

Saturday 13.08.16 **theguardian**

Your guide to  
**Clearing**  
2016



**GET ON  
THE  
PHONE**

How to apply  
to university or  
college through  
Clearing

[theguardian.com/clearing](http://theguardian.com/clearing)

## Introduction

Opening your A-level results is a scary moment, especially if the next three or four years depend on the grades you get, but don't worry - if your results are not as expected, all is not lost! Last year, more than 64,000 students found a university place through Clearing and this year promises a similar number of opportunities.

All you need to do is log on to the Ucas website, look up the courses that interest you and ring the universities that run them. If you are offered a place over the phone, go to Ucas Track to confirm your choice. It's that easy.

As Gus Kadare, who went through Clearing last year and is now studying economics at University of Hull, says: "It's all about having a plan B that gets you to where you want to be." In this special supplement we give advice and information on everything from choosing your course to doing an interview on Skype to finding your accommodation. As Kadare says: "Never be embarrassed to go through Clearing. You will study the same degree as everyone else and you'll graduate and be proud." **Sarah Jewell**



## Contents

- 4 • Get set for Clearing
- 5 • Student stories: "I knew that all wasn't lost"
- 6 • How to use Clearing
- 7 • What to say on the phone
- 9 • How to choose your new course
- 11 • Student stories: "I was surprised at how quick the process was"
- 13 • Sources of funding
- 14 • Top tips for a thrifty but fulfilling lifestyle
- 16 • Student stories: "After the first call I calmed down and did my best"
- 20 • Dial another way: how Clearing has embraced social media
- 22 • Videos and pull-no-punches info: how to research via social
- 24 • My instagram year at Uni
- 26 • Wearing it their way: student fashion
- 29 • Student stories: "I'm over the moon that I came here"
- 30 • Digs dilemmas: a guide to uni accommodation
- 33 • Student stories: "One year on and I'm the happiest I've ever been"
- 35 • Volunteering and travel: how to make the most of a gap year
- 36 • My amazing gap year diary
- 39 • Alternatives to Clearing
- 41 • Question time
- 42 • Freshers' week events
- 45 • Clubs and societies
- 48 • How to reach the next level - a study guide
- 50 • Survival tips

the guardian

**Editor**  
Sarah Jewell  
**Production editor**  
Sam Noble  
**Art editor**  
Sian Everett  
**Picture editors**  
Lucy Johnston,  
Lynn Chambers  
**Cover creative**  
Sian Everett,  
Lucy Johnston  
**Cover photography**  
Alma Haser  
**Telephones**  
wildandwolf.com

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY, ALMA HASER





## Get set for Clearing

# A time to reassess options

Did you fall short of the grades needed for your chosen universities? Clearing can find you a new dream place, says **Helena Pozniak**

**T**his will be a good year to be a student looking to go to university, even if you don't hit the required grades. With fewer young people (due to demographic changes) and no imposed limit on student numbers, universities are likely to have many places to fill through Clearing, building on last year's record numbers.

This year, teams of friendly admissions staff - many of them recent students - will be on hand to soothe concerns and suggest courses to the tens of thousands expected to fall short of their offers or have a change of heart.

And a record number are also using Clearing for their initial application to university; the total number of students using the service shot to 64,300 last year, compared with 38,000 10 years ago, says James Durant, professional development executive at Ucas.

### 'Clearing is a respected and important route into higher education'

"Clearing has transformed into a respected and important route into higher education," he says, "and almost all universities use Clearing for some of their subjects." Last year, the Russell Group universities - a self-selected association of 24 public research universities in the UK - announced 22,500 courses were available in July; 19 of those institutions, including Bristol, Exeter, York, Manchester and King's College London, used Clearing.

#### Get in early

The list of vacancies, available from early July on the Ucas website, will be continually updated this year; and students getting their results on 18 August will be able to make their choice on Ucas Track from 3pm - two hours earlier than in previous years. "About half of those using Clearing will be placed by the Monday after results day," says Durant.

Applying after exams has grown in popularity, says Hannah Morrish, education community manager at online community The Student Room. "This option has given students more time to think about what they want to do," she says.

Meanwhile, a survey by The Student Room shows that more than half of A-level students believe exam reforms have made them more likely to miss their first choice of university this year.

For student Maduvanthi Pathmanathan, who missed her grades last year, it was a simple case of following advice and going through Clearing: she wrote down her options and was accepted into four respected universities, before opting for law at the University of Essex. "That week was probably the most intense I've ever had," she recalls. "But today I can say that I definitely belong here."

### Clearing facts

Ucas expects about **30,000** courses to advertise vacancies in Clearing this year, including those with the highest entry requirements. Last year, more than **37,000** courses were listed.

A record **49,100** students found places through Clearing after missing out on their first offer - up 3% on 2014. In total, a record **64,300** students found places through Clearing in 2015.

Clearing isn't only for people who don't get the grades for their first offer; a record **15,200** people applied to university directly through Clearing in 2015 - up 10% on 2014.

**Nineteen** of the 24 Russell Group universities used Clearing last year - Oxford and Cambridge never do.

**More than half** of students say they'll use Clearing if they miss their offer.

**Nearly half** of those using Clearing are expected to be placed by the Monday after results day (22 Aug).

Source: Ucas /The Student Room

# 'I knew that all wasn't lost'

When his A-level results came in under target, **Gus Kadare**, 22, called his first-choice university to see if there was a different route on to his chosen economics course

**E**conomics was what I'd always wanted to do - I'd had a really funny, inspiring teacher at college and that certainly influenced my decision. But on the day I didn't get the A-level grades I needed. It was devastating, but you just can't afford to feel sorry for yourself.

I wasn't at all aware of my options but I called the University of Hull straight away. I still wanted to go there - it ticked all my boxes - and you can't afford to hang about. I was aware places were getting snapped up quite quickly.

A woman from the uni explained that I could do a foundation degree in business and management - something I didn't even know was possible. She was so helpful; she was the main driving force behind my decision. I felt very reassured, even though they couldn't confirm my place immediately. It was a very

Gus Kadare says it doesn't matter which route you take to getting a degree: 'You'll graduate alongside everybody else'

straightforward transition and there wasn't a waiting list. I wasn't worried about accommodation even though I'd switched campus. I just thought: "Is it near the uni? Does it have a double bed?"

After a year of a foundation degree, I moved on to an undergraduate economics degree. I've since switched to business economics and I enjoy my course - it makes sense to me. Eventually I'd love to study for a master's in development economics.

Clearing is like an auction; everyone in the room wants a place at university. You are disappointed but you need to keep a clear head and focus on what you want out of the process. You mustn't start comparing yourself to

others - it's about your own personal journey.

I certainly think Clearing is a useful process - it's all about having a plan B that still gets you to where you want to be. I knew that all wasn't lost.

You shouldn't be embarrassed or ashamed to go through Clearing. You will study the same degree as everyone else around you, no matter how they came to be there, and you'll graduate alongside everybody else and be proud.

Although I didn't do as well in my A-levels as I had hoped, that hasn't held me back. I have the ability, I can keep up in class and I am doing the subject I always wanted to do - because I was given another chance.

I think it's important to fail at some point in your life. When you pick yourself up and get back on track you see the kind of person you really are.

Interview by Helena Pozniak



**'It's important to fail at some point in your life. When you get back on track you see the kind of person you really are'**

# How to use Clearing

It's simple, speedy and the offer can be immediate, so prep yourself with this easy guide. By **Tanya Jackson**

**F**inding a place through Clearing is much simpler than your original university application. The process takes place over the phone, and you don't have to wait long for a decision - it often happens during that call. The onus is on you to contact the university directly without going through Ucas. This gives you the advantage that you can bypass the normal filters of entry - you get to talk to a human being, and you won't automatically be dismissed if you don't have the grades. If you can demonstrate passion for the subject and good knowledge of it, you're in with a chance.

What's more, if your first-choice courses appear in Clearing, you also have the chance to state your case in person and convince the university that you're worthy of the course, even though you fell short of the grades.

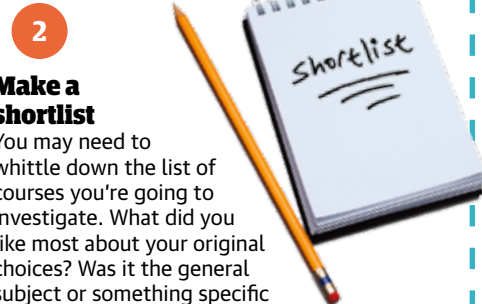
**OK, so where do I start?**

## Ready to start? Simply follow these steps:

### 5-step guide to Clearing



**1 Find a course**  
Go to [ucas.com](http://ucas.com) and log in to Track. Find your Clearing number in the 'My Status' section and make a note of it, along with your personal ID number. Then use the Ucas online search tool to look for course vacancies through Clearing.



**2 Make a shortlist**  
You may need to whittle down the list of courses you're going to investigate. What did you like most about your original choices? Was it the general subject or something specific about the course you liked? Which of your new choices appeals the most? Send them through to the next round.

**3 Do your research**  
Once you've found a course you're interested in, find out everything you can about the university. Consider visiting if you're local (and time permits). If not, make your visit a virtual one: find out everything you can about what existing students think about the university through forums such as [thestudentroom.co.uk](http://thestudentroom.co.uk) and do internet and Facebook searches to see if any students have created groups for their particular class.



Once you feel you've learned all you can, go back to your list of important points and make sure nothing that's really important to you has been overlooked.

**4 Make that phone call**  
It's time to phone the universities on your shortlist. This call is your preliminary interview, so prepare yourself as though you're going for an important job.

**5 Get a verbal offer**  
The university may make you a verbal offer on the phone there and then. If there are several courses you want to apply for, thank them and add it to a new shortlist. Then decide which course you want to accept from your offers, log in to Track again, go to the 'Your Choices' section and click 'Add Clearing Choice', along with the course details. Once you've added it, that's it - the university will confirm it at their end and you're on your way.

## Making that call

You'll probably speak first to a member of the university's Clearing helpline team. Make a good enough impression and you'll go through to the programme administrator. Here's how to wow them



### Prepare yourself

Spend some time on this. Have your A-level and GCSE results to hand, as well as your personal statement. Re-read it for a confidence boost, then go through it with a highlighter to help you pick out the most relevant points. Have all your questions written down.

### Pick up the phone

It's time. Don't dwell on what you didn't achieve and focus on what you have to offer. Try to remember that universities don't want empty places, so they're on your side. Stay calm and confident.

### Go somewhere quiet

Charge up your phone, and find somewhere private. The last thing you want is to be interrupted by your little brother barging into the room, or have a well-meaning parent breathing down your neck. Be prepared to take notes on who you have spoken to at each university and their contact details - you will likely need these again.

## Dos and don'ts

### What to ask

First, ask questions about the course and its possible options. After you've got this important information, ask about other issues related to enrolling on the course:

- Are there any scholarships or bursaries that Clearing students are eligible for?
- Is there any accommodation left

in halls or in houseshares? Is that something the university will help you with?

### What not to ask

- "OK, I have a certain number of Ucas points: what courses can I get on to?" This just makes you sound desperate to study anything.
- "What's wrong with this course that it's ended up in Clearing?"

Many universities use Clearing as a way to open up courses to those who have made the decision to study after the Ucas deadline.

- "I can't tell you how upset I am not to be accepted on to my first choices." If you didn't get the results, you need to show other qualities that make you a worthy student: self-pity isn't one of them. Stay positive!

## Pick your course

# A world of possibilities

Clearing isn't a last-chance saloon - the options are many and varied. **Tanya Jackson** helps you narrow your focus

**W**hen it comes to choosing a course through Clearing it's a good idea to focus on the facets of your original choice that were most important to you. Was it the subject itself, the student experience, the university or its location? Did the course offer a year abroad, or the opportunity to work in the industry as part of the degree? Make a list and number it in terms of priority. But don't think of this as being set in stone. Remember your original criteria, by all means, but don't be afraid to change them.

Joint honours courses are a good area to explore via Clearing. Take the heritage degree at Bath Spa University, which can be combined with its new history of art and design course. Running since last year, the course uses Clearing because it is still building up its reputation.

For Remy Ward, now an English and creative writing student at Liverpool John Moores University, Clearing offered the opportunity for her to change her mind. "I realised in mid-August that I didn't like the university I was at, so I went online and checked my options. I found out I could call the Clearing people at JMU and ask to join first-year English and creative writing," she says.

"The course I'm on now is excellent. All the subject tutors are so passionate about what they're teaching that even if a topic has never interested you before, it can become your favourite."

Sometimes, a course might be listed on Clearing because it's new and yet to build up its reputation, or it's a programme that wasn't finalised at the time Ucas registration began. Perhaps the course simply has niche appeal.

The University of Manchester's school of Earth, atmospheric and environmental sciences, a world-leading faculty that counts

### Clearing courses

Last year, a record **64,000** people found their university placements through Clearing - that's **one in 10** students.

About **30,000** courses are listed in Clearing when it opens each summer - everything from astrophysics to zoology.

The majority of universities now use Clearing for a number of their courses, even those with high entry requirements.

A Ucas survey last year showed that **92%** of students on courses they'd found through Clearing were either confident or fairly confident they'd made the right choice.

You don't have to be UK citizen to use Clearing: **more than 5,500 students** come from elsewhere.

**Almost half** of those using Clearing will be placed by the Monday after A-level results day.

Clearing not right for you? Around half of 18-year-olds who don't get into university apply again the following year - and **85%** get in.

Prof Brian Cox among its alumni, often recruits students via Clearing. "Our geology and environmental sciences courses provide an exciting window into the workings of the natural world," says Carl Percival, professor of atmospheric chemistry and admissions tutor at the school: "Many of our students have no previous experience of either of these subjects before studying with us."



**All flavours:**  
there's a course  
to suit every  
palate in Clearing

# 'I was surprised at how quick the process was'

**Megan Hogg**, 19, shook off her initial disappointment to ring an alternative uni. Within minutes she had her new place

**O**riginally, I wanted to go to Nottingham Trent University to study psychology. But when my results came through, they weren't quite up to scratch. I had a B in psychology, a C in English literature and a D in history, and I needed the equivalent points to two Bs and a C. So I rang the university straight away and asked what my options were. They said I could have a place to study psychology and educational studies.

I could have asked if they had another combination that I was actually interested in - such as psychology and sociology - as I really didn't want to do educational studies. But it had been very hard to get through and I felt that their attitude was: "Here's the offer, tough luck." So I didn't ask - I took the hard route and rejected the offer.

After that, I curled up on the sofa with a blanket for a while. I felt like I needed to process everything. I did feel really stressed, but I shook it off and started researching on the internet. I used the Which? University website to find out which universities had psychology places, and that's when

the University of Northampton popped up.

I rang the university straight away to see if they still had places. I didn't have any questions about the course as the information was all online, and I was familiar with the area, as it's near where I lived, in Corby. They asked me what my grades were, then said I had a place to study psychology. I was expecting to be asked a bit more, so I was surprised at how quick the process was. I was ready to sell myself, but I didn't need to.

It's turned out to be a really good move for me. It's nearer my parents' home, which I like, as it turns out that I do get quite

---

**'I'd worked so hard at my A-levels and it was hard to deal with the fact that I couldn't go where I wanted'**

homesick. I'm really happy with the course and all my lecturers. I'm also getting above-average grades on the work I've done so far.

At the time, I felt a lot of shame at being in Clearing. I worked so hard at my A-levels and it was hard to deal with the fact that I hadn't got the grades and I couldn't go where I wanted. But now I know there's no shame in it at all. As long as you take your determination and your work ethic with you, I don't think it matters where you go.

*Interview by Lucy Jolin*

Megan Hogg: 'It's turned out to be a really good move for me'

# Who will you be banking on?



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY, ALAMY

**You don't need a confirmed place on a university course to apply for a loan**

There are plenty of sources of funding. You just have to know where to look for them, writes **Lucy Jolin**

**S**o you've secured your university place - but how are you going to fund it? Unless you're lucky enough to be able to draw on the Bank of Mum and Dad, you're likely to need a tuition fees loan to cover your studies and a maintenance loan to help fund your living costs.

Tuition fee loans don't depend on your parents' income. However, maintenance loan amounts are dependent on how much your parents or your partner earns, so you may need them to help support you financially during your time at uni.

The policies around funding are different depending on whether you live in England, Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland, so make sure you check what applies to you. Residents of Scotland have their fees paid by the Scottish government.

**Bursaries and scholarships vary, from thousands to £100 or so to help you buy books**

You should have applied for your loans already, as the deadlines have passed. Don't worry if you didn't get the course you applied for, says Mark Kelly of the Student Loans Company. "You don't need a confirmed place on a course to apply. You can use your preferred course and update later if it changes."

You'll have to start repaying your loan the April after you graduate if you are earning over the repayment threshold. "Repayments will be taken from your salary directly by your employer and you will repay 9% of your earnings above the repayment threshold," Kelly says. "Students in England and Wales will repay once earning over £21,000; in Northern Ireland it's £17,495."

#### **Other sources of funding**

But there are more sources of finance available, such as bursaries, scholarships and other loans.

These vary hugely, from scholarships worth thousands to £100 or so to help you buy books or computer

equipment. You'll have to hunt for these, so search on sites such as [scholarship-search.org.uk](http://scholarship-search.org.uk), or look on your university's website.

You could be eligible for a hardship fund payment from your uni if you meet certain criteria, such as being a care leaver, having a disability, or dependants. Care leavers can also apply for a £2,000 bursary from their local authority.

There are plenty of opportunities to earn while you learn, says Robert Fowler, a student money advice and rights team coordinator at the University of Derby. "We have a student employment agency, which matches students needing employment with local companies. There are also a lot of opportunities within the university, such as personal assistants or note-takers for other students, or student mentors for open days."

If you've already worked for a big chain part-time, such as a supermarket, you could ask about transferring to your university town for term time, or carry on working in the holidays if you'd prefer not to juggle work and university.



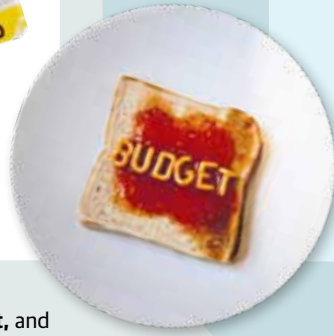
1

Become a **dedicated discounter**: Savethestudent.org has a great directory listing hundreds of offers



2

**Learn to budget**, and remember that what looks like a massive maintenance grant has got to pay for essentials first



3

Seek out **cheap supermarkets** such as Aldi or Lidl, and use blogs such as Jack Monroe's [cookingonabootstrap.com](http://cookingonabootstrap.com) for great budget recipes



## TOP TIPS for saving money

There are plenty of deals and money-saving ideas out there. **Lucy Jolin** offers a few suggestions

4

If you really need to have an overdraft, **make sure it's 0% interest** and never go over your limit, or you'll get charged



5

Don't buy books: **use the library**, Google Scholar and Google Books to access books and journals



6

**Forget paying for delivery**: only ever buy from sites that offer click and collect



7

Never buy your own lunch or coffee - **make your own**

8

**Double check** that you're not paying too much tax. If you earn less than £10,600 a year, you shouldn't be paying any



10

**Have fun for free**: visit [moneysavingexpert.com/deals/free-uk-festivals](http://moneysavingexpert.com/deals/free-uk-festivals) to find out all the free festivals in your area



9

**Look for bargains** in your local area on eBay



How much do I get?

### Maintenance and tuition fee loans

English students are eligible for a tuition fee loan of up to **£9,000** per academic year at a standard university, or **£6,000** at a private university or college. For part-time students, the maximum is **£6,750**.

If you're living at home, you can get a maintenance loan of up to **£6,904**. Living away from home gets you up to **£8,200**, unless you're living away from home in London, in which case it's up to **£10,702**. For a year of a UK course studying abroad, the maximum is **£9,391**.

The amount of maintenance loan you get will depend on your parent's income (if you're under 25 and live at home) or your partner's (if you're over 25 and live together). There are exceptional circumstances, however, such as having no living parents. Use the student finance calculator at [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) to work out how much you could get.

Amounts for maintenance and tuition fee loans are different if you're resident in Wales, Scotland or N Ireland.

Adjustment & Clearing  
Limited places for highly qualified students

University of the Year  
and  
University of the Year for Student Experience  
*The Times and The Sunday Times 2016*

Wonderful things  
happen here.

Lines open at 7am on Thursday 18 August  
0800 052 2248 | [surrey.ac.uk/gu-clearing](http://surrey.ac.uk/gu-clearing)



EST. 1872

#LoveAber

# DISCOVER YOUR PLACE

CLEARING

0800 121 40 80 [aber.ac.uk](http://aber.ac.uk)





A new path:  
Sarah Loftus  
and mum Paula  
reassessed  
priorities via  
Clearing

## 'I believe things happen for a reason'

Sarah Loftus and family were waiting on a remarked paper when they decided to see what options Clearing could offer her

**I**f I hadn't gone through Clearing I wouldn't have known about courses in social psychology and I wouldn't be having such an amazing time here at Loughborough. The student life is incredible, the sports facilities are fantastic and the lecturers and moderators are always helpful and willing to give advice and feedback.

Sometimes I hesitate to tell people I came here via Clearing because there is still a bit of a stigma attached. But there shouldn't be. Almost all universities have places in Clearing. I ended up with five offers after just a few hours, all from very good universities.

When I made my first Clearing call I was completely panicked, but then I calmed down and focused on doing a good interview and finding out about the courses.

Everyone I spoke to was really nice. Try not to be afraid of calling

universities - and don't be put off by the busy lines either.

We looked at universities with the best reputation for psychology and my mother found social psychology, which really appealed to me. Only three had accreditation from the British Psychological Society for their social psychology degrees. One was Loughborough, which also has a brilliant reputation for sport - and I'm quite sporty. We visited the next day and I loved the campus and the people we met.

**S**arah was upset with her results and it made it worse that she was surrounded at the school by people whooping with joy. After the A-level exams Sarah felt she might not have done well enough to get the grades she needed to study psychology at her first choice and her insurance, so

**'Everyone I spoke to was really nice. Try not to be afraid of calling universities'**

she researched which universities had psychology places in Clearing before results day and made a note of their telephone numbers.

I do believe that things happen for a reason. I am sure Sarah is much happier at Loughborough than she would have been with her initial choices. The course suits her better and she has got involved in so many things that she was voted Fresher of the Year in her hall.

Maybe we should have looked at a wider group of universities and courses in the first place, instead of being focused on universities at the top of the rankings, but Clearing proved a very reaffirming experience for Sarah - for her feelings, her self-confidence and her self-worth.

After the initial rejection, which really devastated her, she ended up with offers to study at five extremely good universities.

*Interview by Liz Lightfoot*

# Dial another way: how Clearing embraced social media

Online chats, Skype, Twitter, Facebook - they can all spare you the pain of those endless engaged tones, says **Suzanne Bearne**



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY  
Your future in your hands: smartphones help make Clearing a breeze

**I**t used to be that would-be students would rush to the phones to try and find a university place through Clearing. But now, as savvy universities wise up to the fact that millennials are digital natives, you can turn to social media, online chat and Skype to land the course you want.

"Students can often feel too stressed to talk about course options over the phone and lines get busy," says Jack Wallington, community director at The Student Room. "There's now ways students can swerve being on hold and get an instant response on whether there is a place for them."

Clearing hotlines can be frantically busy - so head to the university's website to see if they offer a live chat facility through which you can ask staff about securing a place. Alternatively, visit their social media pages - they may be allowing prospective students to direct-message them about places.

Last year, Birmingham City University became the first university to make offers to students through Facebook and Twitter. Students were asked to send a private message including their name, contact details, number of Ucas points and the course they were interested in to either of the social networks. "This innovation was about reflecting the reality of where younger audiences go for information or to communicate with people quickly - especially when confronted by an engaged hotline," says Prof Bashir

Makhoul, pro-vice chancellor at Birmingham City University, which plans to use social media again this year.

Universities are also investing in other innovative ways to grab students' attention during Clearing. In a nod to the soaring popularity of mobile dating app Tinder, the University of Salford last year launched "Match Made in Salford", an app enabling prospective students to swipe left or right when presented with potential courses. "Over 10,000 potential students used the app on results day," says Hannah Burchell, assistant director of marketing and recruitment at the University of Salford. The university will be using the app again this year.

There's a wealth of social media to tap into to get a sense of what student life is like at the institutions you're considering. Universities post everything from club match results to the opening of new faculties on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Student community websites such as The Student Room can also be a useful source of unvarnished info, as well as offering dedicated university guides and information on accommodation providers.

And if you really want to immerse yourself in what life is like at your chosen university, seek out a virtual tour of the campuses, learning facilities and accommodation. By the time you physically make the move you could be a virtual expert on your new home town.



## The offer's in the post

**Rumbi Tauro**, 19, used Facebook to contact Birmingham City University about the media and communications (music industries) course listed on Clearing. Within minutes, they were interviewing her over the phone

**L**ike many students on results day, Rumbi Tauro was frantically trying to get through to her chosen university, but found herself held in a long phone queue. Eager to land a place on the Media and Communications (Music Industries) course at Birmingham City University (BCU), Tauro headed to the university's Twitter page to see if she could contact them there. On it was a message from BCU: the phone hotline was busy and prospective students should contact them directly through private messages on Twitter and Facebook.

"I quickly sent them a message on Twitter with my name and mobile number, my Ucas points and the course I was interested in, then sent

**'I'm not sure I would have got on the course if they hadn't [taken social media inquiries]'**

the same message via Facebook," recalls Tauro.

"Ten minutes later they responded on Facebook thanking me for getting in touch, and asked me a few questions. Then they rang me on the phone and I was offered a place on the course."

Tauro feels applying through social media has changed her life. "I'm not sure I would have got on the course I wanted if they hadn't had that."

Now at the end of her first year, Tauro feels she made the right choice with BCU. "I love life in Birmingham and the course I am doing is very interactive," she says. "We get to do interesting assignments, such as setting up a record label and hosting events." **SB**



INDEPENDENCE  
BY  
REGENT'S

## Social media Straight from the horse's mouth

Tap into universities' social media networks to help choose your digs, sniff out the best societies and pre-meet your friends-to-be, says **Suzanne Bearne**

**B**efore Sophie Dishman even started her social work degree at the University of Sunderland, she was tapping into her uni's dedicated social media groups. "The uni had Facebook groups for freshers and for students who were staying in accommodation. I used both to meet a lot of new people before I started, including two of my flatmates - so it wasn't too awkward when I moved in," says Dishman.

Whether it's Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or Instagram, social media is a means to discovery, not only once you arrive at university - when you can head up societies, keep in touch with family and even run protests via your profile - but before you even choose which university you'll be going to.

Matt Horne, digital marketing and social media officer at Newcastle University, says students can get a head start on which societies to join by checking out their Instagram and Facebook feeds, rather than waiting for the freshers' fair. It can help with accommodation choices too, he adds: "Search YouTube for your university and 'accommodation tour', and there's a good

**'YouTube can give you a real feel of where you may end up living'**



chance somebody will have done a guided tour of their halls, including information you won't get on an official tour. It'll give you a real feel of where you may end up living."

On the academic side, many unis have Facebook groups for halls, WhatsApp groups for courses and LinkedIn groups to discuss modules. "Some lecturers are open to connecting on LinkedIn, or have Twitter profiles to follow that give you a flavour of what your course will be like when you start," says Horne. "We have lecturers at Newcastle who run lecture roundups and revision Q&As through Twitter, which you can eavesdrop on to get a feel for course content."

However, there's a word of advice to heed regarding oversharing on social media. "Once images are out there, even on private channels, they are out of your control, so it's sensible not to share anything that you wouldn't want to become public later," says Rhian Temple, editor at social media agency We Are Social.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

**Social media is a means to discovery even before you choose your university**



**WE ACCEPT APPLICATIONS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. TAKE THE INDEPENDENT PATH.**

 **REGENT'S**  
UNIVERSITY LONDON

London's Independent University

Call 020 7487 7505 or email [exrel@regents.ac.uk](mailto:exrel@regents.ac.uk) or visit [www.regents.ac.uk](http://www.regents.ac.uk)

## Video call saves holiday

**Philip Bailey** managed to secure his University of Greenwich place from a resort on the Croatian coast

Philip Bailey, now in his first year on the University of Greenwich's BA in landscape architecture, was on a road trip to Croatia when he received an email from the University of Greenwich asking to see his portfolio. "I remember being in the back of the car trying to organise it all and send it over," says Bailey, who had applied through Clearing to study at the university.

Liking his work, the university asked for a face-to-face interview the following week, but Bailey wasn't due back in the UK for a fortnight or so. "They suggested a Skype interview,



**'I had a Skype interview from a Croatian holiday camp with the department head'**

which was cool," he says. "I was in a holiday camp on the coast near Pula [in Croatia], so I had my interview with the head of the department as I sat in the on-site restaurant. Thankfully, I passed the interview. It was good to know I had somewhere to study."

In the run-up to getting on the course, Bailey also used the university's live chat facility to find out anything he wanted to know. "I preferred to use that as it was more casual and easier than ringing up and waiting on the phone."

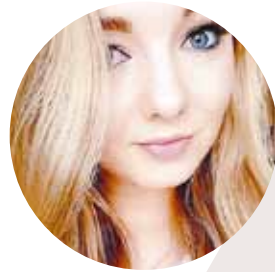
He took a "long-winded route" to Greenwich, he admits, quitting Coventry University when he failed a module on the architectural technology course he was studying. It was then that he found his true vocation - gardening. "I really got into it after getting a job looking after the lawns at Clare College, Cambridge." It was this newfound interest that spurred Bailey on to apply to the University of Greenwich last year. **SB**

At Regent's University London, we pride ourselves on delivering a truly cosmopolitan experience in the heart of the capital. As an independent university, we encourage free-thinking and aim to develop global leaders with intercultural intelligence.

We provide a more personal education. Our students benefit from small classes and face-to-face tuition. They also profit from lifelong global connections with their peers and the many businesses we work with.

Our graduates are renowned for their independent thinking and entrepreneurial spirit. They are confident, connected and eminently equipped to make their mark around the globe.

# Diary of a student blogger



Originally from Exmouth in Devon, **Charli Babb**, 22, has been studying psychology with a professional placement at Cardiff University for the past four years. Alongside her studies, she is a prolific blogger. Her blog, High Street Beauty Junkie, focuses primarily on beauty and lifestyle for those on a student budget. She also has a university series, which covers everything from how to make friends to what you should bring to university with you. Interview by Nicola Slawson

PHOTOGRAPHY: @CHARLI1993/INSTAGRAM



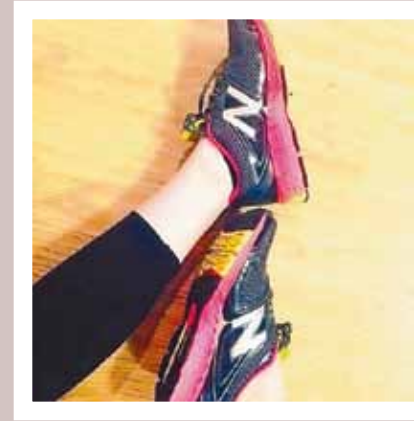
▲ As a psychology student, I don't have many contact hours a week, so on a typical day I spend a couple of hours in lectures and spend the rest of the day either doing coursework, watching a bit of Netflix or going to the gym.



▲ I prefer studying at home. I find the library can get a bit hectic and overcrowded, especially during exam period, and I like being able to make myself endless cups of tea!



▲ My evenings tend to be spent cooking and watching telly with my flatmates, although I do enjoy the occasional night out with my course friends.



▲ I like to stay healthy while studying. I try to go to the gym two or three times a week and I like to get a lot of vegetables into my diet. I make vegetarian meals a couple of times a week because it's a lot cheaper than eating meat every day!



▼ Fashion and beauty (particularly through blogging) are my escape from the stresses of exams and coursework, so it's important for me to keep up with them when I find the time.



▼ I've made some really close friends in my time at uni. I'd say about half of my friends are from my psychology course - the other half I met in halls during my first year. Here's my flatmates and I enjoying a Christmas dinner at our flat.



▲ I've been part of a student-led service called Student Minds for three years while at university. Student Minds is a national charity that aims to break down the stigma surrounding mental health. We also run weekly support groups for students struggling with eating disorders.



▲ It's only a two-hour train journey from Cardiff back to Exmouth, so I tend to go home every one or two months to see my parents - and the dog, of course!



## EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

**PRODIGY**  
LIVING  
URBAN STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

0203 733 1313

For regular offers check: [prodigy-living.co.uk/guardian](http://prodigy-living.co.uk/guardian)

BANGOR • BIRMINGHAM • BRADFORD • BRIGHTON • DUNDEE  
• HUDDERSFIELD • LEICESTER • LINCOLN • LIVERPOOL • LONDON  
• MANCHESTER • OXFORD • PLYMOUTH • SHEFFIELD • WOLVERHAMPTON

# Wearing it their way

These sartorially savvy students prove great style will always trump fashion, via budget-friendly looks that are a rallying cry for individuality. At one end of the spectrum, clean separates and pared back lines keep the #normcore flame alight; at the other, clashing prints and a creative approach to layering are emblems of the maximalists. Those in between walk the line that bisects thrift and polish, pairing vintage finds with new-season heroes and accessories with bite. Choose your side wisely: style is a democracy, after all.

**Patricia Campbell**

PHOTOGRAPHY: VICTORIA ADAMSON



Show your personality with a fun clutch and earn instant style points. **Carrie Wu** Middlesex University

Channel off-duty style with crisp cotton and classic boyfriend jeans. **Clio Cooper** Northumbria University



Earn your stripes by pairing parallel lines with a contrast print. **Cassandra Gubudu** University of East London

Paint it black with minimal separates for a new take on contemporary cool. **Arturas Nauseda** Middlesex University

Cut a bold silhouette with contrasting lines and playful textures. **Katrina Knizikeviciute** Middlesex University

Nail the art school uniform with quirky vintage details. **Jack Allan** Middlesex University

Toughen up florals with an oversized leather biker jacket. **Rose Lee** Student

Have fun with embroidered motifs ripe for the emoji generation. **Jasmine Fleur Sullivan** Southampton Solent University



# 'I'm over the moon that I came here'

Missing out on your universities of choice can be tough to get over. But plan B need not be a compromise, as **Jessica Okoro** found out.

**J**essica Okoro, a third-year pharmaceutical and cosmetic science student at De Montfort University (DMU), Leicester, recently spoke to the all-party parliamentary group for education about her innovating social enterprise, BeScience Stem, which she set up in the second year of her course. But things could have easily been so different for Okoro, who is from north London. In the summer of 2012 she received her A-level results and was devastated - she had missed the grades she needed to get into her universities of choice.

"I really felt like it was the end of the world. I just sat down and cried. My older brother, who had got a basketball scholarship to go to university in Loughborough, decided to look at Clearing for me, as he could see how upset I was. He started

**'I had been so distraught and then there was this comeback - I had to grab the opportunity'**

calling universities that he knew were near Loughborough.

"I had completely given up and thought I would never get to go to university. When my brother called DMU, they said they would give me a phone interview - and I got in. I couldn't believe it."

Okoro, who had never set foot in Leicester, let alone on the campus, before moving there, now believes it was the best thing that ever happened to her. "I had been so distraught, then there was this comeback and I had to grab the opportunity. I really feel I was meant to go to De Montfort and I'm over the moon that I came here because of the opportunities I've been given."

She was diagnosed with dyslexia while at DMU, something she had gone all the way through school not realising she had. The

university also supported her entrepreneurial side. Okoro's business, BeScience Stem, gives people in the community a fun and engaging look into science, technology, engineering and mathematics, through innovative workshops delivered in public places, such as shopping centres and libraries, by volunteers who are passionate about the subjects.

"DMU really supports entrepreneurs and uniqueness and innovation, so I feel like coming to university here helped cultivate that side of me. And I really like Leicester - it's a friendly city."

Asked what her advice would be for any students who find themselves facing a similar predicament, she is positive: "Going through Clearing is not the end of the world. You just have to embrace your plan B."

*Interview by Nicola Slawson*

**Change your view:** Jessica Okoro was upset when her results landed, but quickly recovered



## Accommodation Digs dilemmas

Bear in mind how the cost of a roof over your head varies or you could be in for a shock, says **Allison Dickinson**

**N**o matter which university you enrol at, you will find a range of accommodation to suit all budgets, from shared houses to studio flats.

Accommodation can be provided by the universities themselves or in partnership with private providers - and, of course, wherever you find a university, you will find a raft of house shares to rent from private landlords or through lettings agencies.

There's a great deal of variation - not just regionally, but also in the price difference between

university and private providers, and in the range and quality of the accommodation offered.

### Location costs

The NUS/Unipol Accommodation Costs Survey 2015 showed that Wales had the cheapest institution-provided accommodation, averaging £107.73 per week, and Greater London was most expensive, at £181.62. Yorkshire had the cheapest privately provided accommodation, averaging £119.93, while Greater London was dearest, at £250.67. The national average for institutional accommodation was £134.23; privately provided accommodation averaged £168.94.

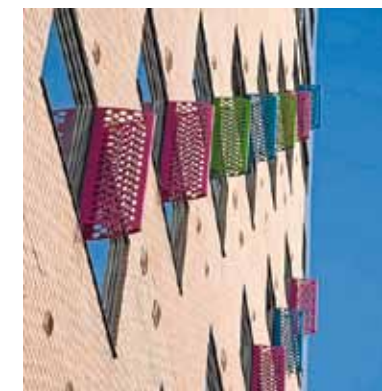
Bear in mind, however, that institutional providers don't always undercut private sector suppliers - in Yorkshire and the East Midlands, for example, private

### Student accommodation in Middlesbrough, right, and Leeds, below right

sector accommodation actually comes in cheaper than that provided by institutions.

In London, where the private sector is the majority supplier, rent puts a serious dent in your pocket, at 69% above the national average.

Another consideration when it comes to cost is that some providers charge a booking or administration fee, most will require a deposit, and you may even need to provide a rent guarantor, so always check before you sign.



£  
Rental costs

### Average weekly rent by region 2015-16

Region	Institution	Private
East Midlands	£153.11	£120.37
East of England	£131.44	£168.08
Greater London	£181.62	£250.67
North-east	£111.55	£149.37
North-west	£122.80	£128.11
Northern Ireland	£118.67 (overall figure)	
Scotland	£124.00	£158.38
South-east	£138.99	£148.47
South-west	£132.54	£163.25
Wales	£107.73	£144.46
West Midlands	£134.11	£134.49
Yorkshire	£122.80	£119.93

Source: NUS/ Unipol Accommodation Costs Survey 2015



www.iqsa.co.uk

Live with us in 2016/17

WIN a £200 Amazon voucher\*

Use code **Guardian200**

when booking

**T: 020 3595 5100**

\*T&Cs apply. Visit [www.iqsa.co.uk/guardian200](http://www.iqsa.co.uk/guardian200) for details.



All-inclusive rents



City centre locations



Modern social spaces



FREE WiFi & Broadband



FREE bike storage



Amazing events



FREE parcel collection

## 'It was all sorted within a few weeks'

One student who got her University of Bedfordshire place through Clearing, also landed a plum room

I passed my A-levels with good grades but didn't get the three As I needed to get into my first choice, which was Sheffield. And I didn't get into my second choice either. All of a sudden I was like: "Oh my gosh, what am I going to do?"

Clearing saved me, with a place at the University of Bedfordshire, but then I needed to find somewhere to live. They advised me to apply for university accommodation and I was offered an en suite room in Fitzroy Court, which is literally a one-minute walk from campus. It was all sorted within a couple of weeks.

I was nervous about moving away from home, but during the application process, you could say what kind of people you wanted to live with to make sure you ended up with like-minded housemates.

'During the application you could say what kind of people you wanted to live with'

And thanks to the social media groups and social spaces, such as TV and games rooms in halls, it was really easy to meet people and make friends, which turned out to be the most important thing. **AD**

A happy ending: 'I'm the happiest I've ever been,' says Jenni Kelsey, who found a place at Keele through Clearing



## Can the grass be greener?

**Jenni Kelsey** was devastated when she missed out on her first-choice unis - but Clearing found her an even better option

**R**esults day is one I'll never forget - a day of mixed emotions. My heart was so set on the University of Nottingham that when I got the email, all I could read was: "You have not been successful." I couldn't bear going into school early to collect my grades - the thought of entering a room full of happy faces would have rubbed salt in the wound.

When I finally composed myself, I was able to spring into action. Talking to my teachers was the most valuable thing I did that day. Not only were they able to reassure me I had actually done

very well in my A-levels (ABB), but they were also able to advise me which universities to look at during Clearing. On the phone it was hard not to cry, but I found the more I spoke to the universities, the more confident I became - they were so supportive and put me at ease.

I had already signed up for Clearing in advance - but, with the benefit of hindsight, I'd have started looking around at courses earlier and found out more about it.

I was panicking so much - I thought all the places would be snapped up immediately; but they weren't and I got a couple of offers. Each call takes a while. You have to go through the same details - what you want to study, what grades you got, etcetera.

I also found out during the day that my first choice of uni hadn't

"released" my application. This has to happen with both your first choice and insurance choice before any other university can officially accept you.

In the end, I opted for Keele. They were so reassuring on the phone and teachers advised me I'd enjoy the campus environment. Finding accommodation was really straightforward too - all the info I needed was on their website.

One year on and I'm the happiest I've ever been. Clearing wasn't stress-free but by listening to my teachers and trusting my instincts I found a university where I'm happy - and I don't believe that would have happened at my first choice. On results day I thought my university dreams were over; little did I know they'd just begun.

*Interview by Helena Pozniak*

**I panicked. I thought all the places would be snapped up immediately'**





A helping hand: organisations such as Raleigh International provide structured volunteer programmes

# More than one way to fill a gap

Not ready for university just yet? It's time to schedule some CV-enhancing fun, says **Nicola Slawson**

**Y**ou've found your place through Clearing and decided to defer for a year, or perhaps you have simply decided to apply next year. Either way, you are now in the enviable, and perhaps slightly scary, position of having a whole year to fill.

Tens of thousands of young people from the UK will head overseas to work this summer - to bolster experience, earn money to travel, and widen their skill sets - and you could now be one of them.

Although there is, of course, something to be said for going it alone in foreign lands, a gap year of purely backpacking is becoming less common; most young people are opting to do some kind of volunteering or work while abroad.

Tim Fryer, STA Travel's UK country manager, says: "Today's young people are under more

pressure than ever to have broad work experience and an impressive CV to show future employers or university admissions boards.

"Heading overseas to work somewhere such as Australia or New Zealand on a Working Holiday Visa, teaching English abroad, doing an internship, or taking part in a volunteering or conservation project - these are all great ways of doing this."

He adds that it's not just about boosting career prospects: "These sorts of experiences also boost life skills, confidence and maturity, as they completely immerse you in a community and place."

## The volunteer route

Jennie Mann spent her gap year volunteering in Costa Rica - "living in hammocks in the rainforest and chopping down bamboo with a machete to build footpaths" - and in Nicaragua, helping build an aqueduct to provide homes with running water. Her top tip is to organise your

**"These sorts of experiences boost life skills, confidence and maturity"**

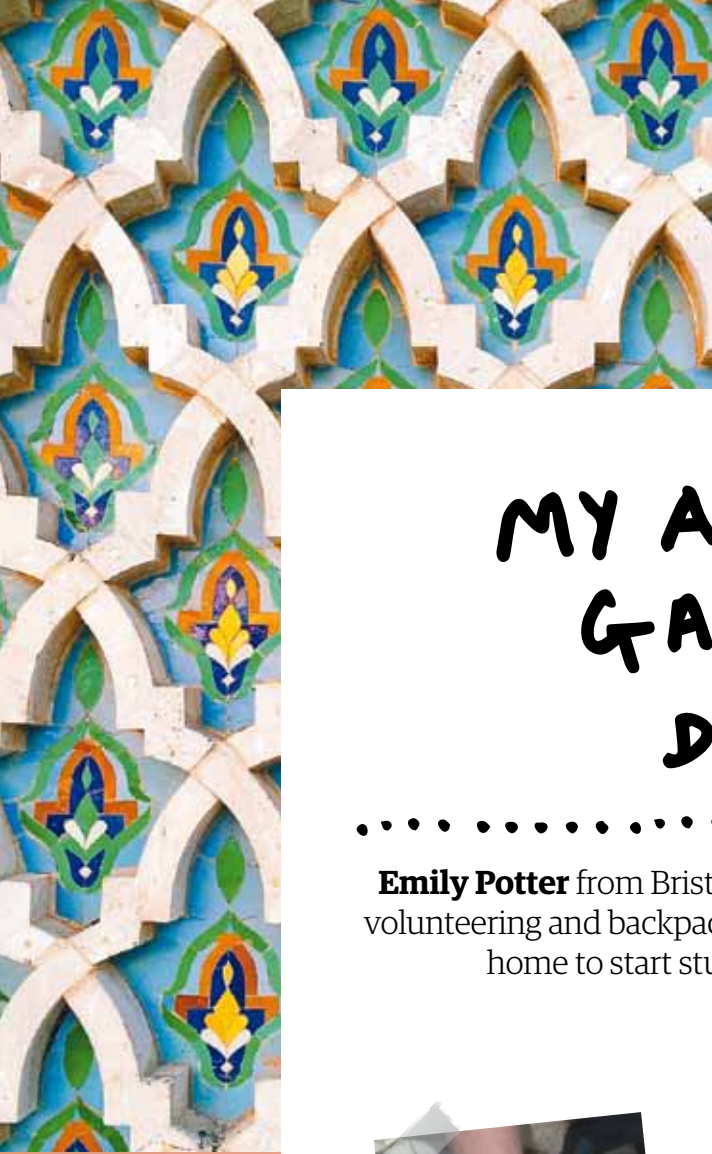
gap year through an organisation such as Raleigh International or International Citizen Service (ICS), both of which provide bursaries. "They give structure and safety to young people as well as the freedom to explore countries and meet new friends," she says. "You get great leadership skills that look fantastic on your CV."

Raleigh International's Mike Butcher says joining an expedition is a good way to make friends if you're travelling alone: "You'll be in a team of about 12 volunteers, from a diverse range of backgrounds, including volunteers from the country in which you're working. Each team then has a volunteer manager, who is there to facilitate the project and support you.

"If you're considering some independent travel after your programmes, volunteering first might just give you the confidence to do it - and, in all likelihood, some travel buddies."

He adds: "Whatever you choose to do, make sure you are passionate about it."





# MY AMAZING GAP YEAR DIARY

.....  
**Emily Potter** from Bristol has spent her gap year working, volunteering and backpacking. At the end of August she flies home to start studying at Leeds University



## AUTUMN 2015

Having had summer off after my A-levels, I'm now saving money for travelling. I mainly do events waitressing and bartending. It is definitely not boring, but it is quite unpredictable, sometimes going from no shifts for a couple of days to three in one day.

## CHRISTMAS 2015

In the new year, my adventure begins. My first stop is Morocco, where I'll be volunteering with Education For All (EFA) which helps girls in the very rural High Atlas mountains finish their education. My own school's been supporting the organisation for years so I'd heard a lot about it. It seems like a great opportunity to get to know a country and a culture I'm interested in. People keep asking if I'm nervous to go away but I'm too excited to be nervous.

## JANUARY 2016

I've arrived in Asni, Morocco. Everyone has been very welcoming and lovely, but it was a little daunting being introduced to about 35 girls in such a short space of time - and after so little sleep.

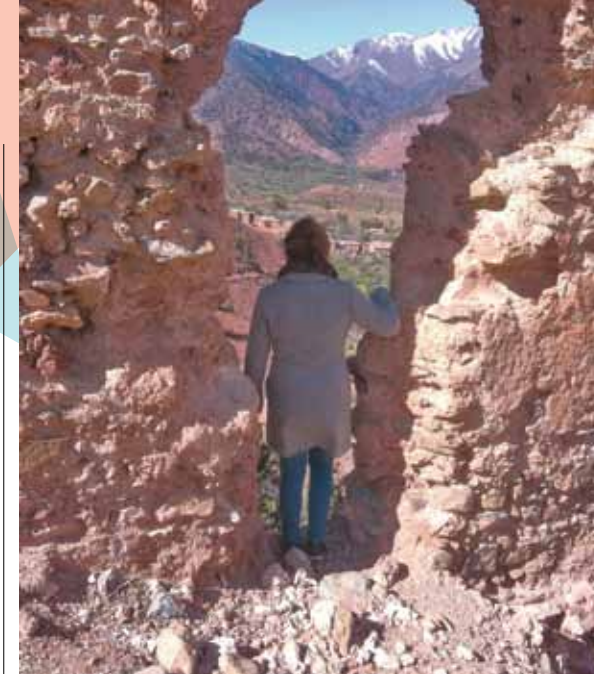
## FEBRUARY 2016

My main job as a volunteer is helping the girls who live in EFA's boarding houses with their English and French. I help a lot with homework, and the group "lessons" I lead consist mainly of games and debates, but any chance to practise is useful for them. There is also always some project on the go, like repainting all the plant pots on the roof, or redoing the displays. If there is nothing to do then we go and play football.

## MARCH 2016

Being of a similar age to the girls has helped me make really good friends. A couple of them invited me to stay with their families for the weekend, which was so much fun. I have even been to an Amazigh (Berber) wedding. They dressed me in a Kaftan and we danced until 6am and then walked home half way up a mountain. It started snowing and we were all wearing heels, and we had one torch between the five of us but because we were all so tired, we thought it was the funniest thing. That was one of my best moments.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY



Moroccan moments: visiting ruins outside a village near Asni (above) and attending a Berber wedding in Tinmel (right)



## APRIL 2016

After leaving Asni, I travelled through Morocco to Tangier, before getting the ferry to Spain and flying to Budapest to do some inter-railing around Europe with my best friend. We're in Prague now. We spent the day wandering around and there's so much to see and the city is beautiful. We had no plan so we just got lost for a couple of hours and took every opportunity to eat interesting looking food.

## MAY 2016

I flew home from Brussels and now I'm getting ready for my next adventure - Nicaragua. I first went there when I was 16 and I really wanted to come back to explore it more. I'm going to do an internship at a place called Casa Xalteva in Granada. It's great because it's a non-profit Spanish school that funds an educational programme for underprivileged local children and adolescents.

**"They dressed me in a Kaftan and we danced until 6am, then walked home half way up a mountain"**

### Gap year top tips

**Do your research.** If you want to volunteer, find out about the organisation, ask difficult questions, and make sure they're reputable.

Go to a country where you can **get a work visa**. Combining work and backpacking is easy in countries such as Australia and New Zealand meaning you don't have to save quite as much. Plus working in a country is one of the best ways to get under its skin.

**Think outside the box**, initiatives such as Help Exchange enable you to help families or businesses in exchange for food and accommodation - a really cheap way to see the world. Just check the reviews from previous helpers first!

**Consider staying in the UK** and finding a meaningful opportunity here. Volunteering Matters has full-time opportunities for young people wishing to live away from home for six months or a year while making a difference in this country.

Overall, **think about the impact** you want to make, and go out and do it.

## JUNE 2016

I usually have Spanish lessons in the morning and then spend the afternoons getting all my work done. My internship involves me doing all the admin, so my days are mainly spent emailing potential students and making sure everything is set up for their time studying here.

## JULY 2016

In September, I'm going to Leeds University to study French and Arabic. It's exciting, but at the moment I'm more excited about being in Nicaragua and exploring Central America. Granada is close to a lot of really amazing places, including an enormous lake full of tiny islands, a crater lake, two volcanoes, the capital city Managua, and the pacific coast. I have a lot of options for exploring so I just pick a place when I have time and visit.  
*Interview by Nicola Slawson*

## Alternatives

# Ready to join the workforce?

Look to an apprentice degree or FE college to nurture your vocation, says **Helena Pozniak**

**L**auren Allen, 21, has a mortgage, a salary, is studying for a degree-level qualification, and has no student debt. Deterred from going to university by the fees, she opted instead for a school leaver's programme with Be Wisser Insurance, earning £18,000 a year to train and study for insurance qualifications at her local further education college in Basingstoke. If she continues as planned with her advanced diploma, equivalent to a master's degree level, she'll finish studying in April next year, at which point her salary could rise to £28,000. "I never felt I missed out on the uni experience," she says. "The company organised lots of socials and I made lots of friends. I'll qualify at about the same time as if I'd gone to uni - but with experience and without the debt."

Allen has taken one of many alternative routes into higher education. As careers advisers point out, students who are having second thoughts about university now have more choices than ever before - one of which is to study for university-level degrees at local further education (FE) colleges. They're closer to home, cost less, have smaller class sizes, and subjects are more vocational.

### Higher and further

One in 10 students currently in higher education are at a further education college rather than at university, according to research from the Education and Training Foundation. A third of them are



**'I never felt I missed out on the uni experience,' says FE college student Lauren Allen, below**

under 21 and 44% are studying part-time. England has 244 colleges with degree-awarding powers, mostly through partnership with a university. These colleges also offer foundation degrees, which enable students to leapfrog on to degree courses, as well as apprenticeships and other vocational qualifications.

"We very much welcome students whose A-level results weren't what they hoped," says Bournemouth & Poole College's Antony Wright. Here, applicant numbers are looking more buoyant than last year, and most students live locally. "It may not always be what students set out to do, but it's definitely a cheaper route."

Costs are usually around £6,000 a year, and many students study part-time to fit work in alongside. Focusing on areas such as engineering, graphic design, tourism or teacher training, many FE courses are developed jointly with local employers to offer a gentler introduction to higher study. Applicants can go through Clearing says Wright,

who urges students speak to staff before applying: "Committing to a programme takes time and energy and you do have to pick a course that really engages you."

And there are many other options too; degree apprenticeships, for

**'I'll qualify at the same time as if I'd gone to uni - but with experience and without debt'**

example, now in their second year, are expanding their subject range to cover everything from digital through to public relations, via aerospace software development. These employer-university collaborations pay apprentices a full-time wage, while they study for their degrees - the government and employer pick up the tab.

Even the Open University (OU) attracts a younger crowd these days - 30% of students are under 25 and 7% are between 18 and 21. Full-time degrees at OU cost an average of £5,600 a year and, crucially, set no academic entry requirements.





Can you help my son use a tin opener?

Can I have a room with a view?

Can I bring my pet dog/snake/gerbil?

# There's no harm in asking

Admissions tutors are impressed by students quizzing them on courses they're offering through Clearing - and it's worth having some more general questions too, says **Helena Pozniak**

**S**tudents - and their parents - ask some funny things. Even the most experienced admissions tutors have been temporarily floored by some queries during Clearing. "I'm worried my son will not be able to use a tin opener - could you help him?" asked one parent of staff at the University of Greenwich. "Could I bring my gerbil/snake/dog?" is another perennial favourite - and the answer is almost always no.

"What course do you think I should do?" is the question no would-be undergraduate should ask, but that doesn't stop them. Other students are more particular about their surroundings. "Can I have a room with a view?" one student asked staff at Greenwich, following it up with: "And what

**A basketball player asked about the length of his bed - and was duly given a bed extension**

colour will my curtains be - I want to buy a matching bedspread." Another simply wondered: "Who will cook my meals?"

### Satisfy your curiosities

But don't be put off by these examples: it always pays to ask. A basketball player applying to Loughborough University asked about the length of his bed - and was duly given a bed extension.

And really, there's no such thing as a silly question, says Jessica Bearne, Enquiry Unit Manager, University of Greenwich - it's natural to ask about all sorts. "So whatever your question, do ring in. Universities have teams of people waiting to help - many of them students who were in your position just a year or two ago."

### Clearing debunked

**Many sixth-formers** are hazy about how Clearing actually works, according to a survey by Leeds Beckett University.

**More than a quarter** of A-level students think they need to accept an offer by the end of results day (they don't), and three quarters think there's a limit on how many offers can be held (there isn't).

**Nearly one in five** thinks Clearing closes at the end of results day (it actually closes on 20 September).

## Freshers' week

# Your university adventure starts here

Quirky societies, wild socials and outdoor cinema - it's all there in freshers' week, says **Allison Dickinson**

**A**s last year's freshers packed up and went home for the summer, student unions across the country were putting the final touches to their 2016 freshers' weeks agendas.

Covering everything from the obligatory pub crawls and freshers' balls to community events, advice and freshers' fairs - not to mention all the goody bags - the mission is to deliver something for everyone.

Expect a bundle of daytime events courting you to sign up to sports clubs and societies; then, when the sun goes down, it's all about themed parties, pub quizzes,

outdoor cinema, light shows, quiz nights, karaoke and comedy events. Some of the larger universities even book celebrities or famous DJs.

Scott Mills, who presents the afternoon show on Radio 1, has been DJing at student gigs for more than 10 years. "There's nothing like freshers' week. It's a fantastic experience. I might visit 20 or 25 in a month and it's always a good time because the students are all genuinely excited to be there," he says.

"I'll be doing a lot of student gigs this year, and we're definitely planning on representing the student community as part of the show. A lot of students say we're their breakfast show because they don't get out of bed until one o'clock!"

**'Freshers' week is always a good time because students are excited to be there'**



Simon Gerry, chief executive of Newcastle students union, says it's not all about partying: "The evening events and big-name acts get the headlines, but more than 80% of our events are teetotal - and surveys tell us this is where students really forge friendships that will last a lifetime."

### Look beyond the university

Many universities will also be taking advantage of what is happening in their towns and cities in a bid to get students to engage with their communities.

Students at the University of Hull, for example, can look forward to a year of events that are tied in with the UK City of Culture 2017 celebrations. As a principal partner, the university is able to offer students not



only cultural experiences, but also opportunities to expand their CVs with volunteering.

Most universities offer something more like a fortnight for freshers,

**The 2015 freshers opening party at the University of South Wales**

with events running from mid-September into October, although the University of Dundee kicks off even earlier, on August 30, with an event to welcome local

students. That's followed there by more events to help arrivals get to grips with the community, such as supermarket tours and help registering with dental and GP services. Evening events include a Taste of Scotland welcome party and a nightly Conversation Cafe and appearances from Radio 1 DJs Nick Grimshaw and Daniel P Carter.

The University of Nottingham promises "foam cannons, bouncy castles, fire breathers, giant ball pits, UV face painting and more", while the University of Leeds boasts "the biggest freshers event in the UK," complete with glow-in-the-dark robots.

Students at the University of Gloucestershire are promised the "biggest freshers in history" with a moving-in-day garden party and barbecue, an international food festival and a 5k run.



UNIVERSITY OF  
LEICESTER

# GET A PLACE, THEN REALLY GO PLACES.

At the University of Leicester you'll find a wide range of flexible courses and fantastic opportunities. Come and fulfil your ambitions on a thriving campus, based in the city of champions.

**CLEARING NOW**  
**0116 373 6000**  
visit [www.le.ac.uk/clearing](http://www.le.ac.uk/clearing)

## It's time for your adventure. Apply to child nursing.

We're looking for ambitious individuals ready to start their adventure to become a child nurse in south-east London and north Kent. Our three-year child nursing degree has places available starting this September.

You must have 280 UCAS points, GCSE English and Mathematics at grade C, or equivalent qualifications, and some experience in a care setting.



No.1 in London for Student Satisfaction in Nursing

Call our Clearing hotline:  
020 8331 9000

[gre.ac.uk/clearing](http://gre.ac.uk/clearing)

 UNIVERSITY of  
GREENWICH

University of  
Hertfordshire **UH**

## Going through Clearing?

### Relax... we've saved you a seat

Exciting courses  
to kickstart your career

Amazing facilities  
with vibrant, on-campus  
sports and entertainment

**96.2%**

of our graduates in employment  
or further study within six months



Call the Clearing Hotline on  
**0333 920 1602**  
[go.herts.ac.uk/clearing-press](http://go.herts.ac.uk/clearing-press)

Wheel mates:  
roller derby  
players at Earls  
Court, London



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

# Do you wanna be in my gang?

University societies attract like-minded people. What better place to meet friends, asks **Allison Dickinson**



**S**ocieties are absolutely fantastic at creating that sense of belonging that students need to keep them in education,” says Richard Brooks, NUS vice-president of union development.

“It’s about meeting people who are like you and who care about you. Plus, students who take part in societies are not only less likely to drop out - they also go on to get good honours degrees and have better employment prospects too.”

Brooks, a judge on the inaugural National Societies Awards this year, has been impressed with the sheer diversity of the societies offered by student unions across the country.

“There’s everything from ninja and pirate societies to extreme sports, like rock climbing and mountaineering,” he says. “Then there’s the more traditional sports, community groups and activism - so there really is something for everyone,” he explains.

“It’s not just about


**‘Societies make students and their lives, as well as wider society, better’**

students doing nice things or having a good student experience - ultimately, societies make students and their lives, as well as wider society, better.”

## Extreme sports

**Ultimate frisbee** Nottingham Trent University students can take part in this fast-paced team game of razor-sharp throwing skills and immense stamina and agility. Also at Leeds, Exeter, Edinburgh and more.

**Airsoft society** Players eliminate opponents by hitting each other with spherical non-metallic pellets. Offered at the University of Derby.

**Roller derby** A full-contact women’s sport played on quad roller skates, by players skating around an elliptical track. The game consists of a series of two-minute countdown “jams”. Get your skates on at a range of universities, including Cambridge. 



Curmudgeons and dragons: uni gives you the chance to explore new interests, such as Walt Disney (below), Game of Thrones (bottom) and quidditch (left)

➔ **Extreme ironing** Described as “combining the thrills of an extreme outdoor activity with the satisfaction of a well-pressed shirt”, extreme ironing sits somewhere between performance art and extreme sport. All you need is an ironing board, some laundry, and a remote or dangerous location/situation - maybe in a canoe or under a frozen lake - and you’re away. Available at the University of Nottingham.

### Unusual clubs

**Historia Normannis** A 12th-century medieval reenactment group at the University of Derby, focusing on the events between the reigns of Henry I and King John.

**Real tennis** Middlesex University has the enclosed court needed to play the original tennis - which has as much in common with squash as it does with Wimbledon.

**The Baker Street Irregulars** Formed in 2015 at St George’s University of London by four

### All you need is an ironing board, some laundry, and a remote or dangerous situation

graduate medical students, their areas of interest centre on clinical forensic medicine, pathology and Benedict Cumberbatch.

**Pagan and occult** Keele University offers this discussion group based around topics from the paranormal to the supernatural. Paganism and witchcraft feature heavily.

### TV and film societies

#### Dumbledore’s Army

This society for Harry Potter fans at the University of Derby has quizzes, online roleplaying, fan fiction and origami sessions.

**Muggle Quidditch** A full-contact, mixed-gender sport modelled on the broomstick-based sport from JK Rowling’s wizard world. Also at Derby.

#### Disney appreciation

University of Manchester students can enjoy movie nights, quizzes and events based around all things Disney.



**Ice and Fire** Offered at the University of York, this is the society to appreciate all things Game of Thrones with socials, episode screenings and book discussions.

**RuPaul’s Drag Race** Watch episodes, get backstage gossip, and enjoy trips to Drag Idol UK and RuPaul’s Drag Race UK in London. At Keele.

Student unions are always open to ideas for new societies as long as there’s enough interest, says Derby students union vice-president of student community Amy Horner.

“At the start of 2016, we held a campaign to encourage students to start up new societies. Some ideas were a bit ‘out there’ - suggestions included stitch and bitch [knitting], skydiving and snail racing - but everything is considered!”



PHOTOGRAPHY: SAM FROST, ALAMY, GETTY

## Study skills

# Step up to the mark

When you finished GCSEs, you probably thought A-levels were impossible. But you coped. **Gavan Naden** offers some tips for the next challenge

**I**t's the parties, drinking games and other fun stuff that grab the headlines. And yet, despite rumours to the contrary, most university courses actually require a serious amount of study.

That workload can be a major step up from school days - both in intensity and complexity - but many are so relieved to be on a course that they forget to prepare themselves for the new academic regime.

"I never gave it much thought and was just happy to be there," says Tim Hartley, who is studying at the University of Nottingham. "I never considered how hard I'd have to work until I arrived."

There are no teachers, no

**Head down: you'll need to work hard to stay on top of the academic side of university life**



constant revision tests; there's no one to tell students off if they don't turn up to tutorials and no parents to help fill out forms.

So students will have to be flexible, relying upon themselves and their organisational skills to ensure they get the most from their course.

"University is all about building independence and resilience," says Claire Huxham, senior tutor in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Bristol, "but this doesn't mean going it alone."



## Studying top tips

**1 Attend all inductions.** Access any you miss through the university's virtual learning environment. Once logged in check each module and what is expected from assignments.



**2 Go to the library.** Obtain a range of different sources, so you have all the required reading you need.

**3 Investigate your learning style** Take an online learning method test, such as Vark, to discover whether you're a visual learner, aural learner, reader/writer or kinesthetic.



**4 Acknowledge that academic reading is not always easy.** Learn to reference quickly - and always acknowledge your sources.

**5 Accept that academic success is a very important part of university.** It's not just about the social scene!

**6 Seek support if you struggle.** Go to your personal tutor, senior tutor, pastoral support team, wardens or senior residents in university accommodation.

**7 Break down large tasks into smaller, achievable steps.** It makes them less daunting.

**8 Don't worry if your work isn't perfect first time round.** Hone and polish it afterwards.

**9 Foster positive wellbeing** Make use of support services, such as counselling, disability services and the health service, if you need them.

Support networks, such as study skills workshops, buddy systems and peer mentoring, are vital in helping students adapt from school to university learning.

"These can provide a safe and welcoming space to gain confidence, sustain motivation, share ideas and talk about seminar content," she says. "We often see first years worried about the quality of their work and where they stand in relation to their new peers. It's OK to see what works and what doesn't. Feedback isn't a one-way street, but an opportunity to get involved with your subject and find your academic voice."

### Independence haze

Dr Emma Thompson, Southampton University's Learn with US Transition Leader, believes students know they are entering a new world of independence and self-reliance, but may be hazy on the details.

"Most students are aware they will have to be more self motivated, organised and timetabled," she says, "but it also helps to have a greater understanding of the difference between the style of lessons at school and those at university, where lectures are more didactic and perhaps slightly less interactive.

**'Students should see lectures as a starting point, rather than a source of all their information'**

"Students should see lectures as a starting point, rather than a source of all their information. And it's necessary for students to do a lot more work themselves around their contact hours."

Depending on the course you're taking, you could have a full, heavily timetabled day - on engineering or medicine, for example - or, if you're reading English literature or history, have very few lectures and tutorials but bundles of reading to tackle. "University can be hard and may not feel like this wonderful experience that it's painted to be," adds Thompson. "Even for the most gifted students this may be the first time they have come across something really difficult."

As for parents, they can help by encouraging debate and critical thinking, rather than expecting their child to accept all they hear. Respect is fundamental, but it's ok to question the foundations of what is being taught.

"Give your child the space to solve their own problems," says Huxham. "Let them know you're always there, but empower them in their decisions. Let them ask questions and let them find the answers, instead of telling them what to do."

**5 STAR**  
RATING FOR  
teaching quality  
(QS STARS GLOBAL  
UNIVERSITY RATINGS)

**UK TOP 10**  
FOR STUDENT  
satisfaction  
(NSS 2015)

**UK TOP 15**  
FOR GRADUATE  
employability  
(GUARDIAN UNIVERSITY  
GUIDE 2017)

**UK TOP 30**  
IN THE 2014  
research excellence  
framework  
(REF)

Swansea University  
Prifysgol Abertawe

**TRAILBLAZER**

"IT IS MY JOB TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENGINEERS"

Dr Ben Evans  
Senior Lecturer, Aerospace Engineering

LEARN MORE ABOUT BEN'S STORY:  
swansea.ac.uk/makingwaves

WINNER  
2016  
STUDENT CHOICE  
AWARDS  
WINNER  
COURSES AND  
LECTURERS

PHOTOGRAPHY: GALLERYSTOCK, GETTY

Apply now for courses starting in September 2016  
**swansea.ac.uk/clearing**  
OPEN DAYS FOR 2016 ENTRY 19 - 24 AUGUST



# How to survive the first few weeks

Do



✓ **Make use** of social media – join Facebook groups connected to your freshers' week and your halls of residence.

✓ **Be prepared** to feel homesick – it's only natural, no matter how good a time you're having!

✓ **Remember you're** not alone in the way you're feeling – everyone else is pretty nervous about their new life too.

✓ **Make sure** you attend some non-drinking events – you can't expect to keep up the pace night after night!

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY



Don't



✗ **Don't close** your door while you're moving in – keep it open so you can say hello to people when they walk by.

✗ **Don't skip** the library induction – the essays will soon start piling up and it's valuable knowledge!

✗ **Don't assume** freshers' week is the only time you can make friends. You'll meet more people when you course starts.

✗ **Don't feel pressured** to go to every event – you'll end up with no money and probably catch freshers' flu too.



University of Essex



# CLEARING.

## MAKE THE RIGHT CALL.

# 01206 874747

[WWW.ESSEX.AC.UK/GUARDIAN](http://WWW.ESSEX.AC.UK/GUARDIAN)