

# Maximising your time at university

Audio transcript

## Slide 1: Introduction

Welcome to this session looking forward to when you'll be starting at university. This is one of a variety of resources on the UWE Bristol website on different topics about planning for your future and Higher Education, which you can check out as well.

## Slide 2: Widening Access team

My name is Nicky Rogers, and I work at UWE Bristol as a Pre-HE careers adviser in the widening access team. We work with local schools and colleges in the area to support students to explore all the options and plan for the future.

## Slide 3: Today's session

You may be coming to the end of your journey as a student at school or college, 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?

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 4: 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 5: Freshers

Freshers' week is the traditional induction to student life for first years. The freshers or induction activities in the first weeks are a key opportunity to get a handle on student life: everyone is really friendly and you bond with others going through the same experience.

## Slide 6: Get involved

Make the most of what's on offer: you get out what you put in.

University is really exciting, and there's so much to get involved in. You'll have worked hard to get the grades you need, but you have all of this and much more to look forward to!

These are just some examples of societies at UWE – there's also Gaming, photography, good food, yoga, American football, skydiving – and loads more. And if you have an interest that's not catered for, you can start your own society.

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

## Slide 7: Opportunities

Freshers' aside, there are a whole range of opportunities open to you in HE beyond your course of study. We're going to look at how these might benefit you beyond your personal wellbeing and development to enhance your employability and tackle some common misconceptions around careers.

## Slide 8: You don't need to decide on a career before you go

You don't need to know what career you want to go into before you get to uni – it's a great opportunity to explore what's available when you are there. quite plausible that new and exciting ideas will emerge as you study new topics and modules. Therefore, don't overly worry about your final career destination at the outset. What's your guess for the question on the screen? The answer is Geography.

Any degree will give you the skills that employers are looking for. Lots of employers with graduate roles who don't mind what subject you studied – but are looking for the underpinning skills you have gained. They want you also to have proved you can study (and succeed) at this academic level

## Slide 9: Why you should think about your career before your final year

According to a survey of graduate employers, they 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. The Covid effect this year meant that graduate job applications increased by 41%, so competition is intense.

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.

For work experience placements, 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. 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 11: Employers 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.

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.

Look out for employability awards. Many universities offer students the chance to register their skills and build up a portfolio of activities 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: 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 13: 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 14: Employers want to know about extra-curricular activities you have been involved in at uni

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 15: 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 careers.

You could 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 16: 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 17: 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 identify the benefits to you of each activity, and keep an open mind to make the most of any opportunities.

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 18: Further information

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

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 19: Blackbullion money advice site

Preparing for university financially is also key to maximising your time – check out this website which has some really great resources and information about budgeting and student finance.

## Slide 20: 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 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 one. 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.

Many thanks for listening and good luck in the future.