on with your university work and dealing with deadlines. Don't forget to take some time out too

1 Plan and prioritise

Plan ahead. Use a calendar on your phone and make sure you have all the lectures, seminars and deadlines in there right from the start. Also, learn to prioritise tasks into urgent and non-urgent – you could even assign each task a number for importance.

2 Working tips

Allow plenty of time for reading: it takes longer than you think. And consider working for a certain number of hours every day in order to get ahead with your studies. Also, remember that big tasks can seem intimidating, so tackle them by breaking them down into smaller chunks first.

3 Uni deadlines

Take your deadlines seriously. If you start missing them, you could end up with an awful lot of work that needs to be done at the end of term.

4 No distractions

Find somewhere to work with no distractions that suits you. It doesn't have to be the library – it could be your room, a coffee shop, or a study area.

5 Time to relax

Don't be afraid to enjoy some free time: not just to take part in clubs, societies and sports, but also to just relax and chill. You'll struggle to concentrate without it. LJ

Universities see it as an asset to take a year out

By Tess Reidy

When Deniz Ronayne, 22, missed out on his grades for the University of Birmingham, he didn't know what to do. "I was just floundering," he says. "So I ended up getting a job in a restaurant."

Ronayne, who now studies history and politics at Queen's University Belfast, says working for a year meant he saved money and rethought his uni choices. Looking back, it was the best decision he's ever made. "I love being in Belfast and it was nice to earn money and get a sense of what life is like outside of school. It was like a little taster of what is to come after uni, budgeting and keeping yourself afloat."

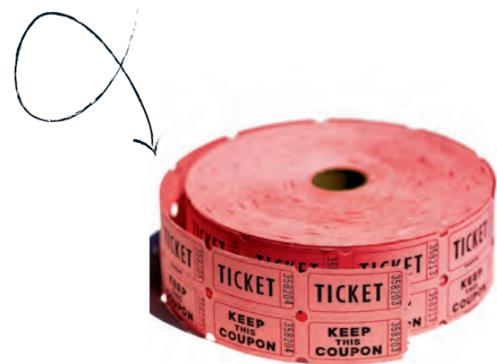
Sheffield Hallam student, Megan Coupe, agrees. With money tight at uni, she says that not only did a year out allow her to save up, but as someone

who is very close to her family, it gave her time to feel "ready to be independent".

According to Ucas, approximately 30,000 students each year choose to defer entry. Many do so for personal reasons such as family circumstances, illness or needing time to mature and increase motivation. Others want to get relevant experience or earn money. Some may have missed out on their grades, while others might not feel 100% about their course and want to wait another year to consider their options. If the time isn't right for you, don't panic.

Some universities even view it as an asset to take a year out. "Generally, I think it's a really good idea," says Delyth Chambers, director of student recruitment at the University of Warwick. "Young people mature a lot during their year out."

Admission can be deferred



PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

Experience

Barney Terrington, 20, is going to study geography at Manchester Metropolitan University



PHOTOGRAPHY: VICKY GROUT; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS

When I finished school I felt so excited to have a year's break after so much academic work. I just wanted to live my life, earn some money, explore the world and have fun. I had originally wanted to go to Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) to study geography after my year out, but I got into Sheffield to study urban planning. I accepted the place as I thought it was a better uni, assuming it was the right thing to do.

After working and travelling, I went to Sheffield and straight away I knew it wasn't for me. The first time I went there was in the car driving up and I just felt so unprepared. Most people carry on but I just thought there is no way I'm going to do this. I wasn't enjoying my time and so, within weeks, I left and had to take another year out. I've spent the last nine months working in building construction and I've learned how to use tools and earned money, but most of all I've gained perspective.

In September, I'm starting the original course at MMU. I've been able to visit and think about what it would be like to live in the city and I've met people who are already there. These are all factors I didn't think about the first time around. I'm much more focused now and I feel really excited about starting. **TR**

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Guide to clearing Gap year

Have fun exploring on your gap year and help build your CV

By Kit Macdonald

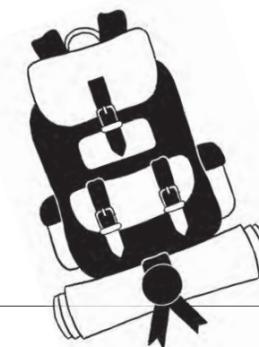
Whatever you want to do with your gap year, a little planning goes a long way. As Stefan Wathan, CEO of the Year Out Group, emphasises: "You could 'suck it and see' if you want to be flexible and spontaneous," he says. "But you run the risk of leaving it too late to really get value out of your year." Better to have a plan in place as early as possible – if you need to raise funds, set aside some time for paid work, with a deadline to motivate you to save.

You can combine classic money-saving tricks with new technology to save effectively, adds Rosie Bannister of MoneySavingExpert.com. "Put money in a savings account, and think about having a new clothes ban or making your own lunches," she says. "Track your spending too – there are lots of apps out there now to help you."

Climate crisis concerns are making stay-at-home or Europe-only gap years increasingly popular – especially

interrailing – though long-haul trips are common among a generation that views travel as part of life. STA Travel's most popular long-haul destinations are still Australia and New Zealand, but Japan and the Philippines are gaining fast. Whatever you plan to do while you are away, avoid programmes that exploit people or animals. Using an approved provider is the best way, or, failing that, do some research before you commit. "Orphanage volunteering" is becoming taboo and the Year Out Group is among those that have pledged not to support it.

The gap year holy grail is one that takes in meaningful activities and CV-building alongside fun. "If you're taking that time out, make it count and learn something from it," says Erin Bartley, careers adviser at Skills Development Scotland. "That's not to say that you can't have fun too – even if you build a six-week volunteering placement into a year out and travel for the rest, that will look fantastic on your CV."



Gap year tips

Planning a gap year is all about working out what you, personally, want from it – not anybody else. Here are three very different ideas for what should be one of the most exciting years of your life

Travelling

This is not, financially speaking, for everyone, but if you can do it, a year of pure travelling in south-east Asia or Latin America, or less obvious areas such as the Caucasus (Georgia is a treat) or central Asia (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are top picks) can be as valuable as any other kind of gap year. Staying in the UK to work or volunteer and going on a few different trips is another way to get a lot of travel experience out of your year. G Adventures is one of the best resources for small-group adventure tours, and the "travel deals" section of its website has attractive discounts on trips.

Conservation volunteering

Wildlife or environmental conservation-focused gap years can be a great way to balance concern for the environment with the urge to travel. There are endless options, but Costa Rica, with its extraordinary jungles, coastlines and biodiversity, is one of the best. Placements are available helping to protect nesting turtles, sloths and great green macaws, and the country makes for wonderful backpacking and hiking trips. The opportunity to learn some Spanish is another reason why Costa Rica is one of the best gap-year destinations.

Working

Sites such as myworldofwork, gapyear and projects-abroad all contain information on CV-building gap years. Working in Australia or New Zealand for a year remains a hugely popular choice and many companies have excellent assistance to make it happen. Latitude Global Volunteering offers tailored placements in New Zealand, working at outdoor activity centres and helping teach in local boarding schools. STA, meanwhile, can arrange your Australian working-holiday visa and help place you in a job, with deckhand, grape-picking or cafe work among the most popular. KM

No time for a gap year but want to expand your horizons pre-university? Five tips for summer breaks

By Kit MacDonald

1 Travel bargains

Super-cheap breaks to interesting places are readily available on an ongoing basis to those who know where to look - sign up to email services such as Jack's Flight Club and keep an eye on sites such as flynous.com and holidaypirates.com for the latest sales and error fares.

2 Staycations

From Devon and Cornwall to the Peak District and all the way up to the North Coast 500 road trip around the north of Scotland, the UK is teeming with bucolic staycation options. London, Glasgow and Manchester are top picks if the bright lights are more your thing.

3 Language learning

Intensive language-learning courses can be a great way to cram some serious personal development into a short time, and they often entail travelling to an fascinating location.

Why not try searching studytravel.com for ideas? You could end up spending anything from a fortnight mastering Spanish and flamenco in Seville to a month combining French with surfing in Biarritz this September.

4 The new volunteering

STA's Thailand "voluntour" trip manages to include three vastly different experiences: exploring Bangkok, volunteering to work with elephants, and time on the alternately idyllic and party-hearty island of Koh Phangan. The trip promises to pack in a whole gap year's worth of experiences - in just 15 days.

5 Festival fun

Partying in a field is always a recipe for a good time, but festivals can also be great ways to discover new cultures. Even though summer is drawing to a close, there are still plenty of options for intrepid music lovers. These range from lakeside reggae, skating and dance workshops at Uprising (uprising.sk) in Slovakia to thoughtfully curated beats and art in a former military site at Horst (horststartsandmusic.com) in Belgium.



ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH

Experience

Cicely and Phoebe Blandford Sisters share their gap year choices

Cicely, 20:

Besides my desperate need for a break from academia, I chose to take a gap year to ensure university was the right step for me (before I was thousands of pounds in debt). Unlike most, I avoided south-east Asia and instead spent two months living in Nepal, working in a school that educates children from areas affected by the 2015 earthquake. It was so rewarding to fully immerse myself in their lifestyle rather than spend only a few days visiting the main attractions. The whole experience of adjusting to a new environment made me a much more self-assured individual who is far less afraid to step outside their comfort zone. **KM**

Phoebe, 22:

I, on the other hand, took the "classic" gap year route, spending three months travelling around south-east Asia and Australia. My time away strengthened my character considerably and for the first time in my life I felt what it was like to be truly independent. Experiences such as losing my passport at the Cambodian border, or the feeling of arriving on the night train into a bustling Vietnamese city at 5am were daunting, but the cultures we were immersed in and the places we saw far exceeded my expectations. I was not originally considering a gap year, but I am hugely grateful for the time it allowed me to rest and mature before the next stage of my life. **KM**

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRISTOPHER L. PROCTOR; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS

Extracurricular activities are more than just an add-on to your studies

By Naomi Larsson

From bagpipe playing to the Nicholas Cage appreciation society, universities across the country have all kinds of weird and wonderful activities on offer for students. Extracurricular activities are more than just an add-on to your studies. Whether they're faith, politics, sports or culture related, societies have been proven to improve students' academic performance and employability. The "soft skills" you learn like leadership, organisation and resilience are what employers are looking for.

"It's important that students realise how much extracurriculars can help them build personalities, skills and CVs. Companies are looking for degrees and grades, but more importantly what you can bring to a role in terms of personality and skills apart from your degree," says Nupur Nair, societies executive officer at Loughborough students' union.

Apart from the social aspect, taking part in extracurricular activities can change how you feel about what you want to do after graduating. "You might end up volunteering and ignite a passion for working in an NGO,"

says Bournemouth University's head of careers and employability, David Wakeford. "By just seizing an opportunity, it could take you in a different direction."

James Milne, 23, is a junior brewmaster at Brew Dog, who graduated from Newcastle University in September 2018 with a degree in chemical engineering and got his job through his interest in brewing. "As a student I was in the real ale society, which was basically going around to different pubs and sampling beers. I also joined StuBrew, Europe's first student-run brewery, and became student brewmaster. I graduated in September and two weeks later joined Brew Dog as a junior brewer, working in the cellar and filtration."

If you're not sure about which society to join, it's worth browsing your freshers' fair. "It's the first opportunity you have to interact with student committees and see what's on offer," explains Nair. "Keep your mind as open as a parachute, because you'll want to take in as much as possible," she advises. "It's worth looking things up beforehand. And if you can't find a society you're interested in, you can start your own."

The 'soft skills' you learn from extracurriculars – such as leadership, organisation and resilience – are what employers are looking for



Keep an open mind and seize opportunities

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

The student movement is continuing to mobilise and agitate for change

By Ilyas Nagdee, former black students' officer, NUS

The youth strikes for climate action earlier this year saw thousands of young people walk out of their classrooms across the country and on to the streets to demand a response to the global climate catastrophe. This shone a light on the power of young people to mobilise and agitate for change.

Students have campaigned on the price of accommodation at Durham, for a decolonised curriculum at Leeds Beckett, and for space to pray at Cardiff. They've tackled the lower grades that BAME students receive relative to their white peers at Aston. They've also occupied buildings over racism at Goldsmiths, gone rent striking in Bristol, and challenged the Prevent Duty at Leicester. Students countrywide have urged their universities to divest of arms companies, human rights abusers and fossil fuels. Student politics is on the rise and with the future of higher education being reshaped before our eyes, there's never been a more exciting time to be involved.

Many people think of student politics as protesting and picketing in the rain, which frankly isn't true. Student politics

is a venture which introduces you to passionate people from across the globe hoping to make a positive difference in the world. It helps you establish a group of friends who you will debate, discuss, argue, teach and learn from.

My time at Manchester and at the National Union of Students taught me that student politics has created a generation defiantly rejecting the status quo and challenging inequality. It's easy to get involved: get to your freshers' fairs and see what you might be interested in, whether it's the living wage, affordable accommodation or campaigning for a liberated curriculum. If you're unsure, most campaigns and activist groups have meet and greet events over the first week or two, so head to those to get a feel for what's best for you. As the year goes on, new groups will pop up in response to incidents on campus or wider society – don't be afraid to get your hands stuck in!

Late last year, I was able to hear the phenomenal Asad Rehman (director of War on Want) speak and he said the key part of being a "student activist" isn't the student bit – it's the fact you're an activist, who just happens to be a student. So, think beyond A-levels, apprenticeships and degrees, and take part in creating a just world.



Ilyas Nagdee

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY



Student campaigns

Activism is alive and well in 2019. So what are students protesting about?

Climate emergency

Students demanded urgent action earlier this year as they joined Extinction Rebellion protestors on the streets of London. They also care about sustainability more broadly: students signed #TheLastStraw pledge, which stopped more than 40 students' unions using plastic straws this year.

Costly housing

Students also continue to fight against extortionate accommodation fees. This culminated in a national day of action against the student housing crisis on 6 March. In Bristol, more than 150 students reportedly withheld payments to the university in protest at the cost of halls and called for increased transparency in the rent-setting process. The protest led to results: the university has promised to reduce the accommodation costs for hundreds of students.

Decolonising the curriculum

This campaign continues to be a significant topic inside universities. The movement challenges the structural legacies of colonialism and racism and demands more diverse representation on course modules. With BAME students less likely to get a first or a 2.1 than their white peers, students are also asking their universities to become more inclusive and equitable.

Suzanne Bearne

1495



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Guide to clearing What to do

Settling into a new city can involve a lot of life admin

By Tess Reidy

Whether the thought of being away from home fills you with fear, or you can't wait to be fully independent, settling into a new city can involve a lot of life admin. In order to get ahead and set yourself up for a successful year, here's what you need to do to keep your life on track.

Register with a GP and dentist

Some people don't bother signing up with a practice if they're able to get to their home GP quickly, but if you have regular prescriptions, or are farther away, do it straight away. Most universities send you the relevant information before you arrive on campus and there are welcome talks in the first week that cover what to do. Some surgeries will have a stall on moving day, so you can sign up. Do it then.

Open a bank account

Most high street banks offer student accounts with incentives such as a free railcard and a big overdraft. Newer banking apps will help you track your spending through instant push notifications and by slotting your purchases into categories.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY; ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH



Insure your stuff

If something gets lost or damaged, you don't want to be stuck with no phone and no way of contacting home or completing your work. Check whether your halls have insurance and look into buying additional student-specific policies. Some bank accounts offer insurance too.

Find a hobby

Whether you're on the hunt for a new hobby or you want to maintain your existing interests in a new city, joining clubs is a good way to settle in and meet people with shared interests. Before you go, see if they have a society you might be into and plan to go to the relevant meet-and-greet events in the first weeks. It's scary, but just go.

If you can't find what you're after, get in touch with the students' union. They often support students to set up new clubs and societies.

Whether you're on the hunt for a new hobby or you want to maintain your existing interests, joining clubs is a good way to meet people

Student essentials

Handy hints on what to pack for your new life as a student, from kitchen basics to a mattress topper

Accommodation is often quite basic, so it's important to take items from home to decorate your room, making it feel less temporary. It's the only space that's yours, so make it a nice place to come back to. Consider books, fairy lights, photos and posters.

Bring a drying rack and coat hangers. Tumble-drying clothes in university accommodation is expensive and time-consuming.

The classic doorstep not only means you seem approachable, it also makes moving things in and out easier.

Pack some cutlery and crockery. Not everyone does their washing up and people borrow your things. You don't want to find yourself without a plate to eat off. If you're moving into a flat, think about setting up a WhatsApp group with your future housemates, so you can discuss who brings what.

You'll need an extension lead. There are never enough plugs.

A basic medical kit is essential, because you are going to get freshers' flu. Think a box of tissues, pain relief, plasters and cough sweets.

A pack of cards or board games will come in useful for socialising. They're also a good icebreaker and fun for nights in or out.

As well as your usual electrical items (your phone, a charger, a laptop if you have one, a USB and perhaps even a printer), don't forget a good old-fashioned notepad and pen.

In addition to your favourite bed linen, consider bringing a mattress topper - mattresses in student halls can be horrible. Some extra cushions can make things comfy too.

And lastly, pack a Hawaiian shirt or some daft accessories for fancy dress. You'll find a use for them, particularly if you join a sports society. TR

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Experience

Farris Simmons, 21, went through clearing in 2018 to study content, media and film production

PHOTOGRAPHY: OPHELIA WYNNIE; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS



I was uncomfortable from the start at my other university. I felt I didn't fit, and that the city didn't suit me. I had an interview for a part-time job at Waitrose, but the atmosphere seemed so constricted. I didn't do any freshers' stuff - I was just unhappy.

As soon as I made my decision to leave, I looked up vacancies and applied to MetFilm School, London through clearing. I didn't know then, but this was the last day I could have got on the course. I emailed and heard back within the hour. They were really supportive and told me what I needed to do. There were hitches with some paperwork, but it didn't stop me.

I've found this course really fun and interactive, and the teaching is supportive. It's very inclusive - everyone gets an opportunity to contribute and no one gets left behind. I've just finished a project I'm really proud of - a short documentary on homelessness. I'm not very talkative but everyone is friendly. I preferred to sort out my own accommodation as it made sense financially.

I had my doubts about going to uni, but now I'm here, I'm staying - I'm gaining a lot more than I expected. In clearing, I'd say don't be afraid to ask questions and be persistent - don't wait for people to message you back; you have to get on to the phone and chase. You need to weigh up the pros and cons and work out what's right - not just stay on a course because you're there. **Helena Pozniak**

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You'll want to fuel your brain and body with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables

By Pixie Turner,
nutritionist and food blogger

For many young people, university will be the first time you have to cook and fend for yourself, and that can feel overwhelming. As a student, it's likely that you'll have a smaller budget to spend on food than your parents, but that doesn't mean you can't make food that tastes just as good.

In my experience, canned goods are your best friends – they're cheap, versatile, and they don't go off, so there's less food waste. With cans of chopped tomatoes and beans, you have the base for a delicious bean chilli. Swap the beans for chickpeas and add some carrots and you're heading for a tagine. Or you can turn it into an easy tomato sauce with spaghetti.

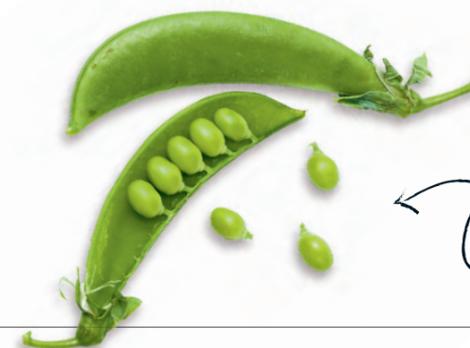
To cut costs, it's worth ensuring you have at least a few meat-free meals every week – a can of beans or a couple of eggs are far cheaper than meat or most fish. Not only is this a good option for saving money, but beans in particular are an excellent source of fibre – something you definitely want to get enough of.

Use carrots in a tagine

For your first big shop it's worth getting a delivery, especially if you don't have a car. Buying in bulk is cheaper in the long run, and you don't want to be carrying kilos of pasta and rice around with you – especially if you're coming down with freshers' flu. If you get on well with your flatmates, it can even be worth having a weekly shop delivered, as you can decide a budget in advance, and spread the cost between you. It's unlikely you'll have every evening meal together, but it's a great thing to try and organise a communal dinner once a week. One person can make a main dish, while another can make a dessert for everyone to share.

It can be tempting to rely on ready meals. While you don't need to feel guilty about falling back on the occasional processed meal in an emergency, you'll want to fuel your brain and body with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains, good protein, and fats like olive oil, to get you fit, healthy and ready to absorb all the knowledge you can.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY



Go meat-free every few days

Meal planner

It's cheaper to bulk buy ingredients, but eating the same thing every night can get boring. With a little creativity, a big bag of fresh veg can be turned into several different meals. Plan a varied diet around some cheap, healthy staples

Fresh tomatoes

Pasta: Roast your tomatoes in the oven with olive oil, salt and pepper, and dried basil. Meanwhile, cook some spaghetti, and mix the two together. Serve with grated parmesan (I recommend buying a big bag of grated frozen cheese – it's cheaper and easier).

Tagine: Chop up your tomatoes and any selection of veg you have. Cook them in a frying pan with olive oil, then add couscous and the same amount of water. Leave to absorb the water, then make a well in the middle and crack two eggs into the pan. Make sure you leave the yolks nice and runny.

Soup: Tomato soup tastes even better with fresh tomatoes, a little vegetable stock, and beans.

Sweet potato

Brunch: Grate your sweet potato, mix in an egg, some flour, and a little chopped onion. Form into patties and fry on both sides. Makes a great brunch option, especially with salsa and guacamole.

Soup: Steam or roast your sweet potato, then season well and blend into a thick and creamy soup. Best served with plenty of crusty bread.

Stew: Fry some chopped onion and garlic in olive oil, then add some diced chicken until cooked through. Add a can of chopped tomatoes and some diced sweet potato and cook the excess water off. When it's almost ready, add a can of black or kidney beans. Some smoked paprika is the magic ingredient for introducing flavour. By using both beans and chicken, you get all the protein and extra fibre, at half the cost. **PT**



Instead of shelling out on new clothes, why not get creative?

By Sophie Benson

It may be cheap and on-trend but fast fashion isn't the answer for cash-strapped students. For Mia Smith, a fashion communication student at Liverpool John Moores University, it's not an option. "I am strongly aware of the effects fast fashion has on the environment and I believe they're too catastrophic to ignore," she says. "More people need to be aware."

Thanks to our hyper-connected world and ethical fashion movements such as Fashion Revolution, we know more about the industry than ever. We know that garment factories pump toxic chemicals into local rivers, farmers use dangerous pesticides to grow the huge amounts of cotton needed, and thousands of gallons of water are used to make just one T-shirt. "The industry's dirty secrets are now easily uncovered and once revealed they're hard to ignore," says Jessica Donnelly, programme leader of fashion communication and styling at De Montfort University.

Not only does fast fashion have a negative impact on people and the environment, it's not that great for your bank balance either. Our favourite brands encourage us to buy more and more and it all adds up. In fact, we now

buy 60% more clothing than we did 15 years ago but keep it for half as long. Instead of shelling out on new clothes, why not get creative and make the most of what you already own?

- Want to update your old jeans? Cut the hems with scissors and pop them in the wash for an instant frayed look.
- Gently run a blunt razor over the surface of knitwear to get rid of bobbles.
- Add fringing to the hem of a skirt, sew patches on to a vintage denim jacket, glue sequins to your sliders or embroider a slogan on to an old T-shirt.
- Dyeing your clothes is a great way to completely transform them. Go for a uniform colour or grab some elastic bands and embrace the tie-dye trend.
- Instead of hiding your repairs, make a feature of them, whether stitching up holes with colourful thread or patching jeans with printed fabric.

We now buy
60%
more clothing
than we did 15
years ago but
keep it for half
as long

Ethical tips

Fed up of fast fashion? Here's how to start a revolution with your wardrobe

1 Swap, don't shop

If you want to head off to halls with a fresh new look, organise a clothes swap with your friends. Around half of what's hanging in our wardrobes goes unworn, so you're sure to find some great new clothes in perfect condition.

2 Sharing is caring

Gain a roommate, gain a new wardrobe too. Sharing clothes is a great way of expanding your outfit options without spending a penny. Just be sure to ask first ...

3 Try new brands

Sustainable clothes can be expensive, but there are plenty of reasonably priced ethical brands around too. Lost Shapes and Birdsong make affordable statement T-shirts, Nude Ethics curates Scandi-inspired ethical fashion and Lucy & Yak have reached cult status thanks to their boiler suits and dungarees that don't break the bank.

4 Go charity shopping

Fancy a fashion treasure hunt? Head to your local charity shop. Oxfam, Barnardo's, Cancer Research and British Heart Foundation are particularly good for their dedicated vintage sections and curated boutiques.

5 Shop online

Delete those fast fashion apps and scroll Depop, eBay, Vinted or Etsy instead. You'll find everything from bold vintage pieces to unworn high street clothes. **SB**

Experience

Melanie Lehmann, 24, is a third-year student, BA fine art, Central Saint Martins



PHOTOGRAPHY: OPHELIA WYNNIE; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MORROSS

I started selling clothes I didn't wear, on Depop, 18 months ago and after about half a year it became a business. I started off looking for stock in charity stores and at car boot sales, and I go back home to Thailand a couple of times a year where there are loads of vintage clothes that are really cheap. Wherever I go, I'll make sure that I find charity shops or markets to go to. I've dedicated two wardrobes just for Depop.

When you take photos, it is best to put the clothes on someone - that's when people buy them. It doesn't even take that long, an hour or two to take pictures of everything I have in stock. I don't upload them right away; Sundays are very good days and I'll leave quite a bit until payday because I know instantly there are going to be loads of customers.

I recommend selling your stuff, especially when you're a student, because you can save the environment and earn money from it. I didn't know that it would become my business, but I think it's about taking chances. It started off being pocket money and now it's helping me pay my rent. **SB**

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Guide to clearing Decorating

Create a cosy space where you can relax from your workload

By Rachel Hall

When Riya Agarwal moved to the UK from India to study a master's in art and interior design at the Royal College of Art, she struggled with homesickness, and found London "gloomy and dingy". As she developed her interior design skills on her course, Agarwal found the best remedy was to decorate her bedroom. "We're taught as interior designers to address the mindset and psychology of people who inhabit the space," she says.

She filled her room with calming shades of white and off-white, with a couple of bright colours to create focal points. "Light colours bring lightness to your mind," she says.

If you're headed to uni this September, that's probably an effect you'd like your room to have. Agarwal recommends thinking about what you want your space to achieve. She wanted to foster a sense of belonging in a new country, but also to create a cosy space where she could relax from her intense workload.

She dressed her bed with bedding from Ikea and cushions, so she can "feel like it's somebody hugging me" when she

jumps into it, and filled her room with plants to make her "feel like somebody is living with you". She also stuck up photos of friends, family and her boyfriend. "There are times in this student life when you feel a little low and I feel like these memories are very important for you to cheer up," she says.

Agarwal does her uni work in the library, but students who prefer working at home might want to focus on making their desk space comfortable.

One inexpensive way to help you concentrate on your studies is to move your bed away from your desk, says Friederike Weid, a recent university graduate who runs a popular interiors Instagram account. Uni work can also be turned into a decorative feature through matching coloured boxes, she adds.

If you're able to, adding shelves to walls can increase storage and allow you to change your decoration as and when you feel like it – just make sure you ask your university first.

Weid also recommends natural candles, room fragrances and lighting to create different atmospheres. You can create a mood board with inspiring phrases, pictures and dried flowers to keep you going through long hours of revision. The main idea is to "try to give your room personality".

HOME
SWEET
HOME

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY; ILLUSTRATION: TOBY TRIUMPH



Houseplant tips

A room teeming with verdant foliage is all the rage on Instagram at the moment, but what if you're not as green-fingered as you'd hoped? Here are some top tips for looking after your leafy greens

1 Take a note of names

When you buy your plants, make sure to note down the name and any advice from the shop.

2 Minimal effort is best

Consider choosing plants that are easy to look after – cacti, aloe vera, succulents, snake plants, spider plants and philodendrons look great with minimal effort.

3 How much sunlight?

Give your plants as much light as they need. Full light means four to six hours of direct sunlight, partial light equates to two to three hours and plants that like shade should have no more than an hour of sunlight each day.

4 Plant hydration

Use warm water to hydrate your plants whenever the soil is dry up to your second knuckle.

5 Lovely leaves

Consider fertilising your plants and cleaning their leaves to keep them in tip-top condition. RH

University isn't for everyone ...

By Suzanne Bearne



Since it's likely you'll walk away with £50,000 of debt, it's worth seeing what other options are available before you agree to university and start drawing down on that student loan.

Apprenticeships remain a popular option, with 375,800 starts in the 2017/18 academic year, according to government figures. Ryehan Amir, 20, took up an accountancy apprenticeship at water treatment solutions provider

ESC Global after his first year of A-levels. "The debt that students walk out of uni with was something I was uneasy about, and I felt that I would be better suited to a vocational qualification," explains Amir, who lives in Scunthorpe and is also studying for his Association of Accounting Technicians qualification. "When I was at college I felt that, in some quarters, there was a belief that to succeed, you need to go to university. Now I know that this isn't the case."

There are also plenty of other choices beyond the typical three-year university route. Students may decide to study for a foundation degree, which focuses on developing skills for the workplace.

Others may wish to enter the workforce and study for a part-time degree, opt for distance learning to save money and live at home, or look to a private university for more choice. "As long as your course is registered, you can get student finance for at least part of your tuition fees," says Polly Wiggins, a careers education consultant. "You could also consider going to university abroad, but be aware you won't be entitled to UK student finance."

Finding a regular job can also bring about interesting opportunities. "You can use it to test out your ideas without the commitment of further study and [you] will be developing new skills and contacts in your industry," says Wiggins. "You could then go on to do further training if you want to progress to higher-level jobs."

Alternatively you could start your own business. "Developing your entrepreneurial skills and building a network to support your new business will teach you things you'll never learn in school," she adds.

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'Even to this day, I don't know what I would have studied'



Alex Durrant chose an accountancy apprenticeship over uni, and now he's co-launched a dating app

There weren't enough reasons convincing me to go to university. After my A-levels I decided to take on an apprenticeship at the accountancy firm I'd worked at the two previous summers and start earning money. In the back of my mind the thought of university lingered. I thought that perhaps after a year, with money saved up, I could choose to go off to uni if I wanted. In the end, I got used to working and the routine. I knew I wanted to continue to learn on the job and just savoured the practicality of it. To be honest, I didn't know what I would study at uni either. A lot my friends didn't know what they really wanted to study and ended up choosing any subject.

After a year, I decided to leave Great Yarmouth for Leeds, moving into my home friend's university house with nine others. It was mad. I was working

in audit, from 8am-8pm, and didn't sleep for a year. That year, my friend Max and I came up with the idea of a dating app. We spotted the opportunity at uni, seeing guys sitting around the sofa each night spending time going through profiles that never materialised into a date. We realised there was a massive gap in communication and a need for a different kind of dating app. With Jigtalk, jigsaw pieces covering a person's face are unveiled one by one during every conversation you have, until you see their face. It encourages conversation. We launched it in London in January.

The practical skills I learned through my accountancy job set me up for a dream scenario: launching my own business. It accelerated my professional life – I already had the skillset to deal with clients and the financial acumen. All that hard learning between the ages of 18 and 20 put me in great stead. It's also meant I'm not seriously in debt. I would have owed at least £27,000, and even to this day, I don't know what I would have studied. I don't regret my decision one bit. **SB**



Alex Durrant

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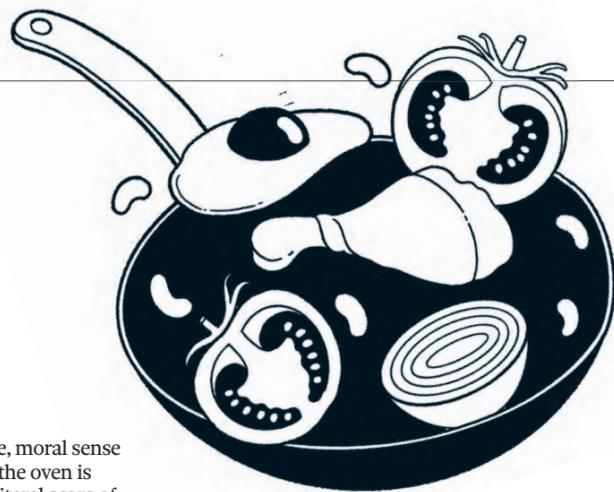
I WAS IMPRESSED BY THE QUALITY OF THE TEACHING AND THE FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE ON CAMPUS

Katherine Higgs, Student



How to share your kitchen

By Alfie Packham, deputy editor, Guardian Universities



If you're headed to university in September, this might well be your first time living with flatmates.

If you've seen any sitcom about student life, you'll know the communal kitchen is the site of much drama. But drama isn't always ideal in real life, where access to the sink is really your main priority. So here are some tips for keeping the peace.

If your kitchen is often left in a mess, you may be tempted to leave your flatmates a note to maybe perhaps think about cleaning up after themselves, please. But that's never a good look. Rather than concede any wrongdoing, your housemate will probably ignore your note anyway, or worse, proceed to vacuum passive aggressively while maintaining eye contact with you. Which is why you shouldn't bother with any

written rotas, either. A loose, moral sense of whose turn it is to clean the oven is fine – but avoid keeping a literal score of which housemate is laziest.

Try to adopt a communitarian approach to life in the flat. Make the occasional meal for each other, empty the bins before they become sentient, and be open to sharing. Who really cares if someone siphoned your milk for their tea? Sometimes you have to let it go.

But if everyone isn't on board with this philosophy, try setting some ground rules for what is communal kitchen territory and what is private:

Fine to share:

- Milk. (You can borrow someone's milk for a cup of tea. But not for a whole béchamel sauce, come on.)
- Herbs, spices, salt and pepper.

- Cheap jarred condiments, such as jam. Maybe not the expensive ones – honey, for example.

Definitely NOT communal:

- That special cake your flatmate was given by their tearful parents.
- Chocolate in any form.
- Cheese, especially French or a fancy type of cheese.
- Anything else that seems fancy, or French.

Enjoy your new student life!

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