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# University



Small text caption for the sculpture photo.



## A guide for parents

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Introduction  
Kim Thomas

*It feels like an ending - but it's also a new beginning*

For more than 16 years you've watched your child grow from a tiny helpless baby into a young adult. Finally, it's time to think about them applying for university and leaving home. It's exciting, but also scary. How will your child cope? And how will you cope?

Our guide helps to prepare you for that difficult transition. It has everything you need to know about the university application process: helping your child find the right course and institution for them; writing a personal statement; applying for finance; and making the most of open days.

But we also have some tips for the parents left behind... on coping with that feeling of loss and emptiness when your child leaves for university. When they leave home, it feels like an ending - but it's also a new beginning, an opportunity to do things you want to do, whether it's meet friends, take up hobbies or enjoy the luxury of a term-time holiday.

And don't forget: although it's hard when your child leaves for university, it won't be long before they're back home again. Just make sure the washing machine is working.

*'Enjoy the luxury of a term-time holiday, meet friends or take up hobbies. It won't be long before your child is home again'*

# Leaving for uni

## Offer advice and support - but from the backseat

It's a fine line between making sure your children are prepared for their uni adventure and trying to relive your past through them

Kim Thomas

Before his teenage sons left for university, Richard Marshall taught them to make curry, bread and home-brewed beer. As a single parent, he had already passed on the "ability to live on a fairly tight budget" and involved them in running the house: "They could operate a washing machine without ruining clothes,

knew how to iron - even if my advice was not to bother - and could do all those chores I'd seen new students fresh from home struggle with."

The road to university is a long one, and Marshall was right to start early. Gaynor Loxley, outreach and widening participation manager at the University of Sheffield, suggests looking at university courses as soon as GCSEs are over, so you can ensure you pick the relevant A-levels.

With two children of her own (one now doing a PhD and one about to start university), she advises against imposing your own ideas about what they should study. "It's their journey," she says. When it comes to helping your child through that journey, however, you can be a bit more hands-on. "Parents need to understand everything to do with the process," says David Seaton,



▼ The nature of family support changes in the university years. Posed by models. PHOTOGRAPH: STOCKSY

head of student recruitment at the University of Bedfordshire. But, he adds, there is "a fine line between supporting your child and leading them in a direction they don't want to go". That means you shouldn't write your child's personal statement for them - but by all means offer to run a "second pair of eyes" over it.

He also recommends attending open days and applicant days, as it's often parents who ask the important questions there. Loxley adds that accompanying your children means you'll know how far away the accommodation is from their lecture halls and be able to assess the safety of the campus.

Her other important tip is to look into what extra financial support might be available; some unis offer bursaries for students from areas where participation in higher education is low.

If your child has an offer, how can

you prepare them for the big step of leaving home? Jeremy Akhavi, a first-year student at Loughborough University in self-catering accommodation, says one of the most helpful things his parents did for him was to equip him with half a dozen recipes: "Just having a set of easy, cheap recipes that my parents taught me how to cook beforehand made such a huge difference."

On the other hand, he reflects, it would have been useful to know how to sew. "When things ripped, I had absolutely no idea how to do that. I ended up just taking them home."

You'll almost certainly worry about how your child will cope with the stress of managing finances and coping with work. Olivia Albaradura gave her daughter some tips about making her loan go further, such as roasting a whole chicken and keeping a separate account for rent and other bills. She also emphasised the importance of exercise to "give

*'I kept missing them, but I also made sure to remember that growing up and moving on is right'*

Richard Marshall  
Parent

her energy and endorphins, to help with emotional wellbeing". It was good advice - her daughter is now captain of her women's rowing team.

If you're worried about whether your child will make friends, it's worth noting that most universities now set up social media groups, so students can virtually "meet" their new flatmates beforehand. This can also be a good way of deciding who should bring which piece of kitchen equipment; no flatshare needs six cheese graters.

The transition to university is a time of change for parents too - and it can feel lonely without your children around. But remind yourself that this is what you've been working towards all those years. As Marshall says: "I kept missing them, but I also made sure to remember that growing up and moving on is the right thing for most. And I became a telephone consultant on essays."

So how did his sons fare? Apart from a "few perplexed calls about things like tenancy contracts" they had no problems coping independently. "Both ate well, lived outside halls successfully and amazingly came out with money in the bank for the next step," says Marshall.

"It seems to have made them more adventurous eaters too - a personal triumph. They don't brew their own beer, though."

Comment  
Rachel Weiss



*'Up until now, Project Offspring has been your focus. Now, you have time for yourselves'*

When your child leaves for university, it's a bit like when they go to nursery or to school for the first time. There's that fear of whether your child will cope, as well as a sense of loss.

The first thing to acknowledge is that this is a period of profound transition for you as a parent. Remember when you first became a parent, when, no matter how many people you spoke to for advice, or books you read, you were somehow totally unprepared for the shock of actually having your own child? When they leave for university, the change is not so dramatic - they've become more and more independent through the teenage years, after all - but those same feelings of being unprepared are inevitable. And yet, at the same time, this can be a time of excitement and new beginnings.

Your child is bound to be anxious because they haven't done this before, so you don't want them to pick up on any worries you have that they won't cope. The last thing they need is a parent going: "I don't know if you'll manage."

What will help is a parent who can say: "It's tough, you'll make mistakes, but I know you'll be OK. Remember when you went to secondary school - remember when you joined the Brownies?"

It's not a good idea to follow them on social media, however tempting it may be - you don't want to know that they were drunk last night or didn't make it home. That won't help either of you, and they need their privacy.

Ask yourself whether you trust your child. Think about all you've given them in the past 18 years. Of course, they'll make mistakes - we all do - but do you have some basic belief that they will cope? Or that they'll ask for help if they need it? If, as parents, we can have that belief, it transmits itself to our children.

And what about you? Your old routine, which was centred around your offspring, has gone. It's a bit like preparing for retirement - there's a similar loss of role and purpose. And, as with retirement or any transition in life, it helps to find a new purpose and develop new hobbies and friendships. Ask yourself: "What did I enjoy before I had children?" You might not have asked yourself what you want for 18 years or so - instead, you've asked: "What do I have to do?" So it's like learning to use a new muscle. Perhaps you'd like to learn Spanish, or play golf again, or see a friend. You can start to find meaning in life beyond being a parent.

If you're in a relationship, think of it as a project. Up until now, and for a long time, Project Offspring has been your focus - now you have the time, you need to ask yourselves, as a couple, what you want to do together. If you don't, it's very easy to drift gradually apart. The number one tip is: look after yourself. Do something nice for yourself. Go and meet a friend you like - not a friend who drains you. Some people find writing a journal helps.

Finally, it's really important to remember you're still their parent. You've done a wonderful thing - you've raised a child to the stage where they're able to leave home! It's what we want for them. This should be a cause for celebration.

Rachel Weiss is a partner at Rowan Consultancy, a coaching, counselling and training business in Perth, Scotland. As told to Kim Thomas

# STAY CURIOUS AND EXPLORE

## University of Brighton

Clearing is an opportunity to take another look at university plans - it's okay to change direction.

We support our students to advance into degree-level study, giving them the foundation and freedom to explore, to learn, to practise, and to grow the skills that will take them into their career.

If you or someone you care about is thinking about Clearing, call us now on **01273 066708** or read our advice at [www.brighton.ac.uk/clearing](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/clearing)

Top tips for student living

**Students finding a large pot of money** in their bank account at the beginning of term might be tempted to splash out, so teach them to set aside amounts for things such as food, rent and books. "Helping students to set a realistic budget before they start university can save headaches later," says Benedikte Joergensen, head of student recruitment at Manchester Metropolitan University.

**Think about what practical skills** they might need - not just cooking, but ironing, sewing, mopping the floor, and loading the dishwasher.

**Offer some tips on keeping safe**, whether it's avoiding walking home

alone or keeping drinking under control. First aid can be a lifesaver.

**Tell them they don't have to follow the crowd** - and that it's fine to spend some time alone. Student Jeremy Akhavi found it helpful that his parents told him: "Don't be afraid to go into your room, close the door, watch a movie, read a book and just relax."

**If you're an anxious parent, try not to show it** - and don't stalk them on social media... but do let them know that you're at the other end of a phone if they ever need you. Going to university can be scary, and it helps for them to know that you're still there for them.



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▼ *The Browns: mum Sharon, dad Malcolm and daughter Emily*  
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID SEVERN



*'I was living at 100 miles an hour - I didn't have time to think about the life I had left behind'*

Emily Brown  
Student, Hull University

**Experience**

**'It took months to get used to barely hearing from her, but we knew she was happy and safe'**

Good exam results and a no-pressure approach from her parents prompted Emily Brown to reconsider her refusal to go to university

Interview by Helena Pozniak

**W**ith hindsight, an ironing board wasn't the most useful item to give a student daughter. "My parents hadn't been to university - I think they thought students live like normal people," says Emily Brown, 20, a student at Hull University Business School. She also took enough dinner plates for a full-blown party. "We were super organised - we went around Ikea with a list," says her mum Sharon. "But her room was that small you could touch the walls." University was a late decision for Emily, who'd been adamant she would choose an apprenticeship instead, "partly because my sixth form put so much pressure on us to

apply (to university) and I rebelled". But, encouraged by good marks and the realisation that friends would be leaving her home city of Nottingham, she took a late trip to look around Hull - the first and only university she looked at. "I absolutely fell in love with it," she says. "People were so friendly and encouraging and it was so picturesque. I'd never been around a campus, so I was massively outside my comfort zone, but the lecturers had a genuine interest in us." Although neither Mum nor Dad put pressure on her, Emily realises university meant a lot to them. "They were so proud I'd applied myself" - she did well in her A-levels, with an A\* and a B, plus a distinction in BTec - "and that I could survive alone. They wanted me to make the most of myself. Then Hull made me an unconditional offer, which felt like a big release of pressure. Having the aim of university and a bright future gave me such a drive to work." Sharon didn't hear much from Emily during her first year. "I'd turned 18, I could buy drink legally, and there were so many new people," says Emily. "I went home once but the train ride was expensive and I didn't want to ask for money -

the whole point was I was living independently. It sounds really selfish now, but I was living at 100 miles an hour - I didn't have time to think about the life I'd left behind." Knowing her daughter had a decent room and an en suite bathroom, was comfort to her parents. "It took about three months to get used to barely hearing from her, but we knew she was happy and safe - although we did worry she was drinking Hull dry. But then the kids of some of my friends didn't even make it to Christmas at uni, they were so homesick." Hull is one of the cheapest cities for students, and Emily supplemented her loans by working as a student ambassador; she also received an academic bursary. "I don't spend money carelessly, only on stuff I need. Buying books second hand saves a lot." Emily's dad, Malcolm, says university has given his daughter freedom and space to develop, and he hopes Emily's brother, recently enrolled at Nottingham Trent, will follow suit. "It's about giving them opportunities we didn't have," says Malcolm. "We hope Emily will find a path in life that leads her to do something she loves. It's been the making of her." Emily is now completing a year-long placement at Jaguar Land Rover, before she returns to Hull for her final year. "It has completely changed me as a person, I wouldn't recognise myself," she says. "I've learned so much - academically, socially, and about real life. This is about so much more than a degree, it's set me up for the future."

**Timeline**

- University open days**  
*June - October 2019*  
Universities mostly hold open days between June and October - see the Ucas website for full listings.
- Ucas entry opens**  
*4 September, 2019*  
Students can now submit their application for university, although most wait until closer to the 15 January deadline. Even then, students can apply for 2020 entry until late September (see below).
- Deadline for Oxbridge applications and most medicine, veterinary medicine, and dentistry courses**  
*15 October, 2019*  
Oxford, Cambridge, and most medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry courses have an early deadline. Students can add further choices at a later date.
- Cambridge and Oxford interviews**  
*December 2019*  
Most interviews take place in the first two (Oxford) to three weeks (Cambridge) of December; offers are made before the end of January.
- Main deadline - university applications**  
*15 January, 2020*  
By now, students should have written and checked personal statements, and can apply to up to five universities. If students want a gap year, they can still apply and ask to defer, but it's worth checking whether a university will accept this - most do.
- Ucas Extra opens**  
*25 February, 2020*  
Students who've used all five choices and haven't received or accepted any offers can apply for one course at a time through Extra - it's available until 4 July. If this doesn't work out, they can still use clearing.
- Universities decide**  
*31 March, 2020*  
Most universities will accept or decline applicants by today, but each has a slightly different admissions process. Applicants now have a few weeks to decide.
- Accept a place**  
*May to June 2020*  
Mid January applicants must reply to university offers by 5 May - after which universities may make fresh offers. Students can answer late offers by 18 June at the latest. Applicants can choose whether to accept an insurance choice too - ideally an offer with lower grades.
- Student loans (2020 entry)**  
*Early 2020*  
Loans take at least six weeks to process, and students don't need a confirmed place to apply.
- Last day for applications (before clearing)**  
*30 June, 2020 (although Extra applicants who don't hold an offer can apply until 5 July)*  
Students have until the end of July to respond to offers.
- Clearing opens**  
**International Baccalaureate (IB) Results Announced**  
*6 July, 2020*  
Clearing - which helps match students to course vacancies - opens. IB and BTec students and those who know their results and who've missed their grades can now apply to some courses through clearing.
- A-level results announced**  
*13 August, 2020*  
Those who've met their grades can relax; those who haven't enter clearing and can attend clearing open days.
- Adjustment (2020 entry)**  
*13 August - 31 August, 2020*  
Students who've done better than expected can use Ucas Adjustment to look around for different courses. Their firm university place remains safe.
- Last day to apply to university for 2020 entry**  
*21 September, 2020*  
Last day to enter a new Ucas application for 2020 entry.

# Open days Questions at the ready

Grill tutors on course specifics or just get a feel for the town vibe on these fact-finding days

Abby Young-Powell

Open days are not just a good opportunity for students; they also give family members an insight into university life. But parents shouldn't try to "relive their youth", says James Busson, co-director of student recruitment at the University of Sheffield. Instead, they are there to play a supporting role, to help students learn about a university.

So how can you all get the most out of the day?

First off, it's a good idea to plan in advance and to do some research. "My parents and I avoided a lot of stress by writing an itinerary," says Rebecca Hansom, 20, a student at Sheffield Hallam University who has also worked as a student ambassador.

University guides, such as the Guardian University Guide, can help narrow down your options, but once you've decided where you want to visit, some specific research will stand you in good stead on the day. Hansom says this could include: researching transport and parking; times and locations of talks, tours and stalls you want to attend; downloading a map of the campus; and putting together a list of questions. "It's surprising how many families come to open days without

*One of the side benefits of open days was getting to spend one-on-one time with my daughters'*

Karen Packham  
Parent



▲ Open day at Hull University

a plan and, as a result, don't get the most out of it," she adds.

Expect an introductory lecture and course-specific talks, as well as the option to go on tours of the teaching facilities, student union or accommodation - but don't feel like you're a "slave to a schedule", says Richard Harvey, the academic in charge of admissions at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

"It's important to chill out, wander around and get a feel for the place." When you're walking around, talk to students. They're "maybe less guarded" about what they say about the university and local area, says Karen Packham, a consultant and parent who's been to many open days with her two daughters.

"Engage with student ambassadors on forums and ask questions," says Busson, "even if it's just to find out where you get the best fish and chips."

Amy Morton, 23, a recent graduate at the University of Dundee who worked as an ambassador at a number of open days, points out that many university societies have social media accounts on which they will answer questions.

When it comes to questions on the day, parents have an important role. "It's about helping [your son or daughter] to see the big picture and think about the realities," Packham says, suggesting parents can encourage young people to think about practical things like financial costs. But it's not all serious. "One of the side benefits [of going to open days] was getting to spend one-on-one time with my daughters," Packham adds.

Busson has a word of caution, however: "Parents are there to support [students] and not to be the leader." And Morton says she's spotted "parents who look bored all day", which isn't helpful.

Above all, an open day should be enjoyable for all. "It's not a competitive event," says Harvey. "Don't put yourself under pressure to discover everything. It should be a fun day out."

▼ Fiona and daughter Sammie at the University of Gloucester's fine arts degree show

PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCESCA JONES



## Experience 'Young people can get "happy ears". We wanted to inject some realism'

How a mum and daughter took in talks and town highlights to get the most out of their open day

Interviews: Abby Young-Powell

Fiona Scott  
Business owner and consultant

The open day at the University of Gloucestershire, where Sammie now studies, was very well organised. There was a marquee and from there you could plan your day and timings. We went to a few talks and two lecturers gave us a tour of the arts studio and answered our questions. We also looked around the shopping centre and the accommodation to get a feel for the city.

My husband is someone who really likes to plan things, so we thought about everything quite carefully. We didn't want to rain on

Sammie's parade, but we did want to inject some realism into her view of the place, because young people can get what I call "happy ears". They feel a place is wonderful but they don't think about the practical side of things.

As a parent I knew I should sit in the background and make suggestions - but I'm an extrovert, so I had to work hard to shut up and let her ask the questions herself. It's really important to let the students do that. I felt like the university would be a good place for her but I deliberately didn't say anything; I felt the final choice had to be hers.

*'Mum encouraged me to ask questions I felt awkward asking. She told me nobody would laugh at me'*

Sammie Scott  
Student

Sammie Scott  
Student, University of Gloucestershire

I liked the Gloucestershire open day and had a good impression of the place. When I was deciding between universities mum told me it was about my gut feeling. She said you have to think of the place you're going to miss if you don't come back. So that's how I made my decision.

On the open day it felt friendly and everybody was approachable. There were ambassadors every way you turned. I went to a few talks and remember spending quite a lot of time looking at accommodation.

Mum really helped. She encouraged me to ask questions I felt awkward asking. For example, you hear rumours about noisy flatmates and I wanted to ask about that, but was nervous. Mum told me nobody would laugh at me and encouraged me to find out more.

It was definitely good to have my parents there. It meant it was a learning experience for all of us. It was good to share my experience and get a second opinion.

The day can be overwhelming and you're not always thinking as clearly as you might. But you know you'll hear the honest truth from someone close to you.

My advice would be to make the most of the day, because it will go quickly. If there was one thing I'd change about my visit, it would be to try to enjoy it more.

# Choosing a course 'Prioritise your future journey'

Career prospects, social life, distance ... there's a lot to consider when your child picks a course. But self-knowledge can be the most important guiding voice

Heidi Scrimgeour

Helping your son or daughter choose the right university course is a daunting task, but there are a number of practical things you can do to support the decision-making process.

"Look closely at the modules, not just the course overview," says Amber Page, from the schools and colleges team at De Montfort University in Leicester.

"The same subject course can differ significantly between different universities," she adds. "Each will have different modules and facilities, so look at what each module includes to make sure it covers what your child wants to study."

When weighing up the right course for their offspring, parents tend towards more practical considerations - post-study employability rates or opportunities for travel - but students are more likely to consider the university's location, facilities and social scene, according to Page.

"We often see parents advising their children to study a course because they feel it will lead to a secure job, while the student wants to study something else," she says, adding that it might be best for

parents to take a backseat at this point: "Students are more likely to do well studying a subject they're really passionate about."

Open days can help students to narrow their selection criteria via opportunities to meet lecturers, insight into course details, and a tour of the facilities. However, Julie Read of Portfolio Oomph, which specialises in assisting art and design pupils to secure a place at their first-choice art college or university, recommends delving deeper. "Open days give a great 'show' but you don't necessarily get a feel for the kind of work that the institution produces," she says.

She says deciding which course or college to choose can be especially daunting for art and design students, because they have subjects to consider that they won't necessarily have had exposure to at school.

"Try to attend subject-specific events, such as fashion and performance costume shows, which will help further your understanding of the course - and end-of-year degree shows are a must if you're to fully understand how different some courses are to others," she says. "Then build a portfolio and application appropriate to that college."

Stephen Spriggs, managing

*'Students are more likely to do well studying a subject they're really passionate about'*

Amber Page  
De Montfort University

director at consultancy William Clarence Education, recommends parents look beyond the prestige associated with a particular university to ensure it's a good fit for their son or daughter. "It's important to delve deep into the course material and outcomes, and not just go for the university with the best name association," he says.

"Students should consider whether that's the best place to study that particular course, and think about how certain they are about embarking on that career path." He points out that traditional subjects, such as history or maths, leave lots of doors open, whereas more specialised subjects, such as law or architecture, set a student off on a career path. "Prioritise understanding your future journey and where you want to be in the long term," he says.

Parents should look to encourage enthusiasm and career realisation in their children, says Owen O'Neill, founder of the Clearing app Uni Compare. "A common error students make in applications is not showing that they're ready for a particular career path," he says. "For instance, many midwifery applicants talk about their passion for newborns - but the degree is actually centred around the mothers."

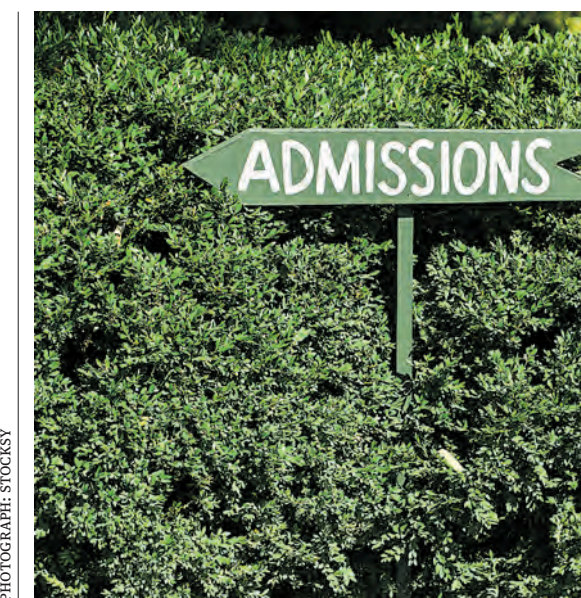
O'Neill advises parents to help their children be clinical with their applications: "Look at the modules across a chosen course, then help them connect the modules with their skills and experience, and showcase how they're preparing themselves both for the degree, and for their future career."

Whatever decision your budding student makes, one single factor trumps all others when applying to university or college. "You'd be surprised how many people don't take this into account," says Spriggs. "But the most critical question to ask when considering applying is: 'Do I meet the entry requirements?'"

For parents who may be tempted to steer their offspring towards a university closer to home, Spriggs offers this advice: "Consider the lifestyle associated with a chosen university, rather than being reserved and staying nearby. Don't just follow the crowd."



◀ Give your budding student as much help or space as they need when they're choosing their course  
PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY



# Personal statements How to help them sell themselves

Students have 4,000 characters to convince a university that they're a great catch. Here's how parents can help

Heidi Scrimgeour

A student's personal statement is exactly what it sounds like - a chance for the student to put their case for being accepted, above others, on a specific course. It should outline interests, skills and experience, and no university or college application is complete without one.

But that doesn't mean the task of writing it should be solitary; there are ways parents can make it simpler on their offspring. Start by having a quick brainstorming session, and make sure you get the ball rolling early. "A strong personal statement is a crucial part of any Ucas application, so you'll want to leave plenty of time for proofreading and further drafts," says Callie Hawkins, Ucas adviser experience manager.

Personal statements have a tight word count - 4,000 characters - so leaving out the waffle is essential, says Jamie Undrell, founder of Save My Exams. The "ruthless" editing he recommends cries out for a parent's hand, although some students may prefer to turn to their teachers to sort the wheat from the chaff.

Students can speak to a Ucas adviser on Twitter or Facebook, and the Ucas site has videos and case studies to help students prepare a personal statement.

Rob Evans, head of admissions at the University of Sussex, says personal statements should address why the student has chosen the course they're applying for.

"If the subject area is something they've already studied, students should cover what they've particularly enjoyed and why, but if it's a totally new discipline, they should explain how they've reached the decision that this is the course for them," he says.

If a student's chosen subject is connected to interests beyond their academic studies, they could highlight some wider reading or relevant work experience they've undertaken. Above all, the personal statement should outline students' motivations and demonstrate their enthusiasm for, and understanding of, the course subject.

While the chosen subject must be the primary focus of the statement, most universities want a broader sense of who their applicants are. "If students have clear career goals, they should cover their ambitions and how the course will help them achieve those," says Evans. "But it's perfectly fine to choose a course because you love the subject. We don't necessarily expect you to have a career or profession in mind; we just want to understand your reasons for applying."

▼ Aim for a relationship neither too needy nor too distant. Posed by models. PHOTOGRAPH: STOCKSY



## Experience 'My son going to university made my own course possible'

Carol Wilhide Justin started an MA in print at the Royal College of Art while her son, Jack, was at the University of East Anglia and her daughter Celia was doing A-levels.

Interview by Celia Dodd

**T**he empty nest hit me quite hard, perhaps because Jack was the first to go away. But although that first year was difficult, and I really missed him, the bonus was that I felt free to go off and do my own thing a bit more. Before that I had been teaching art in after-school clubs for a few years, and had started a printmaking course, just one morning a week. That was my time, and I had to pack everything into those three hours. It opened up some amazing opportunities, including a residency to learn printmaking in Japan. For the first time, I had the space and time to work on something on my own without being interrupted. Jack going to university made that possible.

As soon as I came back from Japan I applied to the Royal College of Art, because being away had made me realise how much more I needed to do. When I was offered a place I was completely elated, but that only lasted about 24 hours. Then reality kicked in: how was I going to afford the £9,500 a year fees? I managed to raise money by writing over 200 letters to charitable funds, but I had to carry on working part time.

*'I came to recognise that unless you're challenged and take risks you're not pushing yourself'*

Carol Wilhide Justin  
Parent and MA graduate

I knew the full-time course would be tough, and that I would miss out on the social side because my daughter Celia was doing A-levels. I always made sure we had supper together and talked over the day. It was really nice, that feeling that we were both at school all day.

The intensity of the full-time course suited me, because it kept the pressure up. The MA is not meant to be comfortable; they want you to be challenged. The lectures were particularly daunting. One of the first was on the philosopher Jacques Derrida. I understood about one word in 10, and I remember thinking that I really needed to up my game.

But while the MA was very hard at times, and quite competitive, there were good things as well. What I hadn't expected was that I would love writing; I'd never felt confident about it before. I had a very good supervisor for my dissertation - strict but encouraging - and I came to recognise that unless you're challenged and take risks you're not pushing yourself. Jack and I graduated the same year: 2017.

Carol created a series of "empty nest" prints, one of which featured in last year's Royal Academy Summer exhibition.



► Carol Wilhide Justin graduates from the Royal College of Art, supported by daughter Celia

parents prefer to keep their distance and stick to a good old-fashioned phone call once or twice a week. That makes good sense: you can tell a lot more about how people are feeling from hearing their voice. "We're lucky that our boys always talk to us, even if it's to tell us when they're stressed," says Bernard. "I don't want to be their friend on Facebook, because it's their world, not mine. We're not their friends, we're their parents."

Too much contact is bad for parents too. It prolongs the agony of letting go, and holds parents back from getting on with their own lives. The empty nest is usually less painful if parents can shift their focus away from their children and on to their own new interests. But that's not going to happen if they're following their fresher's every move on social media, or waiting for a night-time text to say they've got home safely. If parents can't resist constantly checking to make sure a child is safe, they may never learn to trust that they are.

It's all about adjusting to an increasingly equal relationship and accepting that adult children need to make their own life choices. That starts with university open days and applications. For parents, this means stepping back into a less involved but still supportive role.

Don't automatically assume teenagers want you along to an open day, or need help with a personal statement. "Always talk things through," says Caleb. "That's how you develop your relationship, because you'll become a trusted person they can talk to about the bad times as well as the good."

are in the conversation. Our boys don't have to comment but they still feel part of it."

But, at its worst, social media tempts parents into keeping tabs on their children instead of allowing them to spread their wings and gain confidence beyond the parental gaze. "I've known parents phone their child every morning to make sure they're up, and then again in the evening to ask if they're going out - and tell them not to drink too much," says Dr Ruth Caleb, a university wellbeing consultant. "This is overwhelming and takes the ability to control their own life away from their daughter or son. It's not reasonable to expect contact every day."

Parents shouldn't take offence if their children don't want to be friends on Facebook. Indeed, many

*'You want to become a trusted person they can talk to about the bad times as well as the good'*

Dr Ruth Caleb  
Wellbeing consultant

## Empty nests

### 'I don't want to be their friend on Facebook'

Should you expect a daily text, or radio silence? Striking the right communications balance is essential to the parent-child relationship

Celia Dodd

**I**t's never been easier for parents to stay in touch with their student children. That sounds good, but it has brought new dilemmas. These days many parents expect to remain closely involved in their children's lives, even at university. There are clearly downsides - not just for students who feel they're being stalked, but for parents too, and for the changing relationship between them.

Used sparingly, texting, WhatsApp and the rest can offer just what's needed: an informal way of communicating without being too intrusive. "Things like WhatsApp family groups have made it much easier to stay in touch," says Juliet Bernard, whose sons are 24 and 20. "It's like all being in a room together; you can choose how involved you

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# Alumni stories

## 'I loved my time at uni. I struggle to remember anything bad about it'

How has university changed through the years? Previous generations recall how it went for them

Kim Thomas

They're supposed to be the best days of your life - but is university everything it's cracked up to be, now that it comes packaged with more stress and financial worries? Twenty or 30 years ago there were no tuition fees, students had grants and there seemed to be more time for socialising, drinking and generally having fun.

We asked people from that era how they felt about their time at uni - and whether they really would describe it as the time of their lives.

**Will Ham Bevan, 45**  
University of Oxford, graduated 1996

It was the best and the worst of times. Mostly, I realised what a privilege it was to have three years simply to read books and explore English language and literature, but I had a severe stammer that made the first few terms difficult. I look back with huge regret at all the wasted opportunities. If you're dozing off hangovers each morning, you're missing out on things you'll probably never have the chance to do again in later life (and all subsidised, of course). I'd love to go back and be an undergraduate again, but I'd do it better.

**'If you're dozing off hangovers, you're missing out on things you may not have the chance to do again'**

**Will Ham Bevan**  
University of Oxford



**Ralph Nathan, 57**  
University of Leicester, 1982

Growing up in a rented flat in Hackney, I was a free-dinners boy and ashamed of it; university wasn't for the likes of us. The best day of my life was being assured on the phone that the letter asking me to choose a hall of residence wasn't a mistake, despite me missing the offer by one grade. At university, I learned that Catholics faced the same guilt as Jews for breaking the rules, that most people's parents at university owned their own home, and that a pack of bacon wasn't a one-person serving (we'd kept kosher at home). The real bonus was that I met my wife of 30 years in my final year. I now practise law (and imposter syndrome) and never forget where I started. University transformed my life.

**'Uni transformed my life. I was a free-dinners boy from a rented flat; now I practise law'**

**Ralph Nathan**  
University of Leicester



**Catherine Cooper, 47**  
University of Birmingham, 1992

I loved my time at university. It's the best of all worlds in many ways - you have the freedom of an adult while you still don't have the full responsibilities of one. I really enjoyed my English course and felt like I was treated as an adult in my studies for the first time in my life. Mainly, though, I loved meeting loads of new people, many of whom are still friends, and having the freedom to do almost whatever I liked, when I liked, as long as I got my work done (which I did - and I even enjoyed that too). There aren't many times in your life when you have so much freedom.

**'I loved meeting new people, and the freedom to do almost whatever I liked, when I liked'**

**Catherine Cooper**  
University of Birmingham

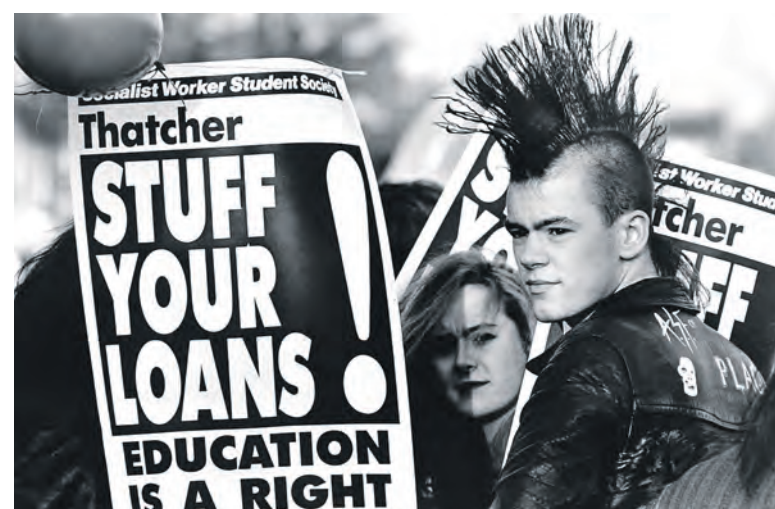


**Rachael O'Driscoll, 53**  
University of Newcastle, 1986

Looking back across a 30-year chasm, although I know that there were times when I struggled, the overwhelming feeling is one of gratitude. Even then, I was conscious that this was an opportunity that had not been open to my parents. My mother's family could not afford the expense of university and my father combined degree study with full-time work and a young family. Academically, I could have made more of my time - even this was a life lesson about the virtues of application! The forging of lifelong friendships was, however, what really made university such a positive experience.

**'I was conscious that this was an opportunity that had not been open to my parents'**

**Rachael O'Driscoll**  
University of Newcastle



◀ All things to all men and women: university has always been synonymous with freedom - to demonstrate, to try new things, to indulge, or to simply take it easy

**Lee Partridge, 53**  
University of Lancaster, 1989

Perspective was university's greatest gift to me: the useful degree I gained from Lancaster was incidental to the experiences of my student life in Liverpool, where Lancaster had an offsite campus. Independence, uncertainty and a distance of 200 miles challenged previous social, emotional and cultural assumptions - and I also had to contend with the steep learning curve of budgeting and bill paying. Lifelong friendships forged through shared hardship, humour and happiness, and seeing yourself as part of the wider world - all of these I valued and encouraged our daughter to seek out for herself in her choice of university. Should I be worried that she's chosen somewhere 400 miles away?

**'The degree was incidental to the student life I had in Liverpool, where my uni had a campus'**

**Lee Partridge**  
University of Lancaster



**Annemarie Flanagan, 55**  
University of Warwick, 1988

I loved my time at Warwick studying history and politics. I struggle to remember anything bad about it. I just recall making great friends, having so much fun and loving most of the studying. I got involved in the student radio station and became arts editor, which paved the way for my future journalistic career, and no doubt helped get me my early jobs in independent radio and then the BBC. My second-year house in Coventry was awful, though - freezing cold with mould on the walls. But we were there when the football team won the FA cup and it was a blast!

**'I became arts editor on the student radio station. It was the start of my journalistic career'**

**Annemarie Flanagan**  
University of Warwick



**'I learned much more outside the lecture theatre or lab than inside it. Embrace the whole experience'**

**John Flynn**  
University of Leicester



**John Flynn, 60**  
University of Leicester, 1982

My time at university was a wonderful life experience that resulted in lifetime friendships. Sure, I learned a lot of physics that gave me a great career, but I also learned much more outside the lecture theatre or lab than inside it, such as how to manage my own time, money, studies and social life, and simply how to get along with a variety of people from many different walks of life. I have the impression that students nowadays seem to prioritise course studies over the extracurricular opportunities available, but I'd encourage them to embrace the whole experience - it's a chance not to be missed!

**'It was a time of self-discovery. I was the first in my family to go to uni and I saw it as a real privilege'**

**Krutika Pau**  
University of Lancaster



**Krutika Pau, 57**  
University of Lancaster, 1983

I was at Lancaster University from 1980 to 1983 and did a combined degree in psychology and educational studies. Looking back, I can really say they were some of the best years of my life. It was a time of growth, development and self-discovery - I just didn't know it then! I was the first person in my family to go to university and I saw it as a real privilege. I was very conscientious and worked hard while having fun too. I am a Londoner and at Lancaster I grew to love the vast open green spaces of the Lancashire countryside - it gave me a lifelong love of walking and hiking.

**'I was happy hanging out with friends, surviving on a diet of chips, garlic bread and cider'**

**Bianca Alder**  
Cardiff University

**Ravi Jayaram, 51**  
University of Newcastle, 1990

When I first went to university, the shock to my middle-class, small-town, naive self was shattering. I knew nobody, I missed my mum, I missed my friends and I missed the security of the life from which I'd felt desperate to escape. Freshers' week was one of the worst of my life, doing things I had no interest in doing, with people I had little in common with.

Fortunately, I stuck with it, found my niche, met people who became friends for life, and learned the art of appearing self-confident. It has taken me till the age of 51 and having teenage children of my own to realise that everyone else was feeling exactly the same - but could hide it more convincingly.

**'Freshers' week was one of the worst of my life. Fortunately, I stuck with it and found my niche'**

**Ravi Jayaram**  
University of Newcastle



**Bianca Alder, 48**  
Cardiff University, 1993

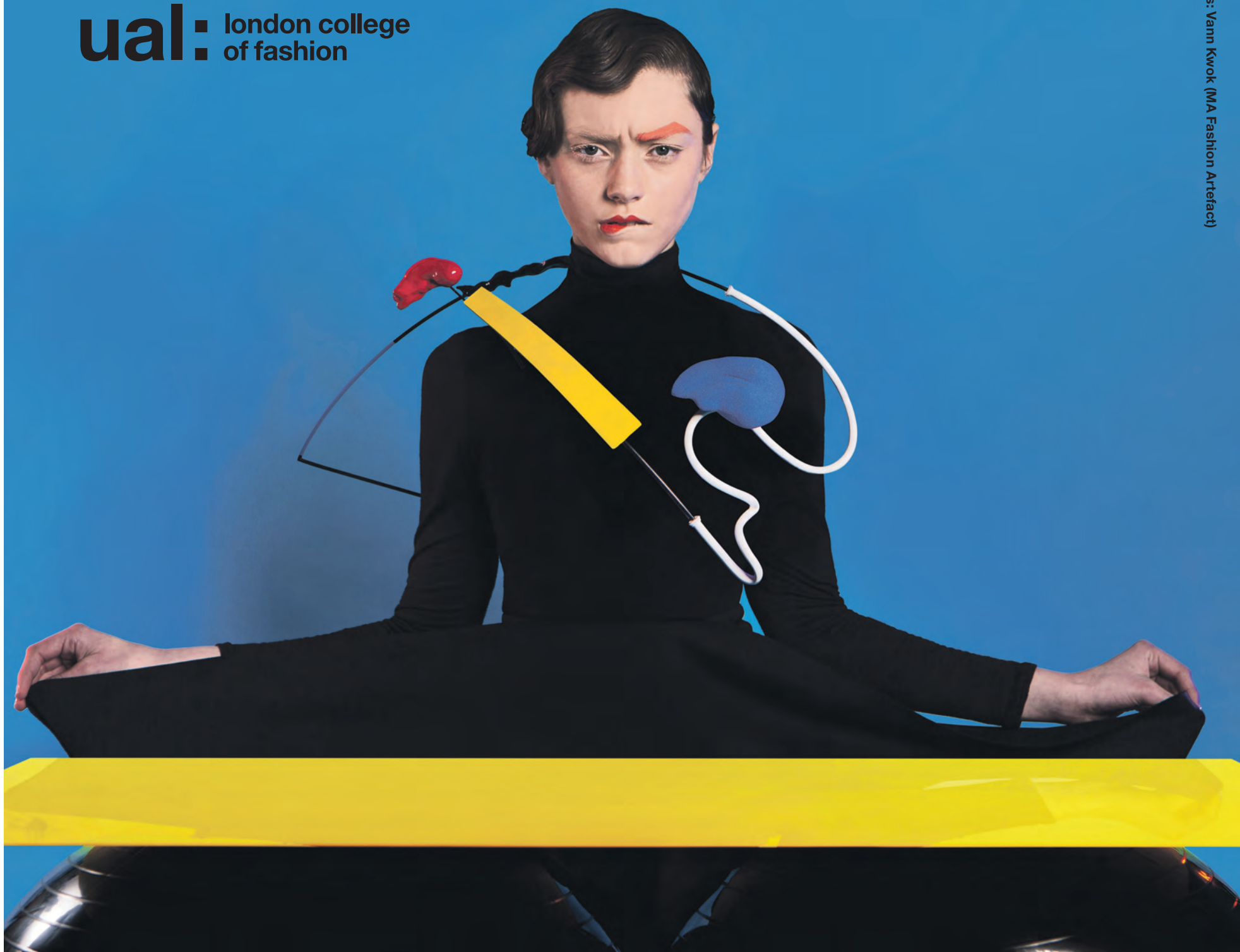
I didn't really care where I went or what I studied. I just wanted to live away from home and by my own rules. I loved learning, but often skipped lectures to lie in, watch hours of daytime telly and catch up with study at night. I didn't join any societies and rarely ventured out of the city. But I was happy hanging out with friends, surviving on a diet of chips, garlic bread and cider and growing into the first iteration of my adult self. The foundations laid here helped me build a modest but happy life running a small business, and to raise two sons now in their 20s and also at university.

**'I was happy hanging out with friends, surviving on a diet of chips, garlic bread and cider'**

**Bianca Alder**  
Cardiff University



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## Fees and funding

### 'Think of your loan as a graduate tax'

A university education won't come cheap, but you may be entitled to more help than you thought

Helena Pozniak

Biology student Molly Savage struggled to imagine how she'd ever afford university - she knew her parents were too cash-strapped to help. But she's managed to win £5,000 a year as part of a scholarship scheme targeting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"I was over the moon," she says. "It's made a massive difference - I knew I could go to uni without any financial worries. There are so many expenses that crop up, but I haven't had to ask my parents for any extra money this year."

Savage, now at the end of her second year, is one of 50 students each year on the University of Bath's

the process smoother for applicants. But just 60% of students say they fully understand the terms and rates of their loan, according to research from savethestudent.com.

Fortunately, students who've not secured their loan can still start their course - they can apply up to nine months after it begins - but this will slow down maintenance payments.

Tuition fees are paid directly to the university rather than the individual student. But maintenance loans are paid into a student's account in instalments over the year. These can reach a maximum of £11,672 a year for students living away from home in London and starting in September, and up to £8,944 for those living away outside the capital, but they're means tested - if household earnings are £50,000 or more, this falls to around £8,409 and £5,735 respectively.

More than half (55%) of parents supplement their child's income by £200 a month, according to research (of 100 parents) by the Scholarship Hub, while one in five donate £400 a month; 21% of grandparents also contribute.

But students might be missing out on more than £150m in bursaries and scholarships every year, says Karen Kennard, who founded the online database the Scholarship Hub to help students locate extra cash. Nearly a third of these are given out by universities for academic merit, 22% for financial need, and 21% for students with caring responsibilities, for instance, while 9% cover sporting achievement - Roehampton now provides up to 15 awards of £1,500 a year for e-sports gamers, who are expected to take part in gaming contests.

Many London universities - including King's College, Imperial, Queen Mary and UCL - provide healthy scholarships; outside the capital, Nottingham, UEA and Stirling are generous, but there are many more. And professional organisations also offer funds, although these require more effort in the application stage.

Student loans accrue interest from the start, at a current rate of just over 6%, but students don't have to pay anything back until they've graduated and are earning more than £25,000 a year, when they'll pay 9% on any earnings above this threshold - on a salary of £33,000, monthly repayments would reach £54.

Currently, outstanding loans are cancelled after 30 years, and some 83% of all loans are never repaid in full (according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies); they also don't affect individual credit ratings. "To all intents and purposes, it's a graduate tax," says Blennerhassett. "The most important thing is that students come, they stay and they succeed."

**'Currently it's the poorest and most disadvantaged students who end up with the greatest debt'**

Reggie Blennerhassett  
University of Roehampton

Gold Scholars Programme, which has been running since 2017. But her experience isn't the norm - every year nearly 2 million people apply for repayable student loans.

Although an official review published in May proposed capping tuition fees at £7,500 (rather than £9,250), extending the loan payback period by 10 years and bringing back maintenance grants, the existing terms still apply for this year.

"Currently it's the poorest and most disadvantaged students who end up with the greatest debt," says Reggie Blennerhassett, pro vice-chancellor and finance director at the University of Roehampton. About a half of Roehampton students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and, like many universities, it too offers scholarships, bursaries and ad hoc help from a hardship fund. "Sometimes £200 can be enough to help them out of difficulty," he says.

For both maintenance and tuition fee loans, university applicants need to apply to the official Student Loans Company - ideally in spring, as soon as they've applied to university. Loan applications are now linked to tax details (HMRC), which makes

▼ Khobhi Kromel-Agamah Williams has avoided credit and an overdraft  
PHOTOGRAPH: MAX MIECHOWSKI



## Experience

### 'I'll take a nine-hour coach rather than the train'

Khobhi Kromel-Agamah Williams, 20, is studying history and politics at Northumbria University in Newcastle

Interview by Helena Pozniak

I've not got an overdraft and I don't have a credit card - I'm not comfortable with that. I try to put some money aside, so it's there if I ever want to treat myself or do anything spontaneous. This spring I've been pretty tight for money.

I didn't set a budget in advance but I started assessing my spending at university and I've learned so much. I never realised how much I'd spend on food. I get peckish all the time but

I try not to buy snacks when I'm out, as that's so expensive.

I'll spend about £20 to £30 at Morrisons every week and I can cook a bit, although I'm no masterchef. There are lots of handy videos on YouTube, and cooking can be creative and fun. I've started preparing my meals for the week in advance. You can spend a fortune on takeaways if you're not careful.

Going out can be a massive

**'I can cook, although I'm no masterchef. There are lots of handy videos on YouTube'**

Khobhi Kromel-Agamah Williams

expense. It depends on your personality - you have to be cautious and work out whether it's worth it. I try to go out once a month, or when I've finished an assignment. Peer pressure plays a part but there are many times I've decided I don't want to spend the money.

Laundry is the big unexpected expense that creeps up on you - I'm envious of those students who take their washing home. London, where my family live, is 250 miles away so it's not an option, but I do manage to go back sometimes - I'll take a nine-hour coach rather than the train, as it's so much cheaper.

University accommodation has its downsides; you don't get much personal space, and not everyone will be your friend, but you can be civil. Next year I'm moving into a studio flat, which will be more expensive but I'm confident I'll manage.

When you go to university you don't want to ask your parents for money - you want to feel independent and you don't want to be a burden. But at the end of the day they care for you, so if you're struggling, just ask them. Mine weren't in a position to help with rent but they are supportive.

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Students should be aware of what help is at hand for mental health problems. Posed by models. PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY

## Mental health Support for a healthy university life

The pressures of uni life can take their toll, so students need to know how to take care of themselves - and who to turn to for extra help

Kim Thomas

There's so much to be enjoyed at university, but for some people, it can be a time of loneliness, of feeling anxious about examinations, or of being weighed down by worries about finances. "The first six weeks are the most difficult," says Ruki Heritage, assistant director of student experience and head of student services at the University of Bedfordshire. She suggests talking to other people who have been to university so that you and your child know what to expect. Think about the kinds of problems your child might face; do they have difficulties with essay deadlines or managing their money? "A lot of students come in [to the wellbeing service] with financial issues that cause distress, when a lot of it could be avoided by learning simple budgeting techniques," she says. Heritage also advocates doing some preparation before starting -

visiting the campus together, for example, so that you remove the anxiety of not being able to find a lecture hall or having no idea where the supermarket is. Most universities now ease the transition by using a buddying system where second- and third-year students show new students around, attend freshers' events with them and answer questions about university life. It's a good idea to be aware beforehand of exactly what support is available, so that students can access it without delay should they need it, Heritage says. "It's all about preparation - students shouldn't wait until they get to that slump where they think: 'Oh my gosh, I don't know what to do.' As soon as they notice signs, if they're feeling anxious, they should seek help from fellow students, as well as from staff and parents." If you worry that your son or daughter might have difficulties coping at university, then talk them through the options that are there

to help them. Most universities now have a dedicated mental health and wellbeing service with a team of counsellors. Such services also typically run workshops to teach coping strategies for common problems such as exam stress or a lack of confidence. All students should register with a GP, who can either prescribe medication or refer them to therapy for mental health problems. Anyone who has a pre-existing mental health problem should notify the university before they arrive, so that support can be put in place. Mental health and wellbeing services are not the only source of help. For problems relating to the course, such as difficulties with assignments, students can contact their departmental adviser. If your child is uncomfortable talking face-to-face, then online support may be an option. Many unis offer this via Big White Wall, a forum where people can find self-help resources, chat with peers and talk to counsellors on a one-to-one basis. Peer support is also available at most universities through Nightline, a phone, email and online chat service staffed by student volunteers. Student Minds, a mental health charity, runs face-to-face peer support groups at some universities, described by policy manager Rachel Piper as "a safe, confidential place that allows students to talk and listen without judgement". University can be a time when many students end up neglecting their wellbeing - drinking too much, eating junk food, or staying up late. But self-care is important, Heritage says. "Lack of sleep can cause all sorts of mental health problems. So think about joining sports teams or going for walks, because exercise can help your mental health." And if your child does have problems, encourage them to seek help as soon as they can - the earlier they find support, the more likely they are to resolve their problems and enjoy university life.

**'A lot of students' distress could be avoided by learning simple budgeting techniques'**

Ruki Heritage  
University of Bedfordshire

### Comment Paddy Woodman



*Almost all new students worry they won't make friends. Freshers' week is there to help*

Before your child starts university, it's helpful to think about challenges they have already faced, and talk with them about how they might handle these at university. Although it's a new start, problems don't just go away - university life is, and should be, challenging. So help your children develop practical skills (cooking, shopping, budgeting) but, equally importantly, let them lead on making decisions for themselves and managing the consequences of those decisions. It's much better for them to be prepared for what they may encounter at university rather than struggling because the demands on them come as a surprise. At Reading, for example, we run workshops called Life Tools, which help equip students with strategies for managing academic pressure, using critical feedback constructively and building confidence. A uni's website should give you an idea of the support available. We have a student welfare team, a student financial support team and our own counselling service. Although we aim to get information to students before they know they need it, there is so much support available that they don't always remember. It's helpful if parents can reinforce that message, so they know they can turn, for example, to their academic tutor if they're having a problem with their course. Students generally arrive at university with the adage that university will be the best time of their lives ringing in their ears, and those who have had problems before may think things will be different just because they are in a new place with new people - so if a challenge does arise they may not know where to turn for help. Many universities, including Reading, have buddying schemes that pair experienced students with new students, to help them settle in and to direct them to any support they need. Almost all new students worry that they won't make friends. That's what freshers' week is all about. As well as attending student union-run activities involving nightclubs or parties, it's important for students to go to events organised by their department - at Reading, for example, every department organises events that encourage students to work together in teams on something relating to their subject, so they get to know each other quickly and easily. Having fun is not all about alcohol. These days, universities and students' unions run lots of events that don't involve drinking, and there are hundreds of clubs and societies, so there are activities to suit everyone, and lots of opportunities to make friends. Finally, it's important for both students and parents to have realistic expectations. Universities aren't boarding schools - they don't have responsibility for every aspect of students' lives. That's important, because a big part of going to university is growing up and learning to be independent. Your child needs to be ready for this, and you need to be ready to give them space to shape themselves into the adults they want to be - while still holding the safety net of parental support. If you think your child is likely to struggle with their mental health, it is important to recognise this and seek early advice from mental health professionals.

Dr Paddy Woodman is director of student services at the University of Reading. As told to Kim Thomas

*'These days, universities and students' unions run lots of freshers' events that don't involve drinking, and there are hundreds of societies'*



# Packing for uni Essentials for a happy home

A mix of the practical and the sentimental will cover most of your child's needs at university - and there are always shops ...

Suzanne Bearne

As your child heads off for a new independent life at university, you have one last chance to make sure they're prepared - so when it comes to packing that car you'll want to make sure every item warrants its space.

First off, check with the university or accommodation provider to find out what they provide - many of the rooms in halls of residence and rented houses will have some of the basics, including a bed, desk,

wardrobe, bedside table and chair. Although some unis also provide duvet covers and sheets, you may prefer to splash out on some new linen instead, so it's essential to know the size of the bed. Given the likelihood of a springy bed, a mattress protector is a sound investment too.

You could try slipping a framed photo of the family into a box so they have something to remember you by, but, equally, your offspring may want to cover the walls with snaps of that Ibiza trip they all took as a final school-leaving hurrah. It's all about personalising this blank canvas of a new room. Lobby for a few low-maintenance plants to help generate a healthy homely atmosphere in their new space.

If you're worried about them making friends, arm your child with some icebreakers - and that all-important doorstop, to encourage others to come wandering into their room. Board games have been enjoying a resurgence, as well as



Students likely won't have much space in their room, so travelling light is sensible  
PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY

branching into new areas - dinosaur evolution, anyone? - whereas the likes of Cards Against Humanity are best played once a few barriers (and drinks) are down.

But back to the practical stuff ... You'll need to cram in a clothes horse, a couple of towels, a laundry bag - for the weekly pilgrimage to the washing machine - a tin opener and bottle opener. There should be enough crockery, but it's always worth them taking an extra glass, cup, bowl, and plate. Many students recommend a multi-plug extension, as there's often

a lack of plug sockets in rooms, and light sleepers should bring earplugs - maybe an eyemask too. A bike will give them a bit of freedom to explore on their own, if communal living becomes a bit much (and you have a roof rack).

You may as well stock up on toiletries, washing powder and the like, because heading to the supermarket may not be top of your offspring's priority list. Stash away some condoms, too, if your relationship functions on that level, and a medical kit.

They'll certainly thank you for a box of hardy and non-perishable food too - think olive oil, sauces, noodles, pasta, rice, beans, pulses, salt, pepper, teabags, coffee and cereal. Still got space? There's work to do at uni too, so squeeze in highlighters, folders, plastic wallets, pads and pens. And don't forget ID and any other uni documents they might have been sent.

If they need anything else, they can always use the opportunity to knock on their new neighbours' doors and say hello.

# Food management How to eat on a budget

Shop late in the day and cook multiple portions to make the money go further

Suzanne Bearne

However tempting the pizzas, cheese toasties and sugary alcoholic drinks are, there are plenty of ways to still aim for a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Here are our top tips:

**Plan ahead - and budget**  
Write a list of the recipes you're looking to make for the week ahead. If you've already set out a plan of what you're eating this will help ward off any temptation to just throw a pizza in the oven.

Seasoned shoppers will tell you that going to the supermarket without a list (and when you're hungry) can be a costly mistake. Draw up a list and stick to it - that way you're less likely to come home with a big bag of biscuits and crisps, and no actual meals.

**Batch cook**

Eli Brecher, 23, a food blogger who's studying human nutrition at the University of Westminster, swears by batch cooking. "When you're cooking dinner, make three extra portions: put one in the fridge for lunch tomorrow, and freeze the remaining two (in separate Tupperware) for a quick microwave meal after a very busy day when you don't have time to cook."

**Preparation at home**

Before Emma Bradley's daughter Chloe, 19, started her criminology and criminal justice studies degree at the University of Plymouth last year, she bought her a few student cookbooks and they planned some meals together. "I was concerned because she likes to eat healthily and I was worried about the costs of healthy food for her." Bradley recommends using the summer to help prepare for eating healthily at uni. "Get them in the kitchen with you and helping to prepare food," she says. "I did a week at home where I gave her £30 to feed herself for a week and have a practice run while we were on holiday. I let her use our store cupboard items but she had to

buy the rest. It taught her the prices of the things that she took for granted and made her think about how much she had to feed herself each week."

**Look out for reduced goods**

Supermarkets often slash the prices of products such as fish and fruit towards the end of the day. Some items you'll be able to freeze and eat at a later date.

**Stock up on frozen fruit and veg**

Brecher also recommends buying frozen fruit and veg. "It's much cheaper than fresh, but has just as

*'Frozen fruit and veg is much cheaper than the fresh equivalent, but has just as many nutrients'*

Eli Brecher  
Food blogger

many nutrients. Blend frozen mango and banana chunks into smoothies, stir frozen berries into porridge, or add frozen greens, such as edamame beans and broccoli, to a stir-fry."

**Drink sensibly**

Ensure you're filling up on water - three or four pints a day - and watch your alcohol intake: the NHS website recommends 14 units a week for women and men. That equates to no more than six pints of average-strength beer (4% ABV) or seven medium-sized glasses of wine (175ml, 12% ABV) a week.



A few simple recipes will ensure your teenager minimises the costly takeaways  
PHOTOGRAPH: STOCKS

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## Accommodation From halls to houses (and the family home)

What type of independent living will your child go for? perhaps they'll commute from home instead?

Suzanne Bearne

Decisions, decisions, decisions. After pinpointing which subject and university to study at for at least three years, the next serious conundrum for prospective students is accommodation.

Price undoubtedly is an issue, with 97% of first-year students citing value for money as an important factor, and 96% citing overall cost, according to a survey by Ucas and Knight Frank. That means compromises will likely need to be made. "If being on campus is a priority, you could look at reducing your room cost by sharing a bathroom," says Trudi Vout, director of campus and accommodation services at the University of Hull. "Or if having your own en-suite is essential, investigate options off-campus - or go for slightly less modern options."

The majority of students opt to

stay in halls of residence, where there's often staff and mature students on hand - perhaps an extra advantage for any anxious parents. The sheer number of rooms on each floor creates instant access to a network of potential friends. "Living in halls meant I was able to settle into university more easily and spend some good quality time with my flatmates," says Ada Ughanwa, 19, a second-year sociology and criminology student at Loughborough University. "Sharing a kitchen made us bump into each other and have good conversations."

Halls are usually near or on campus too, saving crucial time commuting to lectures. For Ughanwa that meant an extra hour in bed before lectures and the ability to "go home and eat a snack or go over the notes I made in class". However, halls can be noisy - worth bearing in mind for students that crave the

quiet life. Another key consideration is catered or self-catered; most university halls offer both.

Students - and parents - prepared to spend a little more can opt for a place at privately rented halls or flats. The upside with the latter is more choice of areas to live in, but they come with the hassle of managing bills and dealing with landlords.

Then there's the nuclear option: staying at home. "Living at home can appeal for economic and social reasons," says Paul Burns, accommodation office manager at the University of Manchester. "Some students (or their families) fear they are not ready to make the transition to independent or semi-independent living. But it has the danger of making university little more than an extension of sixth-form."

However, living at home in Gateshead brought plenty of advantages for Abbie March, 22, a final-year business and marketing management student at Northumbria University. "I planned on travelling to Asia in the summer holidays, so I needed to save as much money as possible," says March, who visited destinations like Thailand and Bali over the three years.

"Joining friends from my course was easy enough, as I was living 10 minutes away from the centre. You can still go out a lot and also have more money for holidays."

For those staying at home, Vout recommends making the effort to play for a team or join a society. "Some of the strongest friendships you make at university can come from a shared interest - whether that is sport, volunteering or creative writing. Our last student union president said it was at the netball club that she made her friends for life."

*'Living at home has the danger of making university little more than an extension of sixth form'*

Paul Burns  
University of Manchester

### Top tips for parents with students living at home

#### Lay out some ground rules

Yes, they might have been living with you for 18 years, but now they're at university and adults themselves there needs to be a discussion about what everyone's expectations are. Do you expect them to contribute towards rent and bills? Will they be sorting out their own washing? Does it make sense for them to cook for themselves now, given they may be at uni socials a couple of times a week? Setting out some ground rules and discussing their timetable can help quell (or certainly reduce) any potential arguments in the months to come.

#### Give them space to study

With a book list as long as their arm to get through, it's worth ensuring there's a quiet place for your child to study at home. Whether it's a desk in their bedroom or a dedicated study, making sure they have their own personal space is essential in creating the right environment for them to study. You could also help them scout out other potential workspaces - whether that's a local cafe, a low-cost co-working space or the local library (as well as the university library) - as alternative places to study outside of the family home. Also, do ensure everyone else in the family is quiet and considerate at certain times and does not disturb them, so your teenager can really knuckle down and study without interruptions.

#### Encourage them to join clubs

Some of the firmest friends you make at uni are those you share accommodation with - but students living at home don't have that foundation. That's why it's important to encourage your child to really throw themselves into joining clubs and societies at university. Beyond the potential of lifelong friendships, that netball club or debating society can help develop interests and boost career opportunities.

#### Check out the university support

Find out how the university supports students living at home and check if there are any home student societies they can join. There may be a dedicated member of staff responsible for the welfare of students living off campus who you or your child can speak to for advice. **SB**

▲ Beckley Point private student accommodation in Plymouth  
PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY



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