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Teachers' Guide to University

Facts, Fees, Futures: Higher Education Explained

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Disclaimer:
UniTasterDays can accept no liability for the accuracy or otherwise of statements in this publication. It is a general guide, produced in May 2016, with content provided from multiple sources.



Welcome to The Teachers' Guide to University

This guide anticipates a conversation between you (the teacher/careers adviser) and your student (the potential higher education applicant), arming you with solid answers to their questions about moving on to higher education (HE).

It aims to clarify the current position for you and your students following so many significant sector changes. Crucially, it looks to bring you closer to the HE institutions that now offer so many ways for your students to look into - and taste - higher education, before committing to it.

Helping them to make the right choice

As with any of life's landmark choices, HE is not a decision to be taken lightly. Sound advice and first-hand insight into what students face, at an early stage, provides a smoother path to successful higher-level study, and a better chance of a satisfying and fulfilling career. This guide helps you to provide it.

Universities operate in a more competitive market than ever. It's in their interest to

attract students by inviting them to open days, workshops, talks and all manner of familiarisation events. The following pages show you the sort of activities your students will find useful.

The simple fact is that your students now have a wider choice than ever of ways to 'try on HE for size', to see a library/lab/lecture theatre up close, and to ask any question they want to the university staff member or student best equipped to answer it.

Experts on your side

This guide features contributions from experts in college/university liaison, widening participation, fees & finance, and student accommodation.

It includes tips on giving your students the very best initial guidance on how to find, and make the most of, university preparation activities. You'll also find a useful primer on the recurring question of 'Why should I go to university?'

I hope you'll find it useful, and that you'll visit UniTasterDays.com to search or request your next event soon.

Jon Cheek - Director, UniTasterDays.com
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Changes in the Higher Education landscape - a competitive marketplace

By Carolyn Deeming, Market Intelligence Manager, Plymouth University

Over the last few years, it probably feels like both the pre-Higher Education environment and the Higher Education sector have been in a state of constant flux. It's a situation that's unlikely to change.

From qualification and tariff reform, to removal of the student number cap for universities - and the ever-increasing range of options available to 18 year olds - you can be forgiven for wondering how best to advise your students, and which university, or indeed whether university itself, is the best option for them.

Here are some recent developments to bear in mind:

Removal of the Student Number Controls

Previously, universities were only allowed to recruit a certain number of students. This was relaxed by the government in response to a perceived deficit in university places, with the student number controls first being removed for AAB students, then ABB students.

Now there are no centrally imposed caps on numbers, though universities may be constrained by space or staffing.

Fall in the 18-year old population

The Office of National Statistics is reporting a decline in the principal population projections for 18 year olds until 2020 – these are one of the main consumers of higher education. This means that there may be a plateau, or even decline, in the number of students applying for a place at university.

Clearing

Clearing has changed dramatically. In 2014,

more students obtained a place through Clearing than through the insurance choice scheme. With Russell Group universities advertising places in Clearing, and with the ability to 'trade-up' if exceeding a conditional firm offer, your students may have a lot to think about when they get their results.

These are all indicators of a very competitive marketplace where Higher Education providers will be competing for your students. This could be through making unconditional offers to students or offering incentives in the forms of scholarships, and means that your students may have a wider range of opportunities open to them.

Within this new environment, your students may want to consider some more ambitious choices.

So how can students narrow down the options?

League table position may be an important factor for some students, but practicalities around costs, modules offered etc. shouldn't be ignored, and this is where the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has helped.

The CMA provided guidance in 2015 to ensure universities comply with consumer law. This means your students have unprecedented rights to be fully informed about all costs, course and module information, university regulations etc. - treated like the consumers they are when they are making one of the biggest purchases of their lives.

This information should be available on university websites, and can be a great way of shortlisting courses.

Facts and figures are great for narrowing down choices, but once a student has come up with a shortlist of potential universities and courses, the best way to make that final decision is to go and see the campus. It's vital they meet the staff and students, and get a feel for the place where they'll be studying for the next three years.

Ultimately it has to be the right choice for them: a place where they can thrive and succeed.



“ Since the demise of Aimhigher, it has not always been possible to arrange university visits. However, with the support of UniTasterDays, things are improving. We have attended many informative taster days in collaboration with universities, and students always come away feeling inspired. ”

Pudsey Grangefield School, Leeds

Perils and pitfalls of the UCAS application

By Helen Waters-Marsh, Schools and Colleges Liaison Manager, University of Nottingham

When two new people joined my team from our Admissions department, they opened my eyes to the common mistakes they noted while processing UCAS applications.

Much of my work focuses on advising students about personal statements, so I hadn't really talked much about the rest of the UCAS form.

But my colleagues' experiences made me understand the anxiety of students when realising they've made a mistake on their UCAS application.



Although we never discussed individual applications, we noticed the common mistakes applicants were making. Some more serious than others. These included:

- **Selecting the wrong gender:** One of those mistakes that, although unlikely to cause any major application delays, can lead to some awkward conversations later down the line.
- **Declaring criminal convictions (they don't have):** Whilst I'm aware some students will have criminal convictions, it's not nearly so many as are declared on UCAS forms!
- **Having inappropriate e-mail addresses:** It is important students put down an e-mail address they'll have continual access to, and that it isn't one they'd be embarrassed to spell out to one of our admissions colleagues on results day.
- **Getting 'nationality' and 'ethnicity' confused:** A student's fee status – which determines how much they'll have to pay to attend university – depends on nationality and other factors. Ethnicity is not relevant to fee status.
- **Applying to the wrong university:** This may not apply to all students, but at the University of Nottingham, we still receive applications for Nottingham Trent University!

One of the most interesting problems my new staff had dealt with was a student who *insisted their date of birth had changed since they submitted their UCAS form.*

It's a stressful time all round for prospective students, and as a teacher, your calm guiding hand is vital.

As a little extra insurance, it's worth getting your students to consider who they'll assign as a nominated contact on the UCAS form. Without prior approval through the nominated contact facility, universities can only liaise with the students – not their parents or school.

University events explained

By Francesca Carey, Marketing Officer (Schools and Colleges), Brunel University London.

Most universities run a number of different events throughout the year for prospective students and teachers. They offer various visit opportunities before and after your students submit their UCAS application. Generally, but not exclusively, these sessions are free and include activities such as:

- **Presentations and Workshops** on subjects such as Making Higher Education Choices, Top Tips for Writing a Personal Statement, Student Finance, and The Student Experience.
- **Taster/Subject Specific Sessions** giving your students a more in-depth taste of their course of choice and a chance to participate in practical elements of the subject.
- **Open Days**, which are a great way for your students to begin their selection process by visiting an institution for subject presentations, a chance to view the campus and student accommodation, and speak with current students and academic staff.
- **Campus Tours** - a great way to view the campus and student accommodation and ask current students what it's like to live and study at university.

Remember that universities are often more than willing to offer bespoke events suited to your students' needs, delivered either on campus or at your school or college.

“ By demystifying the university process and by breaking down misconceptions through university visits, students believe they can get there. ”

St Bernard's High School, Essex





How to prepare your students to take their next steps in education

Your students have a wealth of information and university activities waiting for them. It's now important that they have the right guidance in choosing which are the most relevant to their questions about moving on to higher-level study. Here, Francesca Carey from Brunel University London provides her top tips on how you can help your students:

- Approach your local universities about their outreach events, and go to UniTasterDays.com to see the sort of activities HE institutions are promoting.
- Encourage your students to make the best use of university Open Days and Taster Days, speaking with university staff first hand and seeing if they feel the institution is the right 'fit' for them.
- Why not invite universities to come to you to showcase their portfolio of courses? Many universities will be happy to attend a HE Fair at your institution or provide a presentation to students and parents.

- Incorporate student-life activities into your programme of events, so you can broaden your students' knowledge and interest in higher education.
- Encourage your students to make good use of university social media, videos and podcasts to keep up to date with the latest news and developments from their chosen institutions.
- Suggest that they attend UCAS exhibitions wherever possible.
- In fact, encourage early engagement with the UCAS application process as it's never too early for them to start researching courses/universities and to begin formulating an action plan - it builds their self-confidence in decision-making.
- Make your students aware of the breadth of advice and guidance available to them on the UCAS website: there are lots of great tips to help them along the way.
- Get the support of your students' parents during the application process. Parent evenings at your school/college are a great way of raising their own awareness of higher education, ensuring they have all the relevant information so they can be involved in their child's decision-making.

Open Days: a university perspective

Terry Hall worked in the Marketing and Communications department of a large Midlands university. Here, he shares his thoughts on the true value of Open Days:

Open Days were a real eye-opener. My department used to look after the welcome desks where students and their families would register their attendance at the open day, get a bag of goodies and a guide for the day, and ask their first questions.

Halfway through a chat with a family from Ipswich at about 9.00am (they must have got up at about 4.00am to be there), I realised why the work I was doing mattered. Here were people looking for a future: a young girl about to face a new life, a mum and dad about to say goodbye to their daughter for three years, a family hoping that our university was the best place for a good education. It was humbling. I remember others.

A gentleman from southern Europe approached me with a cheque written out for all three years of his daughter's course. They both looked exhausted and a bit lost. I took them straight to the finance department for the safety of his

money, and to the refectory for a complimentary meal.

One young lad and his dad turned up at 8.30am, having travelled overnight from Ireland because of weather problems with ferry crossings. The open day wasn't due to start until 10.00. We gave them their own personal tour of the university.

One father asked me at the welcome desk to tell him why he should entertain the idea of sending his daughter to our university. I felt the desk around me go quiet. I took a deep breath and told him my own experiences as a new student there some years before. I told him of the city, the social life, the work, the pressures and the pleasures. I was honest and didn't pull any punches. He listened, nodded and thanked me. That next September I saw his daughter walking to the new IT block, and I allowed myself a smile.

I asked myself the worth of all the marketing literature I was writing, compared to ten minutes of honest chat at an open day. That's why open days matter. And why scurrilous headlines about fees and 'mickey mouse' courses don't.

When you're there you can breathe the air, talk to who you want, look around corners and ask if it's right. You can find out the truth about HE. You can see for yourself.



If students ask ‘Why should I go on to university?’

It’s a question that probably every one of your students will ask not only themselves, but also you, their parents and anyone who’ll listen. Of course, they’re right to do so.

However, with so many headlines possibly giving a false impression, you need to be the voice of reason and fact. And the fact remains: HE provides advantages and opportunities that set young people up for a lifetime.

In this section, Kate Holmes, Outreach Officer for Schools, Academies and Colleges at Bournemouth University, provides her advice:

University is a life-changing experience for most students and there are many good reasons for going.

First, students get to explore a subject they love, and learn from experts in the field. Second, they make life-long friends and learn how to be independent along with everyone else. Last but definitely not least, they get a degree at the end of it and that means they’re more likely to be employed, to be doing a job they enjoy, and to have a good salary.

But what do students think?

Your students might say that university is ‘not for them’ or they’re ‘not clever enough’. They might think it takes too long, or they’d be better off going straight into work or taking an apprenticeship.

Of course, university isn’t for everyone. But it’s a serious choice for many people, and more and more employers are demanding the higher-level skills demonstrated by having a degree.

But remember:

All degree courses are not the same! There are hundreds of university subjects to choose from and thousands of courses across the UK. Your

students don’t have to study lots of different subjects as they do at school: they can focus on what they’re really interested in. And there are even combined subject degrees for those who just can’t choose!

Degree courses differ from institution to institution. For example, Business Studies at one university can cover different areas or be taught in a different way from the same course at another university. It’s a good idea for students to check out the different subject mixes to find something that suits them, and also to look at how much is coursework and how much exams.

It doesn’t have to take three years out of your life. There are lots of flexible options for university study these days, such as part-time courses, on-line degrees and fast-track options.

A degree is good for your future

Despite what the media might say, employers are demanding higher-level skills and qualifications across the board, and having a good degree puts candidates for jobs at the top of the shortlist. And of course a degree is essential for many careers including medicine, dentistry and teaching.

These days, however, employers want to see more than just qualifications; they want evidence of people’s work skills too. That’s why many degree courses are much more work-related and practical than you might think.

Foundation degrees are a good vocational option, as well as sandwich degrees or courses offering short work placements and applied subjects. Many university students also choose to work part-time alongside their studies and enhance their skills that way, thereby avoiding the ‘Catch-22’ of needing experience in order to gain experience.

Never forget: university is about more than qualifications

Ask any graduate what they’ve gained from going to university and they’re bound to mention the friends they’ve made, the fantastic social life (whatever they were into) and the opportunity to learn how to cook, clean and budget for themselves.

But there are so many other reasons why university is a fantastic opportunity. Your students have access to study, leisure, sports and social facilities that they don’t get anywhere else. Universities also have more employer links than any other opportunities students would encounter elsewhere, such as fashion, law and business placements. Students’ Unions also offer a wide range of clubs and societies catering for all tastes. Whatever their interest, they will find a match at university.



Widening Participation: 3 key facts you and your students need to know

Fact: Universities look for talent, regardless of background

It's in universities' own interests to recruit the best students, wherever they're from and whatever school they went to, because this keeps academic standards high.

And, since people with the potential to benefit from going to university come from all walks of life, universities work hard to remove any barriers (financial or otherwise) that might stop people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university and getting a good degree.

In fact, universities are obliged to do this, or the Government doesn't let them charge higher tuition fees. Reaching out to pupils in disadvantaged areas, e.g. through taster days, is an important part of finding the most talented students.

Fact: Universities help poor and other disadvantaged students

Lots of universities also have ongoing relationships with schools in disadvantaged areas, offering other activities such as summer schools, mentoring and master classes. Through this outreach work, they help improve grades, give advice and guidance (for example, about which GCSE and A-level choices to make) and encourage young people to aspire to go on to higher education if they are able.

Ideally, outreach work starts long before A-level choices or even GCSEs, and continues through the school career. This is because key decisions are made at an early age. Many schemes also involve parents and carers,

who often have a strong influence on a young person's decisions and self-confidence.

Make sure your local universities know who to contact at your school to discuss their outreach work, and if they're not offering something you want, tell them so (you can contact a university widening participation team through UniTasterDays.com). You could also organise your own activities; for example, some schools invite back former pupils to talk about going to university.

“ Ensuring fair access to higher education is crucial both to promoting social mobility and for the economy as a whole. ”

Professor Les Ebdon, Director of Fair Access to Higher Education

Fact: Universities and colleges give out millions of pounds in non-repayable financial aid

As well as Government-backed loans, students from low-income backgrounds can get hundreds or sometimes thousands of pounds in bursaries, fee waivers and scholarships from their university or college. These don't have to be paid back.

How much will they get? Well, this depends on the university or college and family/household income. Each university decides on its own criteria for financial support and students will need to contact them to find out exactly what they're offering and whether they are eligible. For example, the University of Bristol offers free tuition for the first year of study, plus £3,750 in cash each year to full-time undergraduates from low-income backgrounds who have taken part in its outreach scheme with local schools.

“ I will be expecting to see an increase in outreach work - with universities working to raise aspirations and attainment among people from disadvantaged backgrounds - so that nobody with the potential to benefit from higher education feels that their background holds back their ambition. ”

Professor Les Ebdon, Director of Fair Access to Higher Education





“ We have engaged in a busy schedule of activities in partnership with Universities. These activities help to inspire and motivate our students at an early age to achieve the best results that they can in order to progress to higher and further education. ”

Fir Vale Academy, Sheffield

How you can work with universities for your students' future benefit

By Carolyn Deeming, Market Intelligence Manager, Plymouth University

Most universities have a team of people dedicated to building links with local schools and colleges.

Ask for the outreach, schools liaison, or widening participation team. The activities they offer vary, but a typical range might include:

- An enhanced Open Day experience.
- Hands-on experience of studying at university through a sample lecture or practical session.
- An opportunity to see a degree show.
- The chance to chat to academics and current students about their life at university.
- Advice and guidance on making the next step, e.g. how to choose a course and university, writing a personal statement etc.

The team you speak to are the experts on their university. They can often put you in touch with academics and admissions tutors, as well as advise on the range of support services available to all students, guide you through Clearing, and talk about extra-curricular life at the university.

By Francesca Carey from the UK Student Recruitment Team at Brunel University London

I work with schools and colleges, teachers and advisers on a daily basis. We help students make informed course and university decisions by offering opportunities to find out about university life in general, and at Brunel in particular. Here are some tips on how you can build effective links with universities:

Check out what universities are offering

There are a whole host of events at universities that give your students an insight into a

particular subject area and university life. At Brunel, we regularly invite school groups to Open Days, lectures and arts events.

It's a chance to meet academics and student recruitment/schools liaison staff in person and potentially develop a working relationship. Drop a line to the Student Recruitment Team/Schools Liaison Officer to ask how your school can be involved.

Know the institutions your students go to

It's important to look at which institutions your recent students have gone on to. Making contact with these universities will maximise the opportunities, and help ensure your students find the experience relevant and engaging.

Ensure the content of the university visit/event adds something

Help the university make the experience relevant and engaging. If your students have already had a presentation on budgeting for university, let the facilitator know. Don't have your students listen to the price of beans for the fifth time!

Similarly, bear in mind how student numbers might affect the way the session is delivered. Small groups are great for practical sessions. But it may be better to bring together different group years to attend a standard speaker/audience session as it saves the speaker repeating the same presentation.

Pool your resources with neighbouring schools

Consortiums of schools are on the rise with good reason. Many of the HE fairs/events that universities are invited to list the other schools who'll be in attendance. With further audience reach on offer, more universities see the advantages of attending. You don't need to be in a formal consortium arrangement; just make friends with your neighbours!

Give universities a choice of dates

When making a request to a university for activities, I recommend offering at least three potential dates and ideally a half term's notice. University teaching timetables are increasingly tight, so the more flexible you can be, and the more notice you offer, the more likely it is you'll get what you need.

If students ask: where am I going to live?

By Jenny Shaw, Head of HE Engagement & Student Services, Unite Students

Where am I going to live is a crucial question for students going off to university for the first time. Accommodation is the second biggest cost to students after their tuition fees. Choosing the right accommodation can help set up a good university experience and academic success.

For some students, especially those on tight budgets, staying at home and commuting in to university will be a good choice. Many universities and students' unions organise events to help these 'home students' make new friends as quickly as possible.

For those who want to live away from home.

Student halls are the most popular choice. In our recent survey of almost 3000 university applicants, more than 90% said they wanted to live in student halls because it would help them meet other students. When we asked current students about their accommodation, many of them said they were surprised how easy it was to make close, supportive friends in halls.

Student halls have changed a lot over the last 20 years. The majority are now self-catering, ensuite rooms in flats with a shared kitchen and living space. Many are run directly by universities and others by private companies working closely with universities. It isn't unusual for universities to include private halls as part of their standard accommodation offer for first years. Private halls can also be booked directly by individual students or groups of friends who want to share a flat.

“ More than 90% of students said they wanted to live in student halls because it would help them meet other students. ”

A place in student halls costs an average of £134 per week, which can rise to over £200 in London. There is variation in price across the country and within each city, so it is worth shopping around. It is also important to understand what is included in the rent. This can be all bills and wifi, 24-hour security, friendly teams in the buildings to help the students and regular cleaning of communal areas. Renting a private house is often cheaper but students then have to add the cost of bills and manage dividing them up and paying them.

And of course it is not all about price.

The experience of living in halls is so central to university life that prospective students need to think about what's important to them and how they want to live. Are they looking for peace and quiet, or do they want things to be a bit livelier? Do they want to take part in organised events? Some halls will organise social and sports events and even trips or volunteering opportunities. Speaking to the halls' teams can help students match their accommodation to their preferences. For prospective students who already have friends going to the same university, renting a house or flat together might be a good option – though most halls allow you to choose to live in a flat with your friends as well.

For all students moving away from home, it is important that they are aware of their rights as tenants. Student halls should be signed up to one of the National Codes which are stringently regulated. Private houses for students can sometimes be part of accredited schemes through the university or council, and the university accommodation office will be able to advise. Finally, prospective students should visit the accommodation if at all possible before signing a contract – and of course always read the contract!



“ In a recent survey of almost 3000 university applicants, three quarters of students expect social events in their halls of residence. ”



Student Fees and Finance: the facts you need

By Alex Bairstow, Co-ordinator, Higher Education Progression Partnership

A very real concern?

Worries over tuition fees - and an increased reliance on student loans - are seen as the major barrier for young people considering higher education.

Students may also have heard recent announcements to replace maintenance grant funding with increased student loans; and NHS-funded bursaries with tuition fee and maintenance loans*.

The headlines will tell you that students entering Higher Education in September 2016 face the prospect of graduating with over £50,000 student loan 'debt' – and that's before interest.

But what's the real story here?

Having worked in Higher Education student finance for the last 15 years, I know the value of explaining the situation clearly, so students and parents hear the reality, not the scare stories.

Although HE isn't for everyone, I firmly believe

if someone is bright enough and has the desire, then finance should never be a barrier to aspirations. So here's what they should bear in mind:

Repaying loans: it's not based on what they borrow, but on what they earn once they graduate

Under the current system, students only begin making repayments once their earnings reach £21,000 per year (£1,750 per month gross). At which point, they pay an extra 9p for each £1 they earn above £21,000.

For example, someone earning £25,000 per year would pay £30 a month - around the cost of a mobile phone contract or perhaps a gym membership.

Anything they haven't paid off after 30 years will be written off

So if they've earned a great wage, they're likely to have paid off a substantial proportion of their loan, perhaps all of it, before 30 years. Arguably that should be the case, as they've benefited from the education and should therefore repay a substantial proportion of the cost.

If earnings have been lower, their monthly repayments will reflect this. They repay a contribution towards their education through the student loan repayments for 30 years, after which the remainder will be written off. This also seems quite fair.

A lesson from a finance expert

Back in 2012, when £9,000 fees were first introduced, Martin Lewis (Money Saving Expert) tried to calculate how much someone would need to earn to repay all of their student loans (taking into account wage inflation) over the next 30 years.

Assuming someone took out the maximum fee loan and maintenance loan over three years, Martin calculated they would need to earn approximately £35,000 per year, from graduation, in order to repay their full balance, plus interest, within the 30-year repayment period. Some people may find that assessment terrifying, some reassuring.

For me, it says students need to be earning a really good salary, right from the off, in order to have to pay back the total cost of their education. And if they aren't earning at those levels, then they will pay some back, with the rest being written off.

If we called it a 'graduate tax', would students and parents be as anxious?

A graduate tax doesn't have a balance or an interest rate (the two scariest things about the student loan system). It's an amount deducted from your salary each month, which goes directly to the government to contribute towards the cost of the education. The higher their earnings, the higher the deduction from the wage slip each month.

Always bear in mind that this, in essence, is how the student loan repayment system operates.

There's still free money out there!

Most universities and colleges will offer bursaries and scholarships which are not repayable and can be substantial. Each provider will have their own different bursaries with their own criteria and application processes. So students need to do their research.

Final thing to bear in mind

It's worth noting that previous changes to finance arrangements, such as the increase in tuition fees to £3,000 in 2006, and subsequent trebling of the fee cap to £9,000 in 2012, didn't have the profoundly negative impact on the number of students applying to HE that many anticipated.

In fact, the number of people going into Higher Education has pretty much increased year-on-year over the last decade. Which perhaps proves students understand that the benefits outweigh any concerns about the cost.

*NB: Details of the changes to student support for NHS-funded students is still to be confirmed at the time of publication.

The right university and course - what your students need to ask

By Lois Tucker, Outreach & Recruitment Officer, Plymouth University

There are approximately 130 UK universities, and around 240 further education colleges offering university-level courses. Which means students have over 350 institutions to choose from when thinking about Higher Education.

So what should they really be thinking about when deciding where to go and what to study?

First, the course

This is the main consideration when thinking of going on to HE. What area is going to keep a student's interest, focus and commitment for three years? Keep in mind that, unlike schools and colleges, universities do not follow a curriculum. So courses in the same subjects can cover a whole range of different elements and may be taught differently at each university.

What's the location like?

Where is the university in relation to the city centre? Is it a campus-based university, all on one site but away from the main city area? Is it in the centre with the university buildings dotted across the city?

An important factor to consider is how far the university is from a student's home town/city, and is it easy to get back in the holidays? Also, what's the surrounding area like? Do students want to be near the sea/beach or in the heart of the city or countryside?

Facilities up to much?

What are the laboratories/design spaces, classrooms and lecture theatres like? Is the library open 24 hours? How big are the computer rooms and are they open all day? Also consider the facilities on offer for

extracurricular activities, such as sports centres and outdoor resources?

What about clubs and societies?

Ask sports clubs what facilities they have and what competitions they enter. Look at the choice of societies on offer – there's normally a vast range to suit loads of interests. And ask whether it's possible for a student to start their own.

Where will they live?

What accommodation can the university offer and what's the price range? Are the Halls of Residence catered or non-catered? How many rooms are there per flat and can students choose who they live with? It's also worth finding out if Halls of Residence are guaranteed for first years too, as this can take a huge weight of their mind.

Mixing study with work?

Many students want to get a part-time job, a placement or just gain some work experience while they study. So it's worth considering what support and advice there is at the university. Do they have links with local businesses? Are there careers fairs? Is there a service to help apply for jobs and placements?

It's all extra homework. But it's some of the most important homework they'll ever do.

“UniTasterDays provides a fantastic opportunity for students to experience a wide variety of university courses and gain an insight into university life and career opportunities. These range from assemblies and workshops in school, taster days at local and Russell Group universities to residential visits.”

Cowplain School, Waterlooville.

“University visits are brilliant as it gives our students the opportunity to actually see and experience what it is like first hand. It also gives our pupils the opportunity to talk to students who are only a few years older than themselves. This really helps to bridge that link and brings an element of reality.”

South Wigston High School



What do universities look for in a student?

By Claire Forsman, Head of Undergraduate Recruitment (UK/EU), University of Edinburgh

A head for academia

Universities look for students with the potential to do well: those that have the right skills and knowledge to succeed on their chosen course. So academic profile is always going to be a key part of any admissions process.

Students need to check the minimum requirements for any courses they are thinking about. It's easy to miss an important piece of information. So they must take the time to check, and double-check, requirements carefully.

For courses where levels of competition for entry are high, students should be aware that universities may have 'typical' or 'standard' offer levels significantly higher than the minimum.

And some institutions may look for specific skills and qualities that are important for certain subjects, including aptitude tests, portfolios, auditions and interviews.

The right 'fit' for a degree programme

Universities like students that want to get the most out of their course and their time in HE. The UCAS Personal Statement and Reference goes a long way to showing admissions staff that a student will do just that.

Personal Statements can help identify those students best suited to HE courses, and here universities are usually looking for evidence that a student has a strong interest in their chosen subject area.

The UCAS Reference is highly valued by universities as it provides a well-rounded view of an applicant, and helps put a student's achievements in context.

With so many changes taking place in the school curriculum across the UK, references should highlight any specific school policies which may have affected a student's subject choices, as well as any important information about the school itself.

Information provided by subject teachers can also help demonstrate the suitability of an applicant for their chosen course.

Don't hide lights under bushels

Some students tend to underplay skills developed through part-time work, or volunteering in their own schools or local communities.

As a teacher, you can play an invaluable role in helping students identify the key skills they've learned through these activities – whether communication skills, team work or simply good time management.

Understanding their profession

If applying for a vocational course, students need to demonstrate a good understanding of their chosen profession.

This may be through relevant work experience, volunteering or shadowing, and it's often useful for students to reflect on what they've learned from these experiences – both about the profession itself, and also about their own attributes.



By Simon Jenkins, UK Student Recruitment Manager, Keele University

Showing interest and engagement

Universities like to see that applicants have already demonstrated a commitment to the subject area they have applied for, by engaging with it outside their curriculum studies.

So any discussion of wider reading, attendance at subject-related events, visits to museums and exhibitions etc., that can demonstrate a level of interest and engagement, will really strengthen an application.

Bear in mind the transition to working, researching and writing more independently

Historically, this is one of the biggest challenges for new students starting university. Universities tend to look for any prior experience of these research and independent writing skills in an application.

Formal awards, such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) demonstrate these skills and a selection of universities have responded by making reduced grade offers to some students studying the EPQ.

That said, it's equally possible to provide evidence through a discussion of detailed pieces of work completed as part of an A Level (or equivalent) or, even better, through research undertaken by a student out of interest, in their own time.

Details matter

It's always worth noting that, even after the UCAS form is submitted and offers have been made, the finer details mentioned above could still play an important part.

On A Level results day, many universities will go back to the wider UCAS application to make decisions on near-miss applicants. So if a student narrowly misses the grades they needed, it could be that a few of the extra details mentioned above make all the difference.



“Universities like to see that applicants have already demonstrated a commitment to the subject area they have applied for, by engaging with it outside their curriculum studies.”

UCAS Applications and Personal Statements

By Helen Lock, Recruitment and Outreach Manager, Bucks New University

UCAS in a nutshell

- Any students wishing to study a degree at a UK university must use the Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS). The service provides an up-to-date database of all UK universities and their courses, allowing students to make an informed choice.
- Through UCAS, students apply for different universities and courses using just one simple application service, without having to directly contact each individual university. Students can select up to five different courses either at the same or different universities.
- UCAS has various deadlines throughout the year and guides students through each stage of the application process ensuring they're kept up to date and informed.
- Students will also have access to UCAS Track, where they can log in with their personal UCAS ID number and see the progress of their application.
- UCAS alerts students when a university responds to their application, which is important as some universities may request further information or invite students to an interview.
- Students can also complete the Student Finance section of the UCAS application form, which speeds up the financial process.

“ Personal Statements give students the opportunity to stand out from other applicants and personalise their application. ”

The UCAS Reference

All students will need a reference. Usually this is from the school or college they are currently studying at. When completing the UCAS application form, students should add the name of the school or college to the 'Buzzword' field on the form. The school or college will then be informed that a reference is required.

The Personal Statement

This gives students the opportunity to stand out from other applicants and personalise their application.

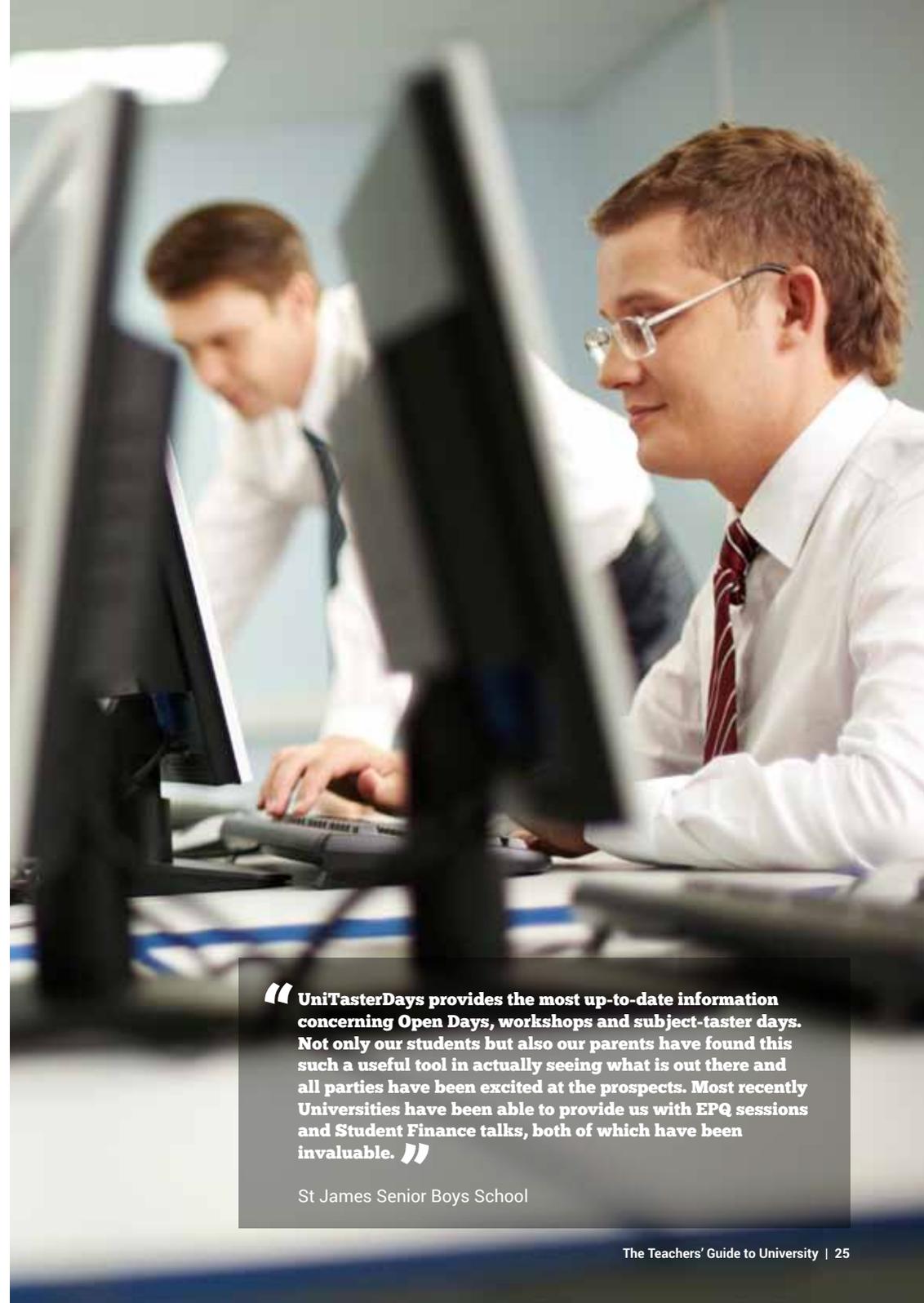
It should be concise and highlight skills, qualities and experiences. It could cover their ambitions; membership of clubs, sports teams or societies; hobbies (playing an instrument, Duke of Edinburgh award, reading); voluntary work, work experience (paid or unpaid) and travel experience.

Students should also reflect on why they have chosen the course and their plans for the future. A well-structured Personal Statement - with a beginning, middle and end - may make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful application.

Once the application form is completed, the fee paid and the form submitted...

UCAS will then alert the selected university of the new application. The University will assess the application and move it through the various application stages, where a student will come across new terminology such as 'conditional offer', 'UCAS Extra' and 'Clearing'.

Students can read more about the process and terminology by visiting UCAS or looking at their chosen university website.



“ UniTasterDays provides the most up-to-date information concerning Open Days, workshops and subject-taster days. Not only our students but also our parents have found this such a useful tool in actually seeing what is out there and all parties have been excited at the prospects. Most recently Universities have been able to provide us with EPQ sessions and Student Finance talks, both of which have been invaluable. ”

St James Senior Boys School



Pre and post-16 options - never too early to start thinking

By Leah Rose Brown, Marketing & Recruitment Officer, University of Bolton

From Year 8 right up until Year 13, students will start to make the key decisions that help shape their future. There are many stages within this decision making, from the initial option choices to choosing a degree at university.

Some students will already have their career mapped out and know the steps they need to take. For others, choosing what to do is a daunting and confusing process. The key is not to panic.

No matter what stage they are at, there's always a solution. They must keep sight of where their strengths lie and what they enjoy doing. They must listen to all the advice they can, yet know that the ultimate choice is theirs.

Here's what I think each year group should be considering:

Year 8/9

- For students choosing their GCSE options at Year 8 or 9, they should pick courses

they enjoy and are good at.

- They should talk to their parents and family members as well as teachers to get advice, but should go for the subjects where they feel most confident.
- If they already know what career/area they're interested in, it's a good idea to work backwards – for example, if they want to be a nurse they should look at entry requirements for some HE courses. This could help sway their decision regarding what they study at GCSE.

Year 10

- This is a good point for them to start thinking more seriously about what they'd like to do in the future.
- Can they see themselves at university or does an apprenticeship sound more appealing? Open Days help them get a taste of what HE is like and helps with the decision-making process. And it's never too early to gain work/voluntary experience if they have a career in mind or are considering an apprenticeship.

Year 11

- Although students' time will be occupied by exams, they need to decide what to do next. Visiting colleges and sixth forms, and speaking to prospective tutors, will help them make this decision.
- Studying GCSEs will give students a clearer idea about what they enjoy, and what areas they should pursue.

- If they are considering university, they should now find out what subjects and qualifications are best for the courses and career they're interested in. They should be advised that some courses will require them to take certain subjects and/or types of qualifications.

Year 12

- By deciding to continue to sixth form or college, they will be in their first year of studying their chosen area. Although this is a new chapter, they will now need to start preparing for higher education.
- They should be encouraged to research HE courses and institutions. They should start to visit Open Days, course enquiry days, and attend UCAS Fairs and other HE events.
- They should learn about the higher education application process and UCAS.
- They need to start thinking about their experience, achievements and topics to write about in their UCAS personal statement.
- They must be encouraged to gain relevant work experience or do some volunteering. This could help with their HE application, and some courses even ask for this as a requirement.

Year 13

Crunch time is here again and students will be completing their higher education applications early in the year.

Students should be aware of things they need to keep track of throughout the year.

- They need to register on the UCAS website and remember to keep their username and password safe.
- They should make sure they know their school/college deadline for applying, as this is usually much earlier than the official UCAS deadline, and be aware of entry requirements before applying.
- You should encourage them to attend open/visit days at universities/HE institutions that have made them an offer.
- They will need to respond within the deadlines set by UCAS or the institutions they have applied to, and apply for student finance and accommodation if necessary.
- If their results aren't as expected, they should also be aware of Clearing options.

“From Year 8 right up until Year 13, students will start to make the key decisions that help shape their future.”

Over to you then...

This guide will help to highlight the advantages and opportunities of higher education. And we hope it'll allow you to further inspire your students to make informed choices about their next steps.

University isn't for everyone; we all know that. But this guide will help your students to find out the real cost (and benefits) of higher education, away from the negative headlines.

The links below will help, and are all available at **UniTasterDays.com**, which is a completely free resource for you, your teaching and careers colleagues, and your students:

- If you would like to arrange events for your school, you can search hundreds of events at: www.unitasterdays.com/search.aspx
- If you can't find the event you are looking for on our search pages, do please request one - this request is then sent directly to named contacts at the universities you select: www.unitasterdays.com/request-taster-day.aspx
- If you would like events that match your chosen criteria sent directly to your mail box, you can join our events-by-email service at: www.unitasterdays.com/events-by-email.aspx
- To stay up to date with school and university collaboration, please keep an eye on our 'Tips for Teachers' blog, a new one is added each week: www.unitasterdays.com/tips-for-teachers.aspx

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