



Higher
Horizons+

Be University Ready: A Guide for Y12s and 13s

2020 Edition

We know that deciding what you want to do after college or sixth form can be confusing. If you're thinking about university, you may be wondering what your next steps are and what to do next.

We've put together the information in this booklet to guide you through your final year at sixth form or college. It will give you some information to help you through the UCAS application process including tips on writing your personal statement and how to choose a university.

If you have any questions about anything in this guide, or higher education generally, you can contact us for free, impartial advice at www.higherhorizons.co.uk/ask





How to Choose a University

Courses

There are lots of benefits to going to university, but your course should be your main motivator. Make sure you choose a course you'll enjoy, it's no fun studying a subject for three or four years if you don't like it! Different universities offer different courses so make sure you do some research.

Even courses that sound the same may be taught in different ways at different universities. For example, you may study different books on different English Literature courses, different time periods on different History courses, or learn and use different programming languages on different Computer Science courses. Make sure you compare information on the UCAS website, the university website, and in prospectuses.

Location

There are over 100 universities in the UK for you to choose from. Thinking about what sort of place you might want to live in for three or four years will also help you narrow down your choices. It may be worth thinking about if you want to study close to home, or move further away, or if you would prefer to live in a big city or a smaller town.

There are no right or wrong answers, but you should make sure that you are comfortable with your choice and will feel happy living there during your time at university.

Types of University Campus vs. City Universities

Campus-based universities are located all on one site. They have their own shops, bars, restaurants, sports facilities and accommodation all in one place, offering a real sense of community. However, if the buzz and greater variety of a city is more appealing, a city-based university may be more up your street. City-based universities can have buildings spread all over a large city, so you may have to hop on a bus or tram between lectures!

City-based universities often mean living in the middle of a city, near all the shops, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, bars and other entertainment.

Traditional vs. Modern Universities

Different universities were built at different times, so some have a traditional feel with lots of grand old buildings, while some newer universities offer more modern buildings and facilities.

Big vs. Small Universities

A larger university may offer a wider range of facilities with a larger number of students. More things to do, and more people to meet! By comparison, a smaller university might let you really get to know your fellow students, as well as your lecturers and other staff.

Entry Requirements

Different universities will have different entry requirements. Entry requirements are the grades universities ask for you to have achieved in your A Levels or BTECs. Grades are worth 'UCAS points' so you may see universities asking for grades or a combined number of UCAS points. University websites will explain this in more detail.

For almost all university courses you will need to have passed your Maths and English GCSEs, as well as achieving certain grades at A Level or BTEC. For some courses, you will also need to have studied certain subjects at A Level or BTEC. This shows the university that you already have some knowledge in this subject and are ready to study it at a higher level.

“There are lots of different things to think about when you start to narrow down your university choices. You can only apply for 5 courses, so you need to make sure you apply for courses that are right for you.”



Open Days

Every university runs Open Days throughout the year. Open Days let you visit a university and see what it's like, including the department you would be studying in, the halls of accommodation you might be living in, and wider facilities like the students' union, sports centre, and student support.

You have to book on to university Open Days through individual university websites, so when you have narrowed down which universities you are interested in it's a good idea to check out when you can visit to see it for yourself.

Here are some tips to help you get the most out of an Open Day:

1. Go to the department you'll be studying in. Three or four years studying one subject is a long time so you should meet some of the lecturers and make sure the course is right for you. Ask lots of questions, staff will be happy to answer them.
2. Talk to the Student Ambassadors. Student Ambassadors are current students, so they will tell you what it's like to live and study at that university.

3. If you're moving away, check out the accommodation so you have an idea of where you'll be living and what different options are available.
4. Find out about student societies, sports facilities, and the Students Union. There will be lots going on, so this will help you work out what clubs you might want to join or what activities you could take part in.
5. Follow your gut – it's often right. If you don't like how a university looks or feels then it may not be for you.

What to do when you get to a university Open Day

Step 1: Look for signs telling you where to go for registration or sign in.

You will typically be given a map of the university, information about what talks and sessions are happening at different times, and where to go to find specific information. Don't miss this out! This information pack will help you make the most of your time at the university you're visiting.

Step 2: Find out more about the university

Each Open Day will feature a programme of talks on different topics. It's fairly standard for there to be a talk welcoming you to the university and explaining a bit about what it's like to live and study there. There may also be talks about the local area, student accommodation and other facilities on campus. You can also usually head to an information fair where you can pick up leaflets on all aspects of university life. This part may seem boring, but it's a great way to get a sense of what a university is really like. Once you've been to two or three, you'll be able to compare and work out which university is for you!

Step 3: Find out about your course

You should always go to visit the department you'll be studying in. Here you'll be able to talk to the academic members of staff who will be teaching you, hear talks from them, and maybe even take part in a sample lecture! Some departments may show you specialist facilities you'll be studying in as well, such as science labs or medical rooms for health-related courses. You will be able to find out which topics you're likely to learn about on your course and make sure this fits with your idea of the course. For example, if you want to study history because you're really interested in the Tudor period, you'll want to make sure that's covered by your course.

Step 4: Find out about accommodation

When you go to university you can choose to either live in university-owned student accommodation, rent privately-owned student accommodation, or live at home (if you live close enough to the university). During an open day, the university will open up its student rooms so you can go and see where you might live if you come to that university. There are also usually current students available to talk to, so you can ask them questions about what it's like to live there. When you live in student accommodation you often have to share social spaces and a kitchen, though you will have your own room and might have your own bathroom. It's a good idea to see what this looks like so you know what to expect.

Step 5: Find out about the local area

The last thing to do is find out more about the local area. Universities will often advertise nearby attractions and what there is to do in the local town or city. You may want to move to a big city, or you may feel more comfortable near a smaller town. There are no rights or wrongs – but make sure the local area offers opportunities that fit your lifestyle!





A Guide to UCAS

UCAS stands for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, and is the website that all students use to apply to university in the UK. You can choose 5 courses to apply to, unless you are applying for Medicine or Veterinary courses. The deadline for applications is 15th January each year, although you may be able to apply later than this through Clearing or other UCAS services. If you are applying for Medicine or Veterinary courses, the application deadline is in October, along with the deadline for applications to Oxford and Cambridge.

Once your applications have been sent to your universities, you have to wait to hear about your offers. Offers are either conditional or unconditional. Unconditional means there is nothing more for you to do – you have been accepted to that university. Conditional means there are conditions you have to meet before the university will accept you. This is usually certain grades that you need to achieve in your A Levels or BTEC courses.

Once all your offers are back, you have to narrow your choices down to a Firm choice and an Insurance choice. The Firm choice is your first choice of university—where you really want to go—while the Insurance choice is your back up or second choice. If you have changed your mind or do not receive any offers you can apply for one more course through UCAS Extra before the end of June.

On results day, you will be able to confirm your final choice. If you have met the conditions of your offer, or had an unconditional offer which you accepted, you will automatically be accepted on to your chosen course.

If you don't get the grades you were expecting, don't panic! If you haven't met the conditions of your offer, you will have the option of entering Clearing. This means you might still be able to get a place at a university. Your teachers in school will be able to advise you on what to do on the day if this happens or there may be members of staff from local universities in your school or college when you pick up your results who you can talk to. You can also call your university to see if they will accept you with your final grades – some might if you are close to the grades you needed.

“On your UCAS application, you will have to write a personal statement. This is an opportunity for you to tell the university about yourself and why you want to study your chosen course. You have 4000 characters (one full side of A4) to persuade the university to make you an offer.”

Personal Statements

Do

- Strong opening sentence
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm – your interest in the course is key
- Discuss books you've read in your own time to demonstrate your interest in the course
- Universities will want to know about your extra-curricular activities, but only if they strengthen your application
- Keep your own voice, avoiding stilted vocabulary you wouldn't use in everyday conversation
- Check spelling and grammar and ask teachers to proof read
- Keep it relevant and focused throughout

Don't

- Avoid lists
- Avoid irrelevant quotes
- Don't feel you have to talk about everything
- Don't feel you have to stick to a formula or template
- Don't mention work experience for the sake of it. If you're going to include it, be specific and relate what you learnt or any skills you acquired to the course
- Don't forget to answer the question, 'why should we give you a place on the course?'
- Don't mention the name of any of your universities – or the course title if you're applying for different courses

Your teachers might be able to review your personal statement, or your sixth form or college may subscribe to a platform like Unifrog where you can receive help and advice on your application.

Student Finance

Tuition Fee loans - Key Facts:

- For a full-time course, the maximum tuition fee that universities or colleges can currently charge new students is £9250 (2020).
- The tuition fee loan is paid directly to the university – so you can't accidentally spend it!
- A tuition fee loan does not depend on household income.
- The loan is repayable, but only when your income is over £26,575 a year.

Maintenance Loans for living costs – Key Facts:

- All eligible students can receive a maintenance loan to help with living costs.
- The amount of the loan will depend on where you live and study.
- The loan is paid directly into your bank account each term.
- The loan is repayable, but only when your income is over £26,575 a year.

Bursaries and Scholarships:

You may be awarded further financial support depending on your chosen institution and course. The amount may be awarded based on family income, if you have been in care, or getting good grades in your A Levels or BTECs. Bursaries and scholarships do not need to be paid back.

Other financial help and support may also be available if you:

1. Have children or an adult dependent on you.
2. Have a disability, including a long-term health condition, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty.

Repayment

After graduation your loans are combined to make one amount you have to repay. You only start to pay back your student loan when you earn over £26,575. Payments come out of your wages automatically – you don't have to do anything. Your loan will be wiped out after a certain amount of time (in 2020 this currently happens after 30 years) and can never be passed on to a family member.

“Student loans are provided by Student Finance England (SFE). You have to apply for a student loan before you start university, and have to reapply every year. The two main costs incurred at university are tuition fees and living costs.”

How to work out the monthly repayment amount:

annual salary – **£26,575**
before tax

then **9%** of the remainder
work out

÷ **12** Round down
to the nearest **£1**

Here's an example...

$£30,000 - £26,575 = £3,425$
 $9\% \text{ of } £3,425 = £308.25$
 $£308.25 / 12 = £25.68$
Round down

So your monthly student loan repayment would be £25.



Budgeting

It's a good idea to have a budget when you're living at university. Your Maintenance Loan will get paid to you in three big instalments – and it's up to you to make sure the money lasts until the next payment!

Step 1:

The best place to start is to add up all the money you know you'll receive over the year. This might include:

- Your Maintenance Loan
- Extra money from scholarships, bursaries or grants
- Any salary from a part-time job

Essential Student Expenses

- Rent
- Food
- Bills (insurance, gas, electricity, water, broadband, TV Licence, mobile phone) – some of these may be included in your rent, but it's better to check!
- Transport (bus, trains, petrol for your car and car insurance)

Once you've got that covered you can think about the fun stuff! You may want to spend some of your budget on these "non-essential" student expenses:

- Nights out
- Takeaways and eating out
- Hobbies (cinema tickets, gigs, festivals, books, sports)
- Clothes
- Gym membership
- Haircuts and other beauty expenses
- Subscription services (Netflix, Amazon Prime)
- Travelling and holidays

Remember, though these things are "non-essential" they contribute to you having fun and feeling good, and having a well-rounded university experience.

Step 2:

Next, you'll want to work out how much you think you'll spend each month while you're at university.

You might know some of them – if you're going to live in university accommodation you will probably know how much this might cost you – but others might vary from week to week like how much you spend on food and transport.

According to Save the Student's National Student Money Survey 2019, the average student spends around £800 a month... but some of this is on what we might think of as 'non-essential' expenses like having a night out, ordering a takeaway, holidays, and hobbies. It's useful to think about what is essential and what is nice to have!

Step 3:

Figure out your weekly budget.

Once you know how much everything costs you can use a simple way of working out how much you have to spend each week.

1. Work out your total income for a term at university
2. Take away your essential expenses during a term at university
3. Divide the number you're left with by the number of weeks in a term (usually 12).

This will give you how much you have to spend on all those fun non-essential things each week. For example, if you have an income of £3,000 for a term, your essential expenses are £1,500, you would have £1,500 a week to spend on non-essential expenses.

Check out Save the Student (savethestudent.org) and UCAS (ucas.com) for more budgeting tips!

Remember – as a student you can access lots of savings through the NUS Totum card, Unidays app, or even save a 1/3 on train tickets with a 16-25 railcard.



Revision Tips

Let's start with the basics...

- Look after yourself! Try not to live off junk food and energy drinks
- Start planning and be as organised as you can
- Find a space where you can study in peace
- Get a decent night's sleep, especially the night before your exam!

Rereading your class notes won't help you remember everything, you need to organise your information and make notes of your notes...

- Recreate your classroom notes – keep everything for one subject / exam in one place
- Condense your notes into bitesize chunks
- Be concise – you don't need to memorise a whole textbook just key information
- Use different styles to help you remember – charts, spider diagrams, doodles, whatever works!
- For subjects like Maths or Physics write down step by step methods and keep practising
- For subjects like English and History where you have to write essays organise your notes by themes or topics
- Make yourself a revision timetable and stick to it!
- Go over past papers and look what sort of questions to look out for

Now you have notes, how do you use them? Think about your learning style...

Auditory learner

- Like to learn by hearing
- Easy to remember information that they hear
- Try – teach someone else by explaining what you know
- Try – read your notes out loud



Visual learner

- Like to learn by seeing
- Easy to remember information in diagrams, charts and illustrations
- Try - Highlighting as you read
- Try - Using flashcards



Kinaesthetic learner

- Like to learn by doing
- Easy to remember information when they act it out, or through hands-on activities
- Try – moving around as you process information
- Try – using hand motions or actions when reading



Next Step: University!

University Shopping List

If you're moving away to university there are a few essential items you'll need to buy to take with you. We've made you a quick checklist to get you started:

- Bedding – you'll need a duvet and pillows, with covers.
- Towels – probably more than one!
- Kettle and toaster – if where you're living doesn't have one.
- Plates, bowls, and cutlery
- Mugs and glasses
- Cooking utensils – spatulas, wooden spoons, a colander, a cheese grater, a tin opener etc.
- Food for your first few days (things with long best before dates like pasta and tinned goods will keep you going!)
- Toiletries
- Toilet roll
- Stationery – notepads, pens, files for organising things
- Appropriate clothing and equipment for your course (if necessary)
- Books for your course – although you may not have to buy them at all: **see what you can borrow from a new friend or the library**
- A computer or laptop – but there will be computer facilities at your university if you need to use them

Shopping List



How to be a Considerate Housemate

Moving to university and living with other people can sometimes be difficult when you don't know what to expect. There are a few simple rules to living with other people that can make living with others an enjoyable experience.

Remember – you will have your own bedroom, but will be sharing social spaces and kitchens with others.

Be respectful.

There are lots of ways to be respectful of your new house or flatmates. Be aware of your noise levels when others are studying or sleeping, and show respect for other people's property, beliefs and views.

Be clean and tidy.

Nobody likes coming in to the kitchen to get their tea ready and find piles of dirty dishes. Wash up your dishes and keep communal areas clean and tidy.

Do things together.

You'll probably find you have lots in common with your new house or flatmates. Have a movie night or cook together. You could take it in turns to host and cook for each other.

Share the bills.

If you're living somewhere where you have to pay bills, make sure you set up a method of payment that everyone agrees on and that everyone is paying an equal amount. If you live in university accommodation your bills are usually included in your rent.

Safety first.

Make sure you lock up the house and that everything is turned off when you leave.

Remember you have neighbours.

Your neighbours might not be students and it's important to be respectful to them and other people living nearby. You might not have to get up until 10am for that lecture, but they might have to leave the house at 7.30am for work, and won't appreciate being kept up by the noisy students next door.



Be University Ready Checklist

Choosing and applying for a university is a long process. It starts when you get to sixth form or college and finishes when you get your A Level and BTEC results in the summer and finalise your place.

We've summed everything up and when you should be thinking about it:

First year at sixth form or college

1. Visit universities for their Open Days
2. Research different courses and decide what you might want to study
3. Narrow down your list of universities to apply to

Second year at sixth form or college

1. Write your personal statement for your UCAS application
2. Apply to university through UCAS – for certain courses you have to apply by October, for all others the deadline is January
3. Apply for student finance – you have to do this before you arrive at university, and can do it before you have a confirmed place on a course
4. Review your offers from different universities and decide where you want to go while you wait for your exams and exam results





If you have any questions about what to do next you can contact us at
www.higherhorizons.co.uk/ask

 @Higher_Horizons  @HiHoPlus ncop@keele.ac.uk | higherhorizons.co.uk

