

SUPPORT FOR NEW STUDENTS STARTING UNIVERSITY IN AUTUMN 2021



Steps universities are taking to support wellbeing, transitions, and skills development.

June 2021

Universities have put in place extensive support for students starting their studies in the new 2021–22 academic year. Preparations are well underway to ensure that new students experience a positive transition into university life, with tailored support and activities that recognise the disruption they have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Students have been extremely resilient in the face of significant uncertainty and universities have been working closely with their existing students to learn from their experiences and adapt their approaches for the next academic year. The following case studies highlight just some of the skills development, transition, and wellbeing initiatives and advice that universities are planning, in addition to their usual comprehensive student support services and welcome programmes.

This resource may be useful for universities to further enhance their plans, ideas, and activities. Any applicants, parents and advisers who want to find out more about the support on offer or discuss individual student needs are advised to reach out to institutions directly.

Each case study is labelled under one or more of the following three themes it relates to:



Academic skills development



Preparation and transition to university life



Supporting good wellbeing



University of Sheffield: Level Up Your Skills

The University of Sheffield has developed an interactive study skills resource '[Level Up Your Skills](#)' for all new undergraduate students to support their transition into undergraduate level study.

The resource supports students to:

- develop the skills and confidence to make a positive start on their course
- reflect on their personal strengths, gaps and challenges
- set skills-related goals for the academic year and work towards them
- apply their academic skills to learning and assessment on their course

Resources are broken down into sections for students to access as they need, starting before they arrive at university and lasting up to week 12 of their course. Students can choose to record their progress and work towards an Academic Skills Certificate for recognition of their skills development.



Staffordshire University: Staffs Peer Mentoring Scheme

Staffordshire University has developed a new '[Staffs Peer Mentoring Scheme](#)' to help first-year students settle into university life.

Mentors will be fully trained to support mentees and can help new students to:

- feel supported in a time of change
- have someone to talk to
- meet new people
- increase confidence
- get the most out of university life
- succeed and achieve their goals



Wrexham Glyndwr University: Confident Learner

Wrexham Glyndwr University has created a free '[Confident Learner](#)' online course for anyone considering undergraduate study. The course is designed to increase confidence in studying for those who are starting university for the first time, those returning to study after a period away, or considering a professional or part-time course.

The course is four weeks long, with five hours of learning per week and an assessment on the sixth week. There are multiple start dates up to 5 July 2021.

The course will enable learners to:

- research and find information from a range of sources
- improve their presentation skills
- prepare for a higher level of study
- improve and enhance their digital skills
- build their confidence to achieve their potential



Wrexham Glyndwr University: Preparing for University

Wrexham Glyndwr University has created a free [‘Preparing for University’](#) online module covering a range of topics including:

- finances and budgeting
- mental and physical health and wellbeing
- planning for academic success
- managing time to be able to study effectively

The module is delivered through a series of pre-recorded content and activities which require 20 hours of active learning over four weeks. The module includes group activities such as discussion forums and a tutor will be available to support learners throughout. There are multiple start dates currently running up to July.



University of Wolverhampton

At the University of Wolverhampton, academic schools are developing purpose built content to enable early engagement for new students with staff and academic coaches through their virtual learning environment, Canvas. All level three and four students have an academic coach who provides academic support and pastoral care to improve engagement with university life and facilitate independent learning.

Peer to peer support will be encouraged through closed groups on social media and Unibuddy events. Applicant webpages will also be a ‘one-stop shop’ for all things transition, showcasing live events as well as pre-recorded/past events on demand. They will provide links to key information, self-access toolkits, and clear channels for communication with individuals at the university specifically tasked with supporting student transitions.



University of Cambridge: Tutoring scheme

The University of Cambridge has launched a pilot offer holder tutoring scheme, which aims

to support the academic attainment of its 2021 offer holders. The scheme is open to offer holders who are care experienced or in care or who are eligible for Free School Meals. This year, 135 offer holders are undertaking 15 hours of online one-to-one tutoring in a chosen A Level subject. The tutoring started in March and will run until pupils sit their exams in Year 13.

The aim of this scheme is to increase the number of students from widening participation backgrounds achieving top grades in their exams and securing the conditions of their university offer. The tuition has previously helped students to make two and a half times the progress of their peers equivalent to one grade of improvement in just a single term.

“I am very determined and motivated to meet my grade requirements and I know this tutoring scheme will bring me closer to that A* in maths that I need to meet my offer.”
– Offerholder, tutoring scheme participant.



University of Cambridge: STEM Start

The University of Cambridge has developed a STEM Start course to support students' preparedness for higher education. It reassures students and supports confidence building by revising school materials. Before the course starts, students are also provided with GCSE and A level revision materials via the Isaac Physics platform. The online course lasts for four weeks, with nine hours of learning per week.

A 16-month programme is being planned to support Year 12 widening participation students from January 2022 through to examination results in 2023. This will be a pilot for physical science and engineering students, supported by the School of Physical Sciences and delivered through Isaac Physics (Funded by the Department for Education England and The Ogden Trust).



University College London (UCL): Transition Mentor programme

UCL has a long-running [Transition Mentor programme](#). Every first-year undergraduate is matched to a Transition Mentor, a second- or third-year student from the same degree programme or department. Students meet their mentor once a week in groups of ten. Mentors help students to settle in, they can signpost to other university services, support with administrative tasks, and provide study skills guidance.

In the new 2021–22 academic year, mentoring will remain online to allow access for all students. However, where mentors and mentees are keen to do so and the government guidance allows for, some mentoring groups and social activities will take place in person.



University College London (UCL): Student Advisers

UCL created the role of Student Adviser to support their 2020–2021 first-year undergraduate students to provide individualised support, enabling all students to build relationships with staff and foster a sense of reassurance and wellbeing.

The Student Advisers are based in departments and get in contact with students before they arrive and stay in regular contact throughout the year with information, initiatives, events, and workshops. In the new 2021–22 academic year they will:

- Support new students with orientation and transition to university life.
- Engage with students proactively, demonstrating interest in their university experience and care for their wellbeing.
- Offer opportunities and activities for personal development, alongside facilitating connections between students and staff.
- Guide students through relevant UCL policies and processes, promoting and enabling equality and inclusion, resolving issues, signposting or referring enquires as appropriate.



Aston University: Get Ahead

Aston University developed '[Get Ahead](#)' for all new students in 2020–2021 and will be expanding the programme for first-year undergraduates in 2021–22. Get Ahead provides self-paced study materials and live classes focused on wellbeing and academic transition including maths, writing, study skills, and learning in higher education. Students can access the resources before they arrive at Aston and throughout their first year of study.

The maths content includes a range of refresher resources that support students from GCSE level through to A Level. Specialist mathematics support will also be available to students studying relevant courses with peer mentoring and pre and post-arrival teaching.

All new students are also offered a peer mentor before they arrive at the university. Once a new student has confirmed their acceptance to study at Aston, they can choose to be put in contact with a current student from their degree programme to communicate with during the pre-arrival period and throughout their first year.

Mentors can share their experiences of starting at Aston and answer questions new students might have. Hearing about the experiences of a current student, and benefiting from their reassurance and friendly advice can help students to settle in quickly. International students can also choose to join our International Buddy Scheme in which

they are matched to a buddy from the UK and invited to participate in a variety of social events.



Nottingham Trent University: Student Transition & Engagement Programme

Through the Student Transition and Engagement Programme (STEPs) Nottingham Trent University has developed a series of scaffolded interventions to provide students with relevant information, support and signposting at the right time pre and post-arrival. New personalised interventions were created in response to the pandemic, including:

- A pre-arrival phone call from a current student to ask any questions about their course, university life etc.
- Pre-arrival induction modules (in partnership with Pearson Education) that introduce students to themes such as online learning, wellbeing, citizenship and transition to university.

All first-year students also attend Welcome Workshops, developed in partnership with [Grit Breakthrough Programmes](#). The student-centred workshops are tailored to course groups with the aim of supporting students' transition into university, building a sense of community, belonging and agency. Students meet student mentors at this session and are encouraged to maintain contact with them and their peers after the workshops through a range of activities including specially created Microsoft Teams sites managed by the Student Mentors. Evaluation of the workshops has shown significant effects on students' sense of community, agency and awareness of University and Nottingham Trent Student Union support systems, particularly amongst under-represented groups.



University of Leicester: HeadStart

The University of Leicester has been supporting new students through its [HeadStart](#) campaign since February 2021 in preparation for their September entry to higher education. The campaign includes a digital readiness module, live and on demand sessions with student created content such as cooking demonstrations, Netflix watch-alongs and quiz nights. There are also sessions for parents to help them understand how they can support their child in the run up to starting university.

The intended outcomes for the 2021 cohort include:

- Increased confidence in their academic ability and skills.
- Increased awareness of all the support provided across the institution.
- A sense of student community with their fellow entrants.

- A head start in their digital readiness for the Autumn term.

Students receive weekly emails confirming the live activity taking place during that week. A supportive letter from the vice-chancellor has also been sent to provide additional reassurances to students and their parents.



University of Greenwich

The University of Greenwich is extending its Welcome Week to support students to transition into university life with additional online and in-person events and activities. Academic faculties will run extra practical and laboratory classes, taster sessions and skills tutorials for new and returning students. Year 13 students can access the [GREat Skills programme](#) of workshops delivered by student ambassadors and staff to build key personal and academic skills. Workshop topics include problem solving, time management, managing stress and independent learning.



Canterbury Christ Church University

Canterbury Christ Church University has worked closely with their students' union to develop a package of transition, orientation, and induction initiatives in response to the Covid-19 pandemic which will take place online, with complementary on-campus activities where possible. All students have access to online 'Welcome' and 'Welcome Back' hubs with on-demand content and live events, plus information about student support services, course orientation, and practical advice such as how to sign up for a GP. All academic course teams have been given additional guidance this year to support their planning for welcome activities.



University of Sussex: Situate

The University of Sussex has developed new [workshops](#) with their first year students to explore the challenges that they faced at Sussex and in local colleges early on in the transition to university and how to deal with those challenges.

The Situate workshops will run for the second time in September 2021 for new students, focusing on topics including:

- health and wellbeing
- social pressure
- financial pressure
- academic pressure

The workshops will be delivered by second- and third-year student Mental Health Ambassadors and will provide time, space and peer support in looking after mental health at university, as well as supporting students in finding help and extra support should they need it.