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.”
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 bit more. The first is a bimonthly dip in the early 2000s birthrate, which 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 open 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.

“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, 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 Clare Befham 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 by 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 ringling 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.”

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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 reword 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 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.

“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’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

“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

“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.

Katherine Swindells Welfare officer at the University of Sheffield

“Take comfort in the fact that clearing really does work.”

By Helena Pozniak

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, 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
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.

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 re-reflect on your decision and make sure that it’s the right one for you.
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.

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.

Samantha Pettitt and mum Karen

Guide to clearing | 2019
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 find out about things happening at the university.

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.

Work tips

1. 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 university homepage and social media.

2. 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, a student at the University of East Anglia (UEA), says this year her university will have a special team dedicated to social media during clearing. “We don’t communicate with students in any other way.” 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 email. Having said that, if an email comes our way, some of the team may send one back,” she 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.

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 sugar 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 McNair, welfare and funding advisor 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 £9,364 for those living away outside the capital, but they’re means tested – if household earnings are £50,000, these figures fall to about £8,469 and £6,738 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 funding. “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.”
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.
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 “quieter rooms”, for students looking to live in halls available, there are still great opportunities for living in private houses in town or in dedicated halls.

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 StudentHalls, 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 students, although it’s best not to rely exclusively on these.

Google reviews, although it’s best not to rely exclusively on these. It’s helpful to search for places online to check reviews and trusted accreditation, like伎, which gives properties and landlords a rating. It’s also useful to check out Google reviews, although it’s best not to rely exclusively on these.
If you ace your A-levels and get better results than expected, how about an upgrade?

By Tess Reidy

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, then I think that should take priority over everything else,” says Souto-Otero.

21% of AAB applicants are under-predicted each year

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. Be 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 a 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 result 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.”

Souto-Otero says that although the process is nerve-racking, it is worth it. “My first choice had asked for ABB, but on result 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, then I think that should take priority over everything else,” says Souto-Otero.

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.

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.

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 opportunities to study abroad? How much contact time will you have per week?

Take an open day

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

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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
Choose your degree by focusing on your passion

By Lucy Jolin

Alicia 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 in 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 do six months after they leave university.

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.”

There’s still a shortage of women in tech

Shajda Akthar undertook a degree apprenticeship and gained her BSc in digital and technology solutions while at Accenture. “I 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 science.”

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.”

Degrees bring employability
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 Access Able 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.”
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 opportunistic 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.

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

By Suzanne Bearne

Top 5 apps

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 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
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%).

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

Having a budget is the best thing you can do 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.

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

By Suzanne Bearn

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.

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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 there, especially as students often spread themselves spending the next three years of your life,” he 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.

Alexandra Curn, 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’

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?

Before

It’s a great 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 Carrickfergus 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.

Belfast

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 vanity 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.

Brighton

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 get a bit more independent, but you’ll become it, especially as students often spend across the city after your 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’re going 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.

City profiles

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

Experience

When I found out that I didn’t get into either my first-choice university or my insurance offer, I panicked. I didn’t have a plan B. 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 uni 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.

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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 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.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY
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.
Whatever you want to do on 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 interesting – 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.”

By Kit Macdonald

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. Adventures is one of the best resources for small-group adventure tours, and the “Traveller 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, coasts, 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 businesses 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 downhill, grape-picking or cafe work among the most popular. KM

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.

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

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Gap Year

Guide to clearing | 2019
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 a 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 (horstarsandmusic.com) in Belgium.

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 right 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

Experience
Cicely and Phoebe Blandford
Sisters share their gap year choices

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 fun 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, universities have been known 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, as opposed to 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 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 brewer at Brew Dog, who graduated from Lancaster 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 different pubs and sampling beers. I also joined initiatives, 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 fresher’s 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

The student movement is continuing to mobilise and agitate for change

By Ryan Nagdee, former black students’ officer, NUS

The youths strike 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 showed 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 and fossil fuels. Student politics is on the rise 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 fresher’s fair and see what you might be interested in, whether it’s the living wage, affordable accommodation or campaigning for a liberalized 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 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.
Settling into a new city can involve a lot of life admin

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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.

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 meet people. 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.

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 into a 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 doormat 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 to warn your 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 fresher’s 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

Got your exam results?

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abdn.ac.uk/clearing
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 prefer to sort out my own accommodation as it makes 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 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

Farris Simmons, 21, went through clearing in 2018 to study content, media and film production.
You’ll want to fuel your brain with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. For many young people, the thought of cooking can be overwhelming. As a student, it’s likely 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.

For your first big shop it’s worth planning a menu that makes the most of your spending. Always compare prices and don’t forget to add in any meals you have planned for later that week. One person can make a main dish, while another can make a dessert to share. You’ll be less likely to waste food, and your meals will be more diverse. Use carrots in a curry, or try a vegetable stew in a tagine. If you get stuck, Google “meat-free meals” and you’ll find a whole range of options.

To cut costs, it’s worth ensuring you have the right foods on hand. Not only is this a good option for saving money, but beans in particular are an excellent source of protein, and fats like olive oil, to get you fit, healthy and ready to absorb all the knowledge you can. For your first big shop, it’s worth making a list of your weekly meals and buying in bulk if you can. It can be tempting to rely on easy meals, especially with salsa and guacamole. Best served with plenty of crusty bread.

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. A healthy breakfast is an important start to your day. Not only do you have to cook and fend for yourself, and that can feel overwhelming. As a student, it’s likely 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.

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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 now 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, or hem a T-shirt using a pair of scissors and pop them in the wash for an instant frayed look.
• Instead of hiding your repairs, make a feature of them, whether stitching up a hole or inserting lining to make your old clothes look new.
• Fade your jeans a great way to completely transform them. Go for a uniform colour or grab some elastic bands and embrace the tie-dye trend.
• Owing 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.
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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 in perfect condition. Around half of what’s hanging in our wardrobes goes unworn, so you’re sure to find some great new clothes in perfect condition.

3. Try new brands

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

4. Go charity shopping

Eco-friendly second-hand stores are just a stone’s throw away from 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.

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 selling clothes I didn’t wear, on Depop, 18 months ago and after about half a year it became a business. I started looking for stock in charity stores and at car boot sales, and I go back home to Bangkok 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.

By Sophie Benson

PHOTOGRAPHY: OPHELIA WYNNE; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS

Guide to clearing  Fashion

45

Experience

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

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By Sophie Benson

PHOTOGRAPHY: OPHELIA WYNNE; ILLUSTRATION: KATE MOROSS

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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”.

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**Guide to clearing: Decorating**

Create a cosy space where you can relax from your workload

By Rachel Hall

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.

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**Houseplant tips**

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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.
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.

**De-finitely 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.

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