

# Maximising your time at university – audio transcript

## Slide 1 - Introduction

Hello everyone. I hope you're all keeping safe and healthy in these challenging and unusual times. My name is Nicky Rogers, and I work at UWE Bristol, as a careers adviser in the pre-HE careers team. We work with local schools and colleges in the area to support students, like yourself, to explore your options and plan for your next steps after you finish your current course.

Under normal circumstances, we would usually come into your school or college and speak to you personally, face-to-face. However due to the current lockdown we've decided to pre-record some of the workshops we would typically be delivering around this time of year so that you can still get the information and advice you need to help plan ahead.

Before we start, I want to explain that although the session will be less interactive than if I was meeting you in person, there are still some activities you can try to help reinforce the learning. All you need to do is simply pause the recording, do the activity, then restart the recording afterwards.

At the end of the session, if you have any questions for us, please contact us on the UWE Bristol pre-HE team email address that we will give you. We'll be happy to help where we can. Lastly, I wanted to let you know that we are posting a number of other sessions and resources on different topics about planning for your future on the UWE Bristol Schools and Colleges webpages. Please do check these out as well. We hope you find our sessions useful.

In this workshop, we're going to be looking forward to September. By then we hope you'll have a got a place on a course at the university you chose.

## Slide 2 – Your student journey

So first of all, I want to ask the question where do you think you are on your student journey? Getting into uni is great. Passing the exams, even in the strange way this is happening this year, is fantastic BUT it's just the beginning.... So, start thinking about your student journey. You may have come to the end of your journey as a student at school, but when you START at university – it's just that – the START. What do you need to do from day one to make a success of it so that you achieve your goals?

## Slide 3 – If you could go back...

Pause for a moment to reflect on your school or college experience – are there any opportunities you wish you had taken? What have you learnt about planning for the future? Now's your opportunity to make sure you don't miss out.

## Slide 4 – Today's session

In today's session, we're going to look at the wider benefits of university and how they can impact on your future. We'll be looking at the range of opportunities available at university in terms of what you want to achieve, and how these activities can have a real impact on your employability, so that you're all set to make the most of your experience from the get go. And to test your assumptions, we'll be working on some true and false quiz questions as we go along.

## Slide 5 – What does university mean to you?

University means different things to different people. It's important to think what you want to get out of it and this probably has influenced your choices already. Everyone has different reasons for going, but it's important to make the most of your time while you're there.

Take a moment to reflect on why you are going to study the course in the first place – making a note of this will ensure you don't lose sight of your goals.

Slide 6 – You need to know which specific career you want before you go to university

OK, first assumption, you need to know what career you want to go into before you start uni – this is false. Student surveys show us that many students, even students on vocational courses, haven't decided by their final year specifically what they want to do.

You don't need to know what career you want before going to uni – it's a great opportunity to explore what's available when you are there. You might find new and exciting ideas to emerge as you study new topics (often things you've never even heard of or considered). Any degree will give you the skills that employers are looking for. So don't worry too much if you're unsure of your career destination.

Slide 7 – What's the evidence?

Lots of employers with graduate roles don't mind what subject you studied, but are looking for the underpinning skills you have gained and also that you have proved you can study (and succeed) at this academic level.

Evidence from destinations of graduate surveys show us that the subject studied is less important than aptitudes and skills – can you guess which degree these graduates studied? The answer is History. This shows that having a degree opens up wide range of [not always obvious] career options to you.

Slide 8 – I need to think about careers from the first year at university

Now consider if you need to start thinking about your career from the first year. The answer is true. Why do you think this is?

Slide 9 – Why I need to think about my career before my final year

Last year, the country's top employers received 10% more graduate job applications, compared with the same period in the previous recruitment round and 40% said the quality of application had improved.

Many of those job applications came early in the recruitment process (i.e. September – Christmas). Some companies advertise jobs for graduates before you return to uni for your final year – so it's good to start considering options and exploring as early as you can. This gives you an indication of how competitive the graduate jobs market can be and with unemployment predicted to rise dramatically in the wake of COVID-19, graduate recruitment is likely to also be affected.

According to a CBI Education and Skills survey, 50% of employers took experience on work placements into consideration when recruiting graduates. Work experience schemes have become an integral part of recruiting new graduates. Students are selected through a very similar recruitment process to that used to recruit graduates (so if nothing else, it is good practice for you to apply). This means that once a placement has been successfully completed, recruiters are able to offer students a graduate

position, often a full year before they are due to graduate, taking a lot of pressure out of your final year. Many recruiters also believe that hiring candidates who have proven their abilities during a placement to be a more reliable way of employing graduates. Work experience also helps you build your industry contacts and figure out occupational areas of interest too. For some professions such as law or teaching – you won't get a training place without having done some work experience.

Don't worry about it from day one – just keep it in the back of your mind so when you see an opportunity to explore career options or gain some experience, hopefully you'll remember this advice and take up that opportunity.

Slide 10 – Employers don't have opportunities for first year students to gain experience

Next question – this is false. Can you think of any examples?

Slide 11 – Employer opportunities for first year students

Substantial numbers of employers also now have work experience places for first year undergraduates – a quarter of organisations offer paid internships and over a third of employers run introductory courses, open days and other taster experiences for first year students.

Internships have traditionally been for second year students, but in recent years an increasing number of companies have introduced internships and 'insight days' for first years. These tend to be for one to five days, usually around Easter time, to give first year undergraduate students an insight into the company and the work it does. It is a great way to see whether a firm or industry is a good fit for you. See the 'Rate my placement' website for more insight opportunities.

If you're applying for a sandwich placement (a year in industry) that will take place between second and third year. Some of the bigger companies advertise from the August/September before your second year starts (almost a full year ahead), so these can be a great way to get an insight into a company, explore whether it's something you might like, and get tips on applications.

But also: your university will have a careers fair and employers on campus all the time – UWE Bristol holds a large event in October and we host employer events throughout the year – the same with all other unis. They're willing to speak to ALL students, so again, if you're still not quite sure what you'd like to do, this is a great opportunity to explore what's out there.

Take part in Employability Awards. Many universities offer students the chance to register their skills and build up a portfolio of activities that count towards an employability award which develop and highlight the skills employers want. So, if you lack significant work experience, this could be an alternative way to show a potential employer that you've developed the relevant skills for a role.

Slide 12 – Unemployment rates are lower for graduates than non-graduates

So this is true. Data shows that 95% of graduates are in further work/study and that the graduate unemployment rate consistently lower than for non-graduates.

Slide 13 – Case study

But there are differences in the jobs people get after graduating. Take a look at the case study. Can you think of five factors that account for the differences in job outcomes?

#### Slide 14 – Case study factors

One might be work experience – and the quantity and variety of it. Maybe they took a year in industry or sandwich year and have developed their links and reputation with the company already. Perhaps they attended some insight events.

Maybe they developed and were able to demonstrate relevant skills (e.g. knowledge of range of programming languages, ability to be organised, an eye for detail etc.). They may have done this through completing an employability award, participating in a range of extracurricular activities (such as sports, clubs/societies – especially if they can demonstrate how it helped to develop skills relevant to the role), paid or voluntary work.

They may have done a better quality job application – i.e. specifically tailored for the role of interest and marketed themselves more effectively. Or the difference may have been affected by a higher degree classification, or through attendance at an institution with better reputation, or where the employer has links to specific course (although research shows university standing is not a key factor that frequently).

#### Slide 15 – Employers want to know about extra-curricular activities you have been involved in at uni

Do employers want to know about your extra-curricular activities? Yes, absolutely.

#### Slide 16 – What employers want

Academic qualifications will only demonstrate some of these skills and qualities – the rest comes from activities outside the lecture hall. Research shows that businesses believe extra-curricular activities make job-seeking graduates stand out from the crowd. You can check out more advice on employability on websites such as [Prospects.ac.uk](http://Prospects.ac.uk) – there are links in the handout you can download at the end of the session.

#### Slide 17 – What skills and qualities do Aldi look for in graduates?

Here's an example of a graduate position. We've picked Aldi as it is well known for having a generous graduate recruitment package: take some time to read through the job advert – can you identify the key skills required?

Think about where you would get the evidence to show you have these skills. How could you maximise your time at university to do more than just get your degree? It's competitive out there – so you need to consider what you can do to get ahead of the competition when job hunting.

#### Slide 18 – University will give me lots of opportunities to develop my skills

University will give me lots of opportunities to develop my skills: this is true, definitely. The next slide has some examples.

#### Slide 19 – Ideas to develop your skill set

To make the most of student life, be sure to step outside your comfort zone, try new things and meet new people. Be bold and don't get too comfortable. You get out what you put in after all – remember the start of the session where you looked back at your earlier experiences?

So consider the advantages of these activities: voluntary work reflects really positively on you as an individual. It shows you are willing to give of yourself without asking for financial reward. Many HE providers now have awards or programmes for employability and career management (for example the UWE Bristol Futures Award).

Why not consider a study abroad or student exchange programme? Most institutions offer students the opportunity to study overseas for part of their course. Opportunities come in all shapes and sizes, from short study tours as part of a subject to a full semester or year completed abroad. Overseas study gives you the opportunity to travel, experience another culture and make new friends from all around the world. If you choose to study in a non-English-speaking country, you can also expand your language skills. It also develops key skills such as adaptability, flexibility and interpersonal skills – check the availability of opportunities for your course.

#### Slide 20 – Get involved in clubs and societies

University is a really exciting time, and there's so much on offer to get involved in. Yes, you'll be working hard over the next few months to get the grades you need, but you have all of this and much more waiting for you at the end.

Here are just some examples of societies at UWE Bristol – whether you're into gaming, photography, good food, yoga, American football, skydiving there's a club for you and loads more. It really all is there for you, and if you have an interest that's not catered for, you can start your own society.

#### Slide 21 – Spot the fake society

Which society is fake? Well, when we last checked, you could enjoy the Pizza society at London School of Economics, Underwater Hockey at Lancaster, Quidditch at UWE Bristol, Nintendo at Coventry, Lego at Nottingham, Disney and Pixar at Hull and Unicycle at Plymouth. The Fresh Bed Linen Society false – but if you wanted to, you can start your own.

Remember, everybody on your course will have studied roughly similar things – so consider what will really make you stand out to an employer.

#### Slide 22 – Keys to success

We've covered most of these, just a quick word about commercial awareness – this means a candidate's general knowledge of business, their business experiences (or work experience) and, specifically, their understanding of the industry which they are applying to join.

Your personal brand – websites like LinkedIn can be great way of networking, making contacts, and even getting recruited. It's also worth mentioning the need to have a 'clean' social media presence on other platforms as employers will check before hiring. Most unis will run sessions on developing your personal brand or professional online presence to support job hunting and networking.

#### Slide 23 – What are the benefits?

It's not all about employability and boosting your CV, consider the benefits to you of getting involved. What are your personal goals? Use this chart to tick the benefits of each activity, then Y, N or M (yes, no, maybe) for whether you could try it – remember to keep an open mind and refer to what you would have advised your younger selves regarding making the most of opportunities.

#### Slide 24 – What are the benefits? (2)

For example: You can maximise the confidence and motivation you gain on a work placement to help you in your final year and, as evidence suggests, get a higher class of degree.

Research has found that volunteering can do everything from helping you to sleep better to boosting your immune system so while you're busy giving back to your community you could also be getting healthier. And 58% (of 700 leading UK employers) say that voluntary work experience can often be more valuable than experience gained in paid employment.

You have at least three years at uni, so be sure to prioritise, plan and enjoy your time. That said, don't overstretch yourself and do what's right for you and set your own pace. Be realistic, and remember you can't do everything in your first year...

#### Slide 25 – See what the university students have to say

So don't just take my word for it, watch the video for top tips for first year students from UWE Bristol graduates.

#### Slide 26 – Tips for first year students

Here is some more advice from first year students. You can use the virtual open days, and online 'talk-to-students' facilities to ask them what advice they'd give to new students to make the most of their time at uni.

#### Slide 27 – More questions about uni?

There is more useful info on the Future Quest, Careerpilot, What Uni, and UCAS websites, as well as other links in the downloadable handout from this session.

#### Slide 28 – Further information

Make sure you use a range of resources to help you find out as much as you can before you make your final choices and plans.

#### Slide 29 – Final thoughts

So here are some final tips to make the most of your time in higher education, from the start:

Choose your firm and insurance places wisely – if unis invite you to (most likely virtual) applicant days when they make you an offer, be sure to attend – ask questions about what the uni offers to support you with graduate employment e.g. placements, internships, careers events etc.

Start thinking about careers from year 1. Careers events happen before Christmas, many employers offer insight opportunities and summer internships – these are advertised early. Use the Careers Service too – they're there to help you, especially when you aren't sure what you'd like to do next.

Develop your skills – remember it's not enough to say you have the skills, you need to be able to show them - give examples of where you developed them and demonstrate those skills.

Get involved – some of the opportunities to develop skills are great fun, it's not all work. This could be

the difference between you and another person getting that summer internship or placement opportunity later on. Getting a job might be about the fine margins and extra little things you've done.

Be flexible: if you don't have a career in mind, try out a few things and see what you like. If you've got a career in mind, you might change your mind so continue exploring and don't be afraid to look at other things, just in case. Some of you may have applied for vocational courses leading you down a specific career pathway but again, it may not be fixed. Take opportunities that pop up, you never know how useful they might be – even if you learn you don't like something, that's just as valuable - all learning is helpful.

Be sure to ask for help and advice along the way. If you're not sure you've made the right decision about your choice – this can be resolved, so ask your school to help you. At uni, there is plenty of support available from careers advisers, tutors, study advisers and other services.

Slide 30 – Any questions?

If you have any questions about the topics I've covered today, please email us at the address on the slide – [prehecareersadviser@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:prehecareersadviser@uwe.ac.uk) We'll help as much as we can. It's really important to point out though that you must email us from your school or college email account, rather than a personal account, otherwise we won't be able to reply due to data protection. We look forward to hearing from you.

And finally, we would really appreciate if it you could give us some feedback on this session by completing a very short, anonymous online survey which will appear in the next slide. This will help us to improve our service.

Many thanks for listening and good luck in the future.