

Parents' guide to university

Advice for the big
changes ahead



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Oscar-winning actor and university chancellor Jeremy Irons on uni life

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A journey to savour How to get the best out of the uni years

Sarah Jewell



As a parent you want the best for your child but it's not always easy to work out what that is, especially when it comes to choosing which university they should go to. To help you through the application process this special supplement gives advice and guidance to parents and students starting out on their momentous journey. The first thing to think about is the subject - as one admissions tutor says: "Higher education is a fantastic opportunity, but it really is about making sure the course choice is right." And as Jeremy Irons, the new chancellor of Bath Spa university says: "I'd advise would-be students to pick a subject or career they love - that's the advice I

gave to my own children." Once the course is chosen the next challenge is writing the personal statement. You can help your offspring by discussing with them their best characteristics and how to present them, as one parent explains: "I told my son he has to make the reader know him without ever having met him."

We also look at the value of going on an open day - Izzy Schifano says she went to seven, all with her mum or dad, and "it was well worth it - you find out about teaching methods, staff and general university life from talking face-to-face with admissions tutors, lecturers and current students". Once your child leaves home, adapting to new situations is going to be key - you will miss them and they may be homesick, but, as student Norah Lovelock says: "I reminded myself of why I came to university and that homesickness was unfortunately inevitable - it wasn't a constant thing and it didn't last long."

Overview

'They left the decision to me'

It's not an easy balance to strike - between wanting to help your child choose the best degree possible and meddling in their life. **Liz Lightfoot** has some tips for both parties

What to study and where is the first big decision that many young people have to make in their lives. It's a choice that could shape their future career prospects, their friendship groups and their interests, so naturally they turn to their parents for advice.

Luckily, there is plenty of information for parents who want to support their children. So where to start? The course is number one. "My advice would be to encourage students to do what they love," says computer science student Norah Lovelock, who chose the "wrong" subject and will swap to English literature in for next year. "They can always do other things to enhance their career prospects, such as volunteering or gaining work experience."

Parents can help by teasing out what their sons or daughters really enjoy and even act as an antidote to teachers so passionate about their subject they want all their star students to choose it. There are over 50,000 courses, covering a far broader scope than



or teacher, but it's important to look at the guidance from Ucas and individual universities about what they like and don't like to see in it.

Open days are the opportunity for students to get a feel for a place, find out more about the course, accommodation and surrounding area. "One thing I think people should definitely do is go online and get an idea of which halls they would be interested in before they arrive - and then visit them, because there are very different locations and buildings," says Finn Hambly, a first-year student of natural sciences at the University of York.

Their adventure starts here - but you won't be too far away
Getty

"I went to lots of open days. My parents didn't try and push me in one direction or another. To be honest, at times I wished they would just tell me what to do, but they asked questions and left the decision to me. In the end, I chose a brand new course," says Hambly, from East Sussex.

His mother, Frances, found the open days fascinating. "I tended to look at everything with a critical eye but try not to say anything," she says. "I went to one university and I really, really didn't like it, but I just bit my lip because you try not to impart your feelings. Luckily, Finn didn't think it was right for him. He told me his thoughts and I agreed."

Once the decision is made and the packing starts, there's an equally big role for parents. Small things such as a plug extension lead or soft pillows can make the transition easier - and a refresher course on food hygiene, cooking and laundry is invaluable.

Of course, it can be a traumatic when your child leaves home, but the good thing about university is that it is a half-way house - halls are well regulated and there are staff on hand to help and advise the students. And it won't be long before they are back for Christmas, more grown-up and, usually, more appreciative of you and home comforts.

Teachers can be so passionate about their subject that they want all their star students to choose it

A-level subjects, but many students find out about them too late. Even within a subject there can be enormous variations between universities, says psychology student Jan Feeley, 19, who has just completed the first year of his degree at the University of Southampton. "I am the academic representative for my course and take the feedback from students. One thing I have found is that a lot of people didn't really look at what the course included. It's very important to research the individual modules," he says.

Choosing a course that best suits a student's interests helps with the personal statement on the application form, which is a chance for them to "sell" themselves. It has to be in their own words and not those of a parent

Big steps Preparing your child for uni

- Reassure them they will have a great time but that you are only a text or phone call away if they get homesick.
- Prepare a "university" kit of things they will find useful and help them choose nice things to personalise their room.
- Check the household insurance to see if they are covered. If not, think about mobile phone and laptop insurance.
- A quick course or refresher on food hygiene, cooking and laundry will definitely come in handy - plus advice on setting and keeping to a budget.
- Talk about the difference between school and university. Lectures are just one small part of a degree - they will need to do independent study and plan their workload.

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'I did get homesick, but I didn't linger on it'

Leaving home is a wrench – for child and parent. But **Norah Lovelock** and her mum got on with their new lives

Norah Lovelock is in the first year of a BSc in computer science at Sheffield Hallam University.

University is amazing for me. It has changed my life. It's really nice to be able to walk to the supermarket or go out to meet friends whenever I want to. It's also really good to meet a wide range of people. Not being able to recognise everyone on the street is weird, but nice.

It was really hard leaving Mum and I did get homesick. Perhaps three or four times I felt bad because I missed home so much, but I didn't linger over it. I reminded myself of why I came to university and that homesickness was, unfortunately, inevitable. It wasn't a constant thing and it really didn't last long, perhaps two or three weeks.

Lillian Mileerde, who like her daughter Norah Lovelock, has also enrolled on a degree course

I don't drink alcohol, so I thought I might find it harder to make friends, but if you are willing to put yourself out there – to smile and chat to people – you will make friends really, really easily. Everyone in Sheffield is ridiculously friendly anyway.

I originally applied for English, but at one university I visited I asked a lecturer what kind of work I could go into with an English degree from there and he said teaching. Teaching is not for me, I know that. So I decided to do computer science, because I thought it would get me a good job, but I don't really enjoy it. English is still my passion. Sheffield Hallam has been great about it and is allowing me to change to an English degree in September.

Lillian Mileerde, Norah's mother, lives in Brookenby, Lincolnshire.

Of course it was a big change when Norah left. However, thanks to modern technology, I can keep in touch by text

every day, sometimes several times a day. I know my daughter is doing what she has wanted to do since a young age: go to university.

I started an Open University degree in English language and literature at the same time as Norah started her degree. It's a big undertaking, as I am working full time, but I would love to eventually become a primary school teacher.

I currently work as a fishmonger in Tesco, so I get to talk to the parents of Norah's contemporaries every day. They have all coped in different ways with their children leaving home. Some are really missing them and making big plans to start new things. Others say "Hurrah! They've gone!"

Before she left I made sure Norah knew basic things, like how to use a washing machine, how to cook, how to plan food for the week and how to budget. We also talked about planning her workload and not leaving assignments to the last minute.

Interview by Liz Lightfoot

“Before she left I made sure Norah knew how to use a washing machine, how to cook, and how to budget”



A choice that shapes lives

The degrees our offspring take affect not just their uni experience, but the paths open to them, says **Allison Dickinson**

Experts agree that the first thing prospective students should bear in mind when it comes to applying for university is the course itself. But this is easier said than done as a course's name can't tell you everything - course structure and content can vary quite significantly between one university and the next. Some universities even include work experience or international placements. So, how do you choose?

"Higher education is a fantastic opportunity, but it really is about making sure the course choice is right," says

“When my son wrote his personal statement, we had conversations about what he's done as a young person

Victoria Azubuine, admissions manager at the University of Bedfordshire. "The search tools on the Ucas website make it a great place to start. Once you've made that choice, look at the university, to make sure that is a good fit too."

For psychology student Obinna Okoro, 19, who planned to study psychology, the key was being accepted on to a psychology course that was accredited by the British Psychology Society (BPS). "If your degree is accredited, then it makes it easier to find a job after you leave university," he explains. "I didn't want to have to do additional training after university, so this was really important."

So once you've chosen your five options, you have to write your personal statement. Applications are done online through Ucas and you have a maximum of 47 lines to work with. This is where parents can help the most, as Obinna's mum, Lois, explains.

"I told him that he has to make the reader know him without even having met him," she remembers. "So when my son was writing his personal



Above: students at the University of Bedfordshire get settled

statement, we had conversations about what he's done as a young person from when he was in primary school, what interests him as a person and the things he's achieved."

On results day, Okoro didn't get the grades he wanted, so he went into clearing. "A few universities called offered me psychology, but they weren't

Jargon buster

- **Track** is the online "basket" where your university choices are saved, and where you can respond to offers. When a university makes a decision, this feeds directly through to Ucas who then update your Track account and notify you via text or email.
- **Clearing** is the final chance for applicants to get into to university prior to the start of courses. For courses starting in September 2017, the clearing period will be from July through to early September.
- Once you have heard back from your five choices, if you don't have an offer of a place you can add another institution and course as an extra choice. **Extra** is effectively the middle step between the main cycle and clearing, so it's an extra chance to get a place at an institution before the clearing period. **AD**

accredited - I didn't want to settle for that," he says. "It was really stressful but my parents told me not to lose sight of what I wanted, and eventually I was accepted on to an accredited course at the University of Bedfordshire."

The next step was to attend an open day at his chosen university. "The campus was perfect because I wanted to be far enough away from London, but not so far that if I decided to come home to visit it would be a three- or four-hour journey," says Okoro.

"I also liked the buildings because they were quite modern, and I liked the facilities, like the 24/7 library. The accommodation was really nice as well. It was really open and the atmosphere was friendly, which was nice."

The only thing left to do was to ensure his finance was in place, as he had begun his application before results were published. "Don't forget to do that!" he advises. "Then just be happy because you've made it, and there's nothing that can stop you now."

This is me Tips for writing a personal statement

- Pretend that there is only one place left on the course - and make yourself stand out from the crowd
Deborah Green, director of student recruitment, University of Hull
- A pet peeve is using quotes from public figures - they're easy to look up online and don't show much thought
Susie King, head of admissions, Middlesex University, London
- Before you start drafting your statement, check the entry profiles for the courses you're interested in at ucas.com - this will enable you to understand what experience and qualifications are required.
June Hughes, registrar and secretary, University of Derby
- Check your statement is written specifically for the course you've applied for, not copied from an application for a different course. You might not think it happens, but it does and it's pretty obvious to admissions officers.
Kayleigh Parsons, admissions team leader at Arden University

Open days

See it with your own eyes

Visiting on a university open day can be the key to a happy and fulfilled three-plus years, says **Antonia Windsor**

With the cost of going to university now in the tens of thousands, parents rightly feel they have a vested interest in helping their child choose the best place to study. "As much as I love the thought of my daughter going with her friends and having a giggle, there is a definite expectation that parents will be at open days," says Barbara Metcalfe, whose daughter, Thea, is planning to go to university this year. "During the seminars, the parents had some really well-thought-out questions about accommodation and money, but



also the courses - particularly where students had the chance to go overseas."

Open days give you a chance to get to know a university and ask all those questions that aren't answered by the website or prospectus. "My daughter has a nut allergy," explains Metcalfe. "So it was vital for us to check with the universities about procedures and check out the kitchen situation."

Although some subjects vary from university to university, meaning your choice is governed by how the subject

Parents and prospective students visit the University of Southampton

is covered, subjects accredited by professional organisations cover the same ground wherever you go - and so visits are crucial.

"I wanted to visit as many universities as possible to get a feel for the place I would potentially be living in for the next few years," says 18-year-old Izzy Schifano, who is in her first year of medicine at Southampton University. Her grand tour of seven universities - all with Mum or Dad - was well worth it: "You find out about teaching methods, staff and general university life from talking face-to-face with admissions tutors, lecturers and current students."

Liz Hunt, admissions manager at the University of Sheffield, says planning is key. "Work out which talks you'd like to go to, which departments you'd like to visit and whether you'd like to view the accommodation. After that, make sure you plan in time to take a wander around, get some food, check out the Students' Union and get a general feel for the place."

She also advises students to think about any questions they might have in advance. "And try not to take too many coats and bags," is Metcalfe's practical advice. "These places are hot and there is always lots of walking to do."

Open days

'Research the hell out of it'



You snooze, you lose: Milly Butters and dad Fraser rose early to get the best out of their open days

Fraser and Milly Butters, from Suffolk, visited five universities before opting for St Andrews

Milly Butters will start her psychology degree in September 2018.

We visited all the universities I was interested in before I applied to them - Durham, Exeter, St Andrews, Bath and UEA - and then visited four of them again for offer-holder's open days. You really have to visit. There were some I wasn't so enamoured with when I read the prospectus but then when I went I was much more impressed - and vice versa. So it is so important to pick up the atmosphere of the place, because that really influenced my decision.

Take your parents if you can. Because in terms of the financial aspect, I needed dad there to say: "This is what we can afford to do." I wouldn't have known that had I gone on my own. I also suggest you write down questions as they come to you, because you don't want to interrupt the talks

and you don't want to only remember them on the train home. Also think about what really matters to you: if you are really into sport, see what they have available; or if you want to travel abroad, ask about that. That helps you distinguish one from the other. I definitely connected to St Andrews the first time I went there, and I knew from the beginning that that was the one I wanted to go to. All the courses are equally impressive, and the facilities are amazing, but it's the place itself - you either like the atmosphere or you don't.

Fraser Butters: We travelled everywhere, from the far north to the south, and we wanted to include UEA as our local choice to make sure we had covered all bases. They all put on a good show. Nowhere stood out as being better than anywhere else for me. We

“I needed Dad there to say what was possible financially”

stayed overnight and got there very early in the morning to avoid traffic and use some of the facilities that weren't specifically on the tour. When Milly originally looked she wasn't interested in campus universities, but the campus universities weren't so bad in that they were really connected to the town - and actually Durham, which isn't a campus university, had some parts out of the city, so it felt like a campus university anyway. Until you go there, you don't know that. There are significant amounts of money at stake here, so you need to research the hell out of it. We did it over six months. Once she had offers and she was starting to narrow it down, going a second time was really helpful. It is a lot of time and effort and cost, but definitely worthwhile.

Interviews by Antonia Windsor

Adjustment & Clearing

Limited places for highly qualified students

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Fees, funding and costs



To empty or not to empty: students face financial dilemmas at uni **Alamy**

Make the money last

With discounts and deals aplenty - plus some costs you need to swallow - budgeting students need to be on their toes, says **Helena Pozniak**

Cash is often tight for students - and with a pint of beer setting them back three or four quid, it's important to have a handle on the bills that have to be paid. Rent is by far the greatest expense for students, whether they choose catered, self-catered or private accommodation. In Manchester, one of the cheaper student cities, accommodation will cost just under £4,300 for the 40-week year, but catered will cost an extra £1,257. The price of most university rooms includes gas and electricity. Private accommodation - which students usually take after the first year - may be cheaper up front, but the price of utility bills, the internet and so on needs to be factored in to give a real idea of the cost. Students might also have to rent for a calendar year, rather than just the academic term.

Figures from savethestudent.org put average expenditure at £735 a month, with £365 of that spent on rent - although plusher accommodation could cost nearly double that in some cities. Typically, students spend over £100 a month on food, £64 on social, £58 on bills, and £44 on travel. On top of that, there's more than £20 a month each on books and photocopying, clothes, mobile and other expenses - even £5 a month on illegal drugs, according to respondents. London living

costs an extra £1,300 a year, the NUS estimates.

Be aware of one-off costs such as housing deposits, which usually amount to a month's rent up front. Then there's also bedding furniture, cooking equipment, insurance, a television licence, internet and phone installation to consider - adding up to a couple of hundred pounds.

But help is at hand: student rail cards (£30 a year) and National Express coach cards (£25 for three years) give you a third off standard fares; and savethestudent.org offers discounts on a host of goods and services. An NUS card brings discounts for both online and high-street shoppers. For those who have never budgeted before - most haven't - there are plenty of apps to help, and Ucas has a guide online.

Which? compares 14 undergraduate bank accounts, all offering free overdrafts of varying amounts. Prepaid cards, which can be topped up from an account, can help students stick to budget as there's no overdraft available.

More than a quarter of students say their first loan instalment lasted less than a month and only 2% of students manage without an overdraft. So, try to be sensible about the prospect of your child getting into debt - and help them get back on track if they do, maybe by implementing a stricter budget.

How a degree gets paid for

Offer accepted, it's time to get the financial side in order

Funding for a first degree comes in two guises: a loan to cover tuition costs and a maintenance loan to help with living expenses. Tuition fees this year will rise to £9,250 a year for some courses; the cap on fees for new students remains at £9,000. This is paid directly to a university at three stages during the year - it doesn't go through a student bank account.

Students can also apply for maintenance loans to help with living costs; means-tested grants were scrapped for students starting in 2016. Students living away from home and studying in London can borrow up to £11,002 a

year, while those outside London could receive £8,430, depending on household income. Even students living with parents can borrow up to £7,097 a year.

Although students currently graduate with an average debt of £44,000, more than 70% of graduates might never fully repay their loan, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies. The loan is subject to interest, at a rate of retail price index plus 3%, from the start of term, but students will only begin to repay both tuition and maintenance loans on earnings over £21,000 (England and Wales). Any outstanding debt is currently written off after 30 years.

Students can already apply online for loans for this academic year, before they've accepted a place at university. They'll need to supply proof of identity and possibly details of household income, as this can affect the size of loan available.

Some universities offer bursaries or scholarships on their websites. Details of these funding options are compiled on scholarship-search.org.uk. **HP**



Striking out on their own

It's not just tough on the parents when uni starts - not every student copes with their new life, says **Helena Pozniak**

Will your student child sink or swim at university? Independent study, time management, personal hygiene and maintaining a healthy diet are just some of the challenges they will face. Although drop-out rates have risen slightly, they're still only at 6%, according to the Social Market Foundation - most students have a happy, successful time at university.

“The computer in the room is a curse”

Mental health is high on university radars, with the number of students seeking counselling having doubled at some institutions and a quarter of students saying they've experienced depression, anxiety or similar conditions, according to YouGov.

“I would say in the first month, forget about the academic side - just concentrate on building a social life,” says Karen Levi, a university lecturer. Her son chose to quit the University of Sussex in his second term after a lonely start - but will be returning in September. “He loved his course,” she says. But he struggled to bond with his flatmates and was mostly alone, sometimes not getting up until dark. “The computer in the room is a curse,”

says Levi, who believes academic staff could do more to help students mingle. “When I was a student we sat around after lectures, shared chips and chatted. That just didn't happen for him.” Nor did her son enjoy freshers' events: “Everyone was too plastered.”

Happily he did keep in touch - enough for Levi to realise all wasn't well. But confidentiality prevents universities from contacting parents even if something is wrong - unless the student consents. And, as Levi points out, those who really need help are often least likely to ask for it. She secured private counselling, her son found a job and is now travelling before returning to student life - “learning all the stuff he really needed to know before going to uni”.

And how a student copes with new study affects their wellbeing, says Hilly Janes, who teaches first years at two universities. “At school there's little time for digging, thinking around things, exploring ideas or arguing, so some students struggle.”

Here, parents can help, she believes - by encouraging them to develop their own interests and broadening their horizons before they leave “so they get a bigger view of the world than their own peer group and family”. Parents could also teach teenagers basic online research skills. But all this is hard, she acknowledges, “when all they want to do is not what mum and dad suggest”.

Once at university, students can tackle study skills, such as note taking, writing essays and using the library.

Unstructured days with few contact hours might leave them feeling at sea, and panic can set in, says Janes, when work deadlines overlap. Parents should initiate low-key ways of staying in touch, she says, “so that a child having a breakdown or failing a course doesn't come as a huge shock”.

GETTY

Susan Vinther 'Nina now makes her own decisions about what time she comes home'

Susan Vinther's daughter Nina, 19, is studying French and German at Cambridge University.

I will always remember that first visit. We hadn't seen Nina for five weeks, and it felt strange. It was a totally new experience: you're trying to tick a lot of boxes and please everybody - I don't think we managed it particularly well.

I came away feeling a bit dissatisfied, that there were things I wished we'd talked about and that I'd asked too many questions. But I also found it really reassuring. I'd been worrying about Nina - I don't know why - but I saw then that she was absolutely fine.

It was a turning point. I felt I had shifted to a different place in getting used to the new situation. That first stretch of allowing Nina to find her feet was over.

When she came home I knew she'd want to see her old friends, but I was a bit disappointed she went out on the very first evening! She now makes her own decisions about what time she comes home. It helps that she's always very considerate.

We're very close and we talk quite openly about how our relationship is changing. One large shift is that she's now questioning the family ways. She's

Nina Vinther, pictured below right with mum Susan, has begun to question the family ways



espoused certain causes - she's a bit of an eco-warrior - so she'll criticise me for being wasteful or driving somewhere when I could cycle. That can lead to a lively exchange of views! But I remember that experience of feeling a bit disconnected from your family when you first come home from university.

Interview by Celia Dodd

Your relationship is changing

Celia Dodd



Visiting your child at university can be unexpectedly challenging. You look forward to it for ages, but after the high of the initial hugs, it can all feel a little bit ... well, unnatural. There's so much resting on one or two precious days. It doesn't help that you have to meet in halls or a coffee shop, rather than on familiar home turf. Too often parents go back to their empty nest feeling they could have handled things better. Should we have stayed so long/longer? Why didn't we get to meet their friends?

The key is to be flexible and not try too hard. Rather than expecting to spend the whole time together, it helps to line things up to do with or without your child. It's good to let them take the lead in choosing where to eat and how to spend the time, but there's no harm in researching a few back-up options beforehand. And don't expect to meet their friends on your first visit.

Seeing your child in their new world can be a startling reminder of how rapidly your relationship is changing, and how their focus is shifting. It's all very positive, but that doesn't mean it isn't painful. And it can become even more apparent when they come home.

Of course it's great to have them back. One bonus is that returning students are usually much more appreciative of their parents. But conflict is par for the course. Bags and grubby clothes dumped in the middle

of the floor, spending all their time either asleep or out with friends, crashing in at 4am - these are all guaranteed to raise parents' hackles. Particularly if we're told we're uncool for complaining.

It helps to remember how much their perspective has shifted, and that they're being pulled in different directions, while our lives have stayed pretty much the same. It's a huge adjustment for a student to go back to home rules after the freedom of university, so it's worth setting aside a calm moment to discuss what is now acceptable and what's not - recognising their growing autonomy while stressing the need for consideration.

If your child never comes home, the chances are they're having a great time. But it might be worth questioning whether you've adapted to the changes in them: perhaps life at home is still set for teenage life?

By contrast, if kids are desperate to come home it's usually because they're not settling. This is really tough for parents. Most universities advise students not to go home for at least the first month.

One solution is to visit them instead, keep in regular contact, and set a deadline: if they're still unhappy at the end of term, you'll review the situation together.

Celia Dodd is the author of The Empty Nest - How to Survive and Stay Close to Your Adult Child.

Soon the technology could be there to help highlight who is floundering. This year some 20 institutions are piloting new analytical software which analyses students' study habits, looks at their previous grades and pinpoints those who might be falling by the wayside. “Technology is there to provide the (data) universities need to get a quick snapshot of those most at risk,” says Dr Paul Feldman, chief executive at education specialists Jisc, who plan to roll out the technology more widely next year. Students who find that all a bit Big Brotherish can opt out, however.

Veronica Moore, head of counselling and disability at Loughborough University - which comes second in a 2017 student experience survey (Times Higher Education) for welfare support - says it's about getting the balance of parental communication right. Loughborough and other universities such as York have introduced a system where trained wardens keep an eye on new students in halls and seek out vulnerable students.

But it's hard to get the balance right, says Moore. “One minute they don't need you, the next they want a big hug. And it can be really difficult for parents to understand this is the first step towards children moving away entirely, and accept that it's healthy they try to manage their own anxieties.”

Tips for a top uni life

- Register with a doctor - some universities even offer GP services on campus.
- Don't isolate yourself or wait for people to speak to you or visit you. Try to initiate conversation.
- Personal tutors say it's fine to chat to them about general wellbeing.
- Think about going to events alone if you can't find anyone to go with.
- Work out course deadlines in advance - online diaries help. Speak to academic staff before the crunch if you can't deliver work on time.
- Join clubs or societies or get involved, even with a job or voluntary work - the busier you are, the less homesick you'll be. Try to establish a routine.
- Try not to call or visit home too often. Catch-ups can sometimes leave you feeling worse.
- Speak to student support services, or wardens in accommodation, if you are struggling - many universities offer free counselling sessions, which are confidential.
- Remember that things will improve. Early weeks might feel a huge struggle and it can be tempting to give up, but most students settle during the first term.



GETTY

Packing

Leave the kitchen sink

It's not just your offspring off to university, says **Antonia Windsor** – it's also your towels, pillows, pens ...

If you're eyeing up your Ford Fiesta and wondering how you'll fit in your daughter's vintage clothes collection, duvet and pillows, books and toiletries, to drive 100 miles up country, then now might be a good time to think about packing.

When planning what your teenager needs to take with them, it is worth considering the following:

How far away will they be living?

If you live miles away from their chosen uni, you'll need to be more thorough than if they're studying locally and coming home every other weekend.

“Equipping their kitchen is a good way to declutter”

How long are they going to be away?

Do they intend to stay away until Christmas, or will they be heading back to the nest halfway through term? This will determine how many clothes they take with them. Snow boots can perhaps be left behind, along with the thickest of winter coats.

Will they be living in catered or self-catered accommodation?

In catered accommodation you can get away with packing a kettle, toaster, a

few mugs, plates and cutlery. In self-catered accommodation they will need to bring kitchen essentials.

This is a good opportunity to declutter and anything you don't have at home can be picked up locally when you get there. And don't forget these other essentials:

Washing and toiletries

Obviously, a trip to the launderette will not be at the forefront of most freshers' minds, so pack enough clean clothes



We're crammin': what you pack depends on how far they go Getty

Advice

'Pick a subject you love' Jeremy Irons



I'm not a university boy and I always rather regretted that - I trained in drama at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and becoming the new chancellor of Bath Spa University is an adventure for me. I am a strong advocate for going to university - I think university is a valuable way to fast-track the kind of experience that took me years to pick up.

There is value in studying - honing your knowledge - in a particular subject, but students need to graduate poised to take advantage of a fluid job market too. Things are moving so fast that students now will change career maybe two or three times in their lives - so they need agility and a breadth of knowledge to move with the times.

I'd advise would-be students to pick a subject or a career they love - that's the advice I gave to my own

“Students need to graduate poised to take advantage of a fluid job market”

children. I didn't tell them what to do, although perhaps I should have. I just wanted - like all parents - for them to find something that made them happy. It's like darts: you've got to know what number you're aiming for - not just throw and see where it lands. People who succeed are driven; they are the ones who keep learning.

Young people should get involved with politics at university - there needs to be more discussion of political ideals. Students need to think about what kind of society they want to live in - universities are there as a forum for debate and for throwing ideas about.

There is so much opportunity at university to find out about yourself and the world - it's a great springboard from which to launch yourself.

Oscar-winning actor Jeremy Irons is the chancellor of Bath Spa University.

to last them a fortnight, including sportswear and something smart. Give them a pack of washing powder so they don't come home with a case of dirty washing. Toiletries can be taken from home or bought locally. A dressing gown is useful if accommodation includes a shared bathroom, plus two bath towels and a hand towel.

Bedding

You will need to bring a duvet and pillows, and two sets of bedding. Perhaps also a sleeping bag if your teenager intends to visit friends at other universities during term. It's worth packing some hangers, as even if they're provided there are never enough.

Documents and electricals

Pack their passport, driving licence, national insurance card and NHS cards, as well as anything sent by the university. Electrical items, such as a laptop and charger - including an ethernet cable - headphones, USB sticks and a printer are all useful. And then there are reference books, course books, notebooks, pens and folders.

Remember, pretty much everything can be ordered online, so don't panic if you forget something.

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