



Which? University

The Getting Into Uni Guide

The
Student
Room

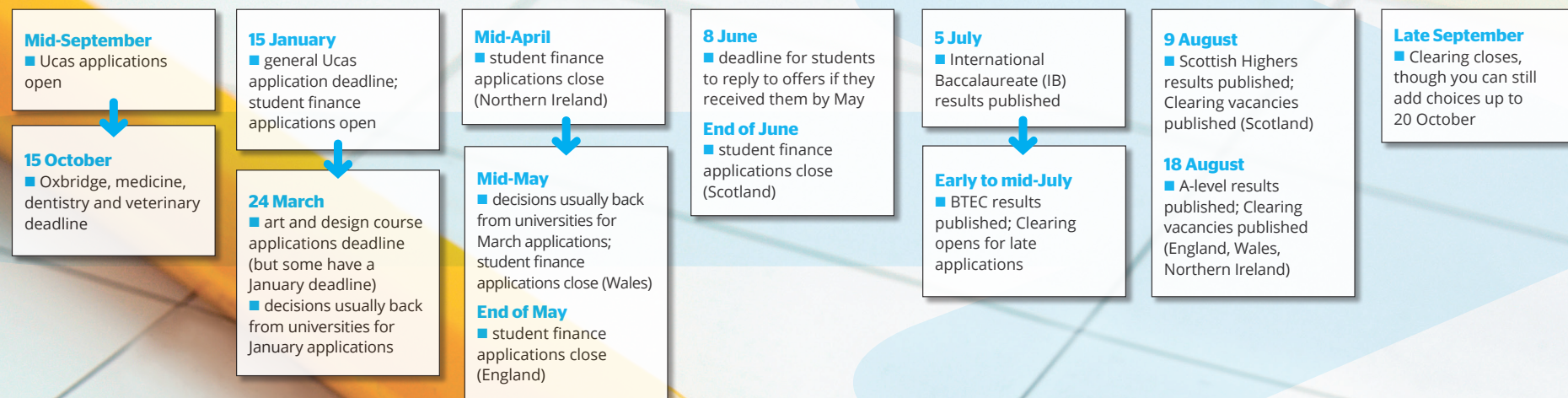
www.which.co.uk/university

www.thestudentroom.co.uk

What to do, when: your month-by-month guide

Get on top of those official uni application dates with some deadlines of your own to keep you on track

Deadlines for 2016 applications



How to get ahead

Year 12

■ June

With exams out of the way, use the time before the summer holidays to devise a long list of course ideas, research different options and attend university open days.

■ July – August

Make a start on your personal statement, so you're ready ahead of the busy autumn term, ideally with a first draft – or at least some structured notes to build on.



If you're reading this, you're probably already set on going to university. But there are plenty of other options to consider that combine employment with training and qualifications, from apprenticeships to school leaver schemes. The earlier you can do this, the better.

Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/alternativestouni



Year 13

■ September – November

Ucas application season! Things get busy as you juggle a final year workload, decide on those five course choices and draft (and re-draft) your personal statement. Oxbridge and early applicants: time to attend interviews and book in for entry tests.

■ December

With the deadline fast approaching, have you finalised choices and got your personal statement in order? Be sure your teacher reference is ready and ask them and your parents to help with final proofing.

■ January – March

Offers should start to come in (maybe even before Christmas for early applicants), but don't panic if you're left waiting – universities have until May to respond, and the Ucas Extra scheme offers a second chance if you're not holding any offers. Creative types: how is your portfolio coming along?

■ April – May

Decisions, decisions... Time to settle on firm and insurance choices that you're serious about studying (have you made it to an open day yet to help with that?) and get on top of your student accommodation application – halls are usually first come, first served.

■ May – June

Revision, exam, revision, exam... And repeat...

■ June – July

Before you head off for summer, think about a back-up plan if things don't turn out how you hope.

■ Mid-August

Results day looms, and university (fingers crossed!) awaits come September.

Choosing the right course

Take your time over deciding what, and where, to study - it's one of the biggest decisions you'll make

What course to study?

If you're struggling to get inspired, try to think about your suitability to different subjects in terms of:

Is it a subject you study now?

If it's the one you love, think about whether it's going to interest you for the next few years. Think about which career path it could lead to.

Is it related to a career idea?

If you have vocational ambitions, explore each possibility to find out whether you need to study a certain subject in order to enter that career.

Is it an entirely new subject?

Studying at degree level opens up all sorts of new subjects you won't have encountered before, so research carefully and talk through your options.

If you are still unsure, you could consider doing a joint honours degree, which could be a mixture of a subject you are already familiar with and something new.

Once you've settled on a subject area, it's time to start researching, comparing and weighing up

degree courses properly. As well as the course content and entry requirements differing from university to university, so too will the structure and assessments.



Making your five course choices

- Try to select a mix of ambitious, on-target and safe course choices, based on your predicted grades.
- Dig into the detail of each course, as there may be subject-specific or GCSE entry requirements to meet.
- Pick course choices based on places you would actually, realistically, be happy to go to – not two or three you like and a couple of 'filler' courses you've not properly researched.
- Do take time to read over the module information and outline for every course you're considering.

Questions to ask at an open day:

- What will the course content and modules cover?
- How much teaching time is there each week?
- What kind of work placements are on offer?
- What facilities (labs, studios, libraries) are on offer?
- Are there flexible options available, such as part-time or distance learning?

To help you find the right course, our course finder will search and filter on the things most important to you – entry grades, subject, location and more.

Visit: www.which.co.uk/courses

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Finding the best university for you

Consider what you really want from a uni location – nightlife, cheap rent or a short train ride home...

What's the best university?

Once you've got your subject choice sorted, start looking around for where you want to be based for the next few years.

Use the course or subject area you want to study as a good starting point in your university search. Dig into the detail of what different university courses provide in terms of modules, structure and other, possibly unique, opportunities.

What do different universities have to offer when it comes to strong connections with employers in your chosen industry, sandwich and placement options or state-of-the-art facilities that will enhance your academic experience?

Also think about the geographical and environmental factors that are important to you in a university, from the average cost of living to local nightlife.

Do you want to stay at home (or nearby), or fancy heading to the other end of the country?

Always had your sights set on a big city with buzzing nightlife like London or Manchester, or would you rather be walking distance from the beach or in the countryside?

Try to visit a few different universities to decide on the environment that suits you best. Open days run throughout most

of the academic calendar, giving you the perfect chance to get a feel for the place and chat to tutors and students.

Be mindful that the cost of living will differ by area, too – so your student budget will need to accommodate your choices.



'Reputation' is a term that you'll probably hear a lot of. League tables, friends, family, teachers, advisers – all can make suggestions of which unis you should consider, but beware of over-simplified notions of what's viewed as a 'good' university.

When you're looking at a university, course content, assessment methods, grade requirements and location should be your priorities; the things that will make or break whether you'll stick it out for the duration.

Student satisfaction scores and real-life feedback from current university students can also help inform your choice.

Get the full picture by seeing what students really think about their university and talk to them about their experience.

Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/applyingtouni



Ucas application essentials

From writing the dreaded personal statement, to offers, rejections and firm and insurance choices. Welcome to the application rollercoaster!

Personal statements

The toughest part to this is getting started – but it's worth putting the hours in, as your personal statement could end up being the decider between you and another applicant.

The bulk of what you write should focus on your suitability, love for and all-round interest in the subject you're applying to study. Use examples inside and outside the classroom, but don't just say what you've done; reflect critically on that experience, achievement and knowledge.

Steer clear of over-used clichés (I've always been fascinated by...), using sweeping statements to big yourself up ('My achievements are vast') and limit your use of the words 'passion' and 'passionate'!

Offers and rejections

The Ucas online system – Track – will tell you when the status of your

application changes – and it's decision time. If you've got an offer, it's most likely to be 'Conditional', and will be based on you meeting certain grade or Ucas point requirements.

Getting rejected from the uni you really wanted to go to is undeniably tough, but it won't necessarily mean you won't end up at a university you're really happy with. Start to think about some of the positives that your other offers would provide.

If you don't get any offers, or choose to decline the ones you receive, check out the Ucas Extra process, which gives you a second stab at finding a new course, or wait to find a course through Clearing (see page 8).

Finalising your first and insurance places

Once you've heard back from the unis you applied to, it's time to settle on your first ('Firm') and reserve ('Insurance') course choices.

Firm: This should be your top choice, the place you want to spend the next three years living and studying at. Think carefully about the course, the place and your future plans – make sure you visit, if you haven't already, to confirm your feelings.

Insurance: This should typically have lower entry requirements than your Firm. If you're considering an Insurance option with conditions equal to or even harder than those for your first choice, remember it's a risky strategy – if you miss your grades, you won't have a reserve offer.

It's important that your Insurance choice is somewhere you're prepared to go, as you'll be committed to going if you don't meet your first choice requirements. Remember that you don't have to include one.

Equally, make sure you can realistically meet the conditions of your Firm offer.



Admissions tutors have shared their secrets to drafting the perfect personal statement on Which? University – where you can search by your chosen subject.

Visit: www.which.co.uk/personalstatement

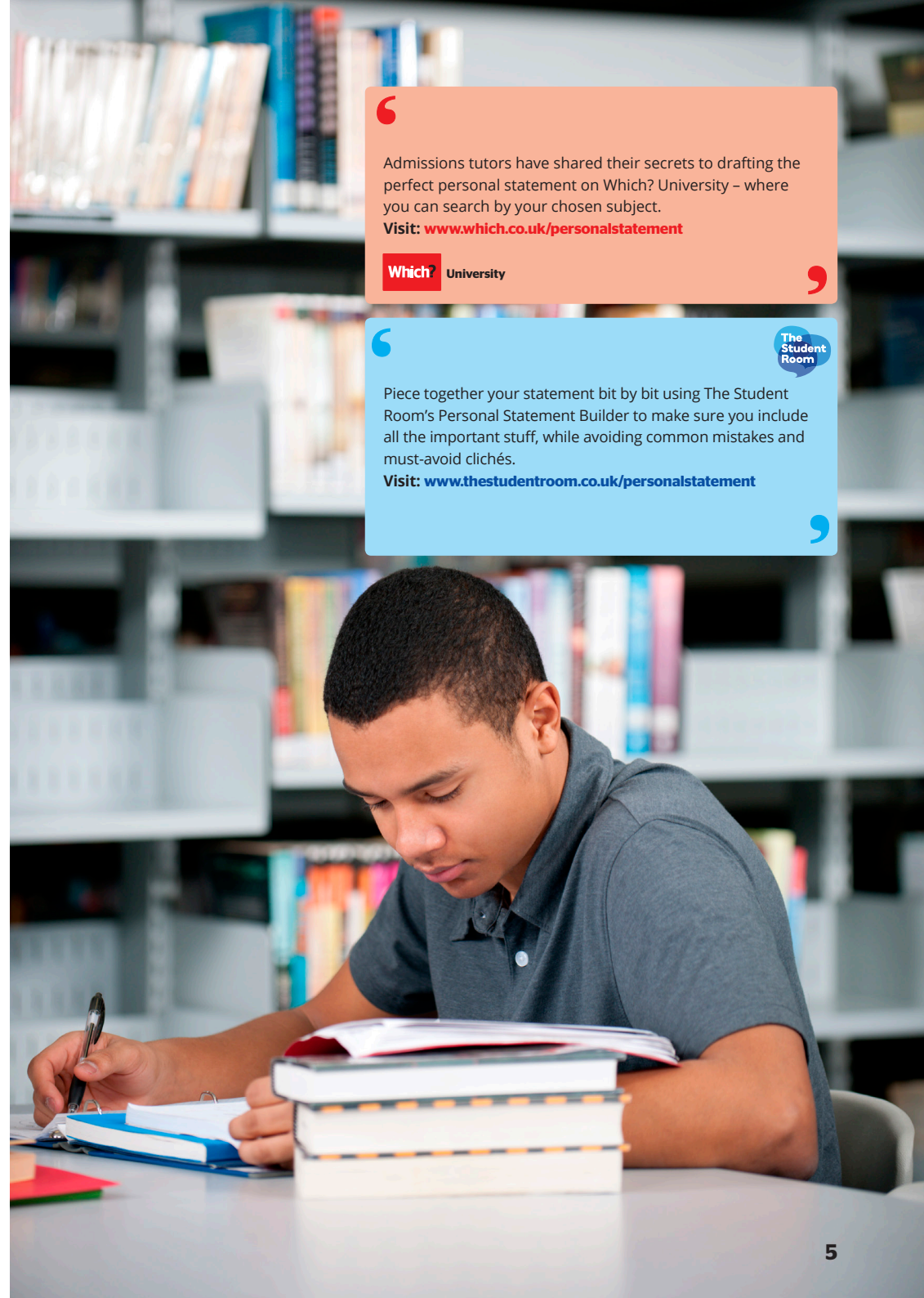
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Piece together your statement bit by bit using The Student Room's Personal Statement Builder to make sure you include all the important stuff, while avoiding common mistakes and must-avoid clichés.

Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/personalstatement



Student finance explained

You've read the headlines about student fees. Here's what you need to know when it comes to covering the financial costs of university

Loans and fees

UK universities can charge full-time English students up to £9,000 a year in tuition fees (though for some courses it's less).

They don't need to be paid upfront. You can take out a tuition fee loan to cover the cost, which you'll pay back after you graduate.

The second element of the loan is the maintenance loan – up to £8,200 a year, or £10,702 if you study in London.

This is designed to help you with your living costs, from accommodation to food. The exact amount you can borrow depends on a number of factors, including where you study and your household income.

Maintenance grants have also been replaced by the maintenance loan.

Repayment

This is based on how much you go on to earn after graduation, not what you've

borrowed. If you're earning more than £21,000 a year, you'll repay an amount based on your earnings over that threshold; under that, you won't pay back a penny. Under the current system, your debt is wiped after 30 years.

Welsh repayment works in the same way, while Scottish students start to pay back when they earn more than £16,910 a year and Northern Irish students repay once they're earning £17,335.

Extra help

Scholarships and bursaries: offered on the basis of academic ability, following means testing or for other reasons – for example, if you are disabled.

Fee waivers: these reduce your tuition fees, either on their own, or in a broader package of support with a bursary.

Hardship funds: also known as the Access to Learning Fund, Financial Contingency Funds and support funds,

these can help if you're struggling financially either before or during uni.

Application tips

■ Get ahead by applying for student finance from the end of January; you don't need to wait to receive an offer from a university to do this.

■ The most common delay with applications is not sending in evidence to support your application; so do get official paperwork and your passport in order.

■ Don't forget to send off your signed declaration; you won't get your funding without doing this.

Budgeting

Making your funds last until the end of term can be tough, so plan your budget carefully. Assess your income, then list one-off (accommodation, equipment, books) and day-to-day (food, travel, toiletries, clothes, entertainment, bills) expenses, allocating a weekly or monthly budget to each.

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What about the rest of the UK?

We're mainly referring to English students here – fees and loans differ elsewhere in the UK. If you live in:

- Scotland and go to a Scottish university, you won't pay tuition fees
- Northern Ireland and go to an NI uni, you'll pay £3,805 in tuition fees
- Wales and go to a Welsh uni, you'll pay £3,810 in fees and get a tuition fee grant to cover the rest.

Visit: www.which.co.uk/studentfinance

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Head to the Student Finance Zone, powered by Student Finance England, for everything you need to know about student finance.

Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/finance

Revision, exams ...

The end is in sight – just the small matter of revising for, and succeeding in, those exams. Get your revision timetable and past papers at the ready

A* students share their revision tips

We all know that, come study leave, a good revision plan is essential. But actually knuckling down to revise will test your willpower probably as much as your planning and intellectual ability.

Here's how previous students won their revision battles:

Make a plan – and stick to it
'I wrote out every topic within every subject I needed to revise then guesstimated how many sessions of 50 minutes I would need to revise that topic.'

'I then put this into a timetable so when it came down to revising I wouldn't spend ages just flicking through any book finding something to revise but would know exactly what area I was to cover in that time period.'

The Student Room member Strawberryjellybaby

Prioritise your weakest subjects

'It's really important that you get out of your comfort zone when revising. Got

one particular subject which is really challenging? Get it out of the way first thing.

'Not only will you be making sure that you've worked on that area, but if you get it done then the rest of the day will be a breeze in comparison.'

The Student Room member Puddles the Monkey

Past papers

'Practice is key, so getting your hands on past paper questions and answers is very important... So put down those revision cards and mind-maps once you've learned them. There's no point going over something a million times; you need to be able to apply it.'

'At least two weeks before exams, start concentrating on past papers. Do each one at least twice. With each one, trawl through the mark scheme and ensure you understand everything there. This gives you a better idea of how to think through an exam question.'

The Student Room member Dmccrirk

Creative cramming hacks

'Everyone has an opinion on how helpful cramming is – but as the natural end to any revision cycle, use your time effectively.'

'Create flashcards from detailed notes to help you learn and memorise key information. Use these during short self-managed revision tests to give your brain a workout and highlight last minute knowledge gaps.'

The Student Room member She-Ra

Look after yourself

'Take regular breaks during your revision – get up, have a cup of tea, go outside or go to the gym. Don't set yourself the task of revising non-stop for eight hours a day. You'll only end up stressed out and demotivated.'

The Student Room member Kuma Kuma

'Ditch the all-night revision sessions and get a good night's sleep. You'll wake up more refreshed for a day of focused study.'

The Student Room Member Hana Teraie-Wood

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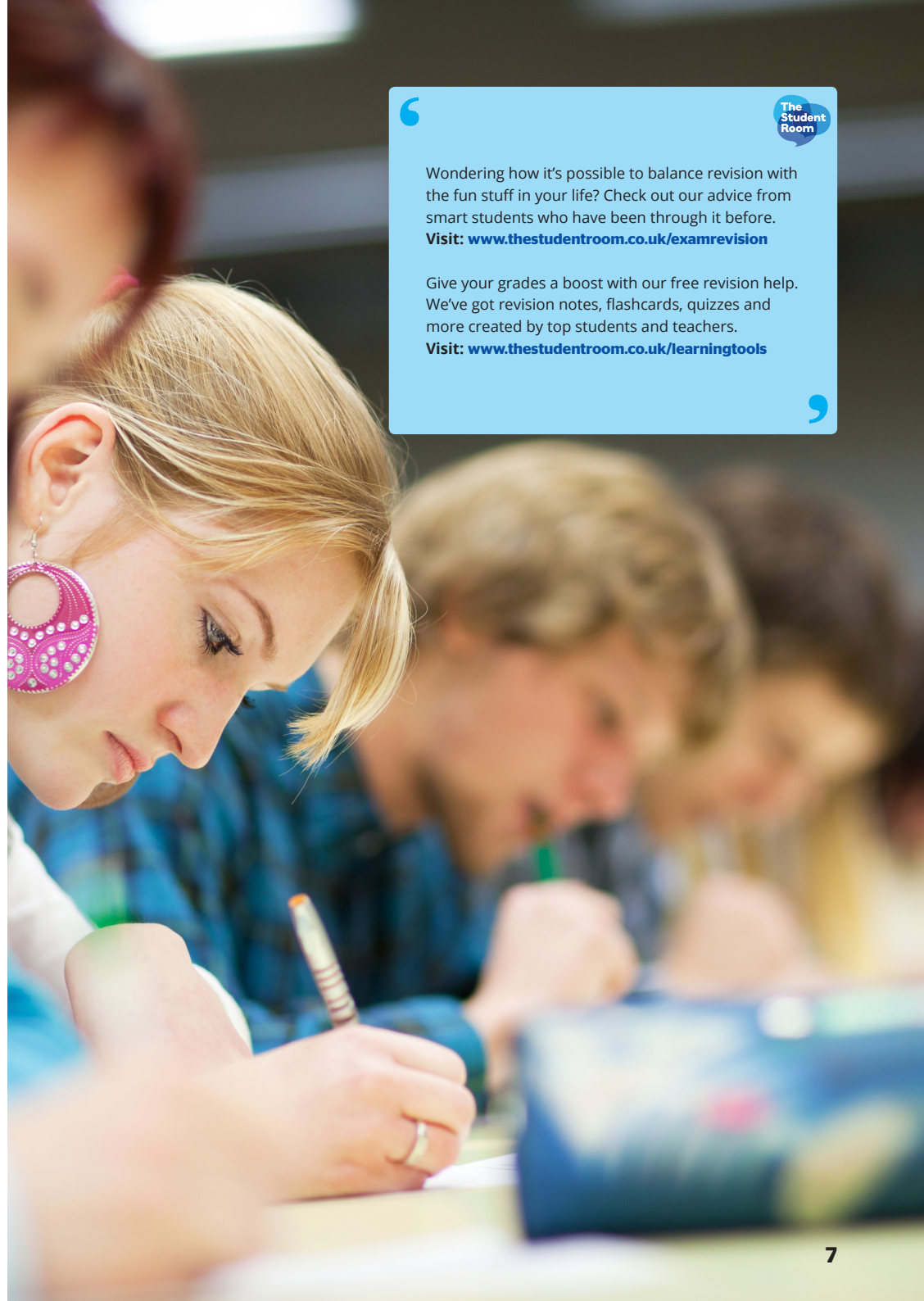
Wondering how it's possible to balance revision with the fun stuff in your life? Check out our advice from smart students who have been through it before.

Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/examrevision

Give your grades a boost with our free revision help. We've got revision notes, flashcards, quizzes and more created by top students and teachers.

Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/learningtools

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...and results day

No matter what's inside that envelope, keep calm and carry on. You've got plenty of options from here

Results time

Whatever happens, results day will be an emotional one, for you, your parents and your friends, so keep some tissues close as someone will start tearing up.

While there tends to be a lot of hooplah around results day - morning news, newspapers, messages on social media and so on - the important thing is to focus on what you're doing rather than being distracted by everyone else.

The good news is that, whatever grades you get, you've still got lots of different paths available:

1. You got your predicted grades Congratulations! Look out for a confirmation email. Meanwhile, get celebrating!

2. You just missed your predicted grades Disappointing, but as a near-miss you may still get an offer from your firm choice - plus there's your insurance as a back-up.

3. Your grades are much lower than predicted You may be upset, but Clearing is open to you to find an

alternative place, so get set for some quickfire phone calls to universities.

4. Your grades are better than predicted A nice surprise! Do you still want to accept your firm choice or apply for a different course with your higher grades? Ucas Adjustment allows you to 'trade up' course places.

If there's any doubt over your place, don't be afraid to pick up the phone to talk directly to a university.

As well as your teachers, the Exam Results Helpline - 0808 100 8000 - can offer impartial, practical advice.

There's always another option: to decide not to go. There's nothing wrong with reconsidering your options, to build up some more work experience, retake your exams or defer your place for a year. A gap year could offer you some valuable time out to get yourself into a stronger position to apply next year.

We asked universities for their views on taking a gap year:
www.which.co.uk/gapyears

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A quick guide to Clearing

Missed your grades? Don't panic - record numbers of students turn to Clearing to find a place. Here's how:

- Look at the Ucas website - all places are listed here.
- If you find a course you like (and meet the requirements), you'll need to call the university department to secure a place.
- Prep before the call is key - research the course and university and be prepared to explain why you're a strong candidate (dig out your personal statement to help) and why that specific course appeals to you.
- Verbal offer(s) made? Think carefully over your decision, then add your Clearing choice to Track and wait for the uni to confirm.

Visit: www.which.co.uk/clearing

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Finding university accommodation

University halls, private accommodation, living at home? Get clued up on the best living option for you, the earlier the better

Student accommodation – what's on offer?

■ University halls: the traditional option for first-years, these are managed by the university and offer a good stepping stone from living at home to living independently. There's a huge range of types, sizes and locations, so ask the right questions (below) to find the right one.

■ Private halls: a second option in some areas is a room in a purpose-built student living complex. The set-up is similar to halls, but it's owned by a private company. Factor in what bills are included, what facilities are on site and how far they are from campus.

■ Private accommodation: a bigger leap from living at home but private rentals can be cheaper (as long as you're happy managing your bills) and more

flexible, and may be your only option if you're late applying.

■ Staying at home: a full fridge, no rent and free laundry service? Living at home can definitely have its perks. Socialising and meeting people might require a little more effort, but there are plenty of other opportunities at uni to make friends.

If you're set on staying in halls, you'll need to research and apply for accommodation early on – it's not always guaranteed that everyone will be allocated a place (with more students going to uni, many simply don't have enough space!). The alternatives can be equally as fun and safe to live in.

Questions to ask about university halls

Try to see one or two halls of residence on an open day – you'll probably

be taken to the best on offer, but it's a great time to do some fact-finding. Consider:

- Is a place in halls guaranteed? What accommodation is available off-campus?
- Would a place still be guaranteed if the uni is your Insurance choice?
- What does it cost – and what's included in that cost?
- Do you have to move in and out each term?
- Is it catered or self-catered?
- How big are the rooms – are some bigger than others?
- How quiet are they?
- Can you put stuff on the walls?
- How secure is it?
- What happens in years two and three?
- How far will you have to travel to get into uni and around town?
- Can you bring a car?

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Some quick packing tips

- Travel light. You're moving into a small room with very limited cupboard space – and you'll be moving out again in June. One large suitcase of clothes, a few boxes of other stuff and a bin liner of bedding is about the right level.
- Before you go out and buy anything, make sure you've checked what the uni will be providing. You don't want to turn up with a lot of stuff that's already been laid on.
- Wherever you're going, they're going to have shops! So if you do forget anything vital, you can always buy another when you get there.

Want the full, definitive list of what to take?

Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/packforuni

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Preparing to go

The countdown is on before becoming a fully fledged uni fresher. Nervous? Excited? Both? We have some practical pointers before you head off

Student bills

Council tax: if everyone living in your household is a full-time student, you don't have to pay Council tax. If someone in the household isn't a full-time student, you'll be eligible to pay Council tax – but will qualify for a discount.

TV Licence: you'll need a TV Licence if you watch or record television programmes as they're being shown on TV – on any device or service. You don't need a licence to watch programmes using a streaming or catch-up service such as BBC iPlayer, Amazon Prime or Netflix. Halls of residence generally have a licence covering communal areas, but not individual rooms.

Utility bills: if you're in halls, these tend to be included in your termly cost; if you're in private accommodation, utility bills may not be included, so make sure you're aware of gas, electricity and water bills.

Internet: many universities offer a free wireless connection in halls, so be sure to ask.

Insurance: your personal belongings might be covered by your family's household insurance, otherwise you'll need a separate policy.

Student bank accounts

Banks are keen to sign you up now as a student to hopefully keep you as a life-long customer. That's why attractive incentives are often on offer, including free or discounted railcards, cinema tickets or vouchers.

See these as perks rather than the main reason you choose a particular account. If it's likely that your outgoings will exceed your income at some point during your studies, it's worth looking for the one with the highest overdraft available. It's not 'free money', but can help to tide you over financially until you have more money coming into your account.

Part-time work

If you're planning to get a part-time job alongside your studies, get in early with applications at the start of term. Your students' union is a good place to head for details of local job vacancies that can fit around your timetable. Bear in mind you may need to pay Income Tax and National Insurance on your earnings, unless these don't exceed your personal tax-free allowance over the year.

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Compare the latest student bank account deals on the market. Which has the highest interest-free overdraft, should you need a little help making it to the next month? Plus, what extra nifty perks do they come with? **Visit:** www.which.co.uk/studentbank

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The ultimate what to take checklist

Bedding: duvet, sheets, pillows and towels

Clothes: from casuals to going out clothes (but don't pack everything...)

Laundry stuff: laundry bag, small drying rack, and laundry products

In the bathroom: glasses/ contact lenses, first-aid kit, toiletries, contraceptives, and medication

Stationery: including notebooks, pens, post-its, ring binders, and a memory stick

Life admin: passport, driving licence, National Insurance number, NHS medical card, university offer, accommodation and student finance documents

Electrical items: laptop, extension leads, headphones, mobile phone, and printer

Kitchen gadgets: kettle, toaster, and microwave (your accommodation may supply these)

Kitchen basics: crockery, cutlery, glasses, pots and pans, chopping board, and storage tubs for leftovers

Store cupboard supplies: condiments, cooking oil, coffee, tea bags, cereal, and tins and packets of midnight snacks

Extras: sewing kit, hot water bottle, hold-all bag for weekends at home

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Get ready for Freshers' before you go – The Student Room uni forums are full of other people starting at your uni this year too. Visit: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/freshers

Freshers' Week survival guide

Everyone will want to make some great mates You'll meet plenty of awesome people during Freshers' Week; maybe in your accommodation, on your course, at fresher fairs or on nights out. No matter how nervous you might be, keep smiling. Everyone wants to be friends with a smiley and approachable-looking person. Don't worry if you don't meet 'friends for life' in your first couple of weeks, you still have plenty of time.

Keep in touch with your favourite people Facetime, Skype and Google Hangouts are ideal for keeping in touch with family and friends. Seeing a friendly face will help you stay feeling

positive and give you a little boost when you need it the most. Set up a Whatsapp or Facebook Messenger group for all your best mates. It's perfect for checking in, staying connected and sharing what you're up to.

Get out of your comfort zone and embrace fresher fairs Hundreds of enthusiastic students, thousands of freebies, a free wall planner available in every corner and all crammed into one hall – this is the 'Fresher's Fair'. From the Harry Potter Appreciation Group to Circus Soc, from Tiddlywinks to the Real Ale Appreciation society – get ready to have your mind blown by the huge number of student groups

and societies you can join. They'll all have a Freshers' intro session, so make sure you go along to any that catch your eye. It could be the start of an amazing adventure.

There will always be someone worrying about how 'boozy' Freshers' Week will be If this is you, you're not alone. Nights out will always be planned into the Freshers' calendar but there will be lots of events throughout the week that involve no alcohol whatsoever. All Fresher events are advertised well in advance so make sure you take a look at the timetable and plan in what suits you and your lifestyle choices best.

Go with the flow during Freshers' There will be tonnes of opportunities to have a good time. Some students will want to party hard, but that doesn't mean you have to. If you're feeling sleepy, take some time out; you're experiencing a huge amount of change and sometimes you'll just need some down time. Go with how you feel; forced fun isn't fun. Instead, suggest pizza and Netflix with other worn-out freshers – they'll love you for it.

Be safe Make sure you know the basics, like the number of your accommodation security, what to do if you lose your key, the number of a reputable taxi firm

and how to contact your fresher reps. Always travel back with someone after a night out, and, if you're planning a late library session, text one of your flatmates so they know when to expect you home. You never know, you might have a cuppa waiting for you when you arrive back.

You'll wish you could be a fresher again It really is once in a lifetime. With Freshers' Week done, the Christmas break will be just around the corner and then uni really does zoom by. Make sure you make the most of campus life and all the amazing opportunities that your course has to offer you.

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www.which.co.uk/university

Good luck!

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