

'Why go to university?' session audio transcript

Video introduction

Hello everyone. I hope you're all keeping safe and healthy in these challenging and unusual times.

My name is Jane Catchpole, 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 you can still get the information and advice you need to help you 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 we have a UWE Bristol pre-HE team email address that we will give you to contact us on. We're always happy to help where we can.

Lastly, we will be posting a number of sessions and resources like this on different topics on planning for your future and applying to university, so do check them out as well. We really hope you find our sessions useful.

Slide 1 - Intro slide

Why go to university? You may be considering this right now. This session looks at how going to university increases your employability, as well as considering the main reasons why people choose to go to university. This session will get you to examine the motivations behind your choices. This is definitely worth considering before you make any major decisions.

Slide 2 - What does university mean to you?

University can be mean many different things to different people. It's important to think what you would want to get out of it, as this will influence your choices.

You'll see on the screen some common factors that often influence people when making choices. Which ones really stand out as key factors to you? We are all individuals so it's likely that what feels important to you may be different from what motivates your friends and family.

Take some time to look at the factors; Social life; new experiences; staying local; achieving your ambitions:- really pushing yourself academically; moving away; getting the golden ticket to a great job. Maybe you have a particular career in mind and you know you'll need a degree; Learning from experts:- Your tutors will be at the cutting edge of their subject area; Or is it money that concerns you? Getting into debt, managing money or thinking about the increased earnings you could achieve as a graduate. Think about which of these factors or combinations really matter to you as this will have an impact on your decisions in the future.

Slide 3 - HE is one of your post 18 options

It's key to point out that university is *one* of your options after sixth form or college. When making your choice, it's important that you have researched all your options, which also include a gap year, apprenticeship or employment, so you can feel confident that you've picked the best choice for yourself. We are not here to promote university and say it's the best thing for everyone. We want to give you the facts, so you can make an informed decision about your next steps.

You can go to university at any age - the oldest current student that I'm aware of is 94. So whether you're thinking about this option now or in the future, it's worth taking some time to understand the principles and benefits to help you decide.

Slide 4 - Aims of the session

Over the next 30 minutes or so we will present all the up-to-date information you need to help you decide. We will look at the many benefits of studying at higher education level, which can vary from person to person. Also, I'll signpost you to useful websites to get you on track to find all the information you need about higher education so you can consider what's right for you.

Slide 5 - Features of studying for a uni degree

You're currently used to studying for A-Levels or BTECs. So how will university be different to this? What will it be like? What do you actually do when you are studying for degree? You might know about the variety in courses at university, but how do you study for one?

Doing a subject that you will like is important as your learning will be in depth, going into detail.

You'll be developing your analytical and critical thinking skills. Nothing will be taken at face value. You will engage with current affairs in your subject area and beyond, and continue to form your own opinions, ideas and solutions. You will be encouraged to challenge, to think deeply. You'll develop all the skills that employers really value.

You'll research topics by looking at subjects, literature, what academics and reports say on your topic will be really key. Maybe the academics at your university will be involved in pioneering/world-class research.

Professional training may be relevant if you are on a vocational degree, for example nursing, medicine or teaching. You'll need to be certain that you want to enter that particular area of work. Work experience can help you test this out, and of course it may be an entry requirement for the course.

Many courses are accredited too by the relevant professional body linked to their subject, as is the case in HR, engineering and psychology, which allows you to practise in that field.

In other cases degrees maybe semi vocational. Learning about an industry, such as forensic science, childhood studies, marketing or animal care, can help you to specialise in an area as well as keeping options open about a range of occupations. It's worth finding out whether these subjects lead to the careers you're interested in.

Slide 6 - Reasons to go to university - International survey

An international student survey carried out by education consultants, Hobsons, questioned over 60,000 students from 65 universities around the world. The students were asked a variety of questions about higher education, including which factors were most likely to influence their choice of university and why they chose to go to university in the first place. The top six reasons are highlighted here:

- Passion for the subject
- To continue my learning and development
- Because I want to pursue a particular career
- To be intellectually challenged and stimulated
- To learn essential life skills
- To help me get or find a better job.

These reasons might resonate with the thoughts you had the start of the session and are all strong reasons to take this route. It's unlikely that people choose to go to university because their friends are going, but it is still worth thinking through your reasons and motivations.

It is also worth noting that the bottom two reasons show that some questionable motivations exist for going to university.

- Because it was expected of me to go to university
- Because everyone I know goes or went.

So make sure you're aware of your own motivations and why. Let's look at the two main reasons often given: For the experience and because of subject choice. Trying to work out what's really important to you will help you consider the right courses, universities, locations and so on. It is important to be self-reflective here, to work out what you truly want and what is important to you.

Slide 7 - Why go to university?

People often say 'I'm going for the experience' but this is a general concept. What does it specifically mean to you? What specific experience do you want to get? Is it one or a mixture of the following factors?

- Move to a new area
- Meet new people
- Gain independence
- Go on placements and get part-time work
- Get involved in clubs and societies

Or is it something different?

Slide 8 - Why go to university

There is much to consider when think about subject choice, as there are over 50,000 courses listed on UCAS. How will you choose just five?

There's more to this decision than 'I am taking maths because I like it'. It's important to ask why. Why else do you want to do this subject? What do I love about this subject? Ask yourself these actual questions. There are five points to also consider:

- Is it linked to an area of work?
- Is it requirement of a job?
- Is it in area where there's a skills shortage? So your skills may be in great demand in the future.

A really important question though, is are you fascinated and curious about this subject? This is key as you will really need to be motivated to take the time needed for independent learning, and dive deeper for information required for your assignments. You really need to be curious to continue asking yourself the question why over a period of two to three years of your course. So that you come away with the grade that you feel matches what you can achieve.

Slide 9 - Common concerns - Employment prospects

One of the main concerns about going to university is the employment prospects at the end. We often hear in the headlines that graduate unemployment is high, but how high is it really? I'll run through two questions about this.

Question one: What percentage of graduates are unemployed six months after graduating?

Question two: What percentage needed their degree to get their first job? Pause the recording to take a moment to think about these questions and then press play when you're ready to see the answers.

Question one - What percentage of graduates are unemployed six months after graduating? 5.1%. This is the lowest rate of graduate unemployment in 39 years.

Question two - What percentage needed their degree to get their first job? 73.9% of graduates are employed in professional or graduate level roles six months after they graduate. The majority of the remainder are in further study for example studying Master's degrees or professional qualifications such as teaching.

These answers shows the low unemployment rates among new graduates, and that most use their degree to enter work.

Slide 10 - Common concerns - Employment prospects 2

Take a moment to compare the levels of graduates in work versus non-graduates in work. What do you think the rates of employment are for each group? Pause the recording to take a moment to mull this over and then press play when you are ready to see the answers.

87.7% of graduates are employed

71.6% of non-graduates are employed

We can see that the rate of employment for graduates is 16% greater than non-graduates. So we can say there are better lifetime employment prospects as a graduate than a non-graduate.

Slide 11 - What do graduates do? 1

As we've seen, many graduates need their degree to get their first job. It's definitely possible for graduates who come from the same degree to go into different jobs. However, on your screen you'll see a number of graduate destinations where the graduates went into careers related to their degree.

These examples show higher skilled roles, and you can see a clear progression where the graduate has been able to apply skills and knowledge from their studies to the workplace.

Slide 12- What do graduates do? 2

Sometimes career destinations don't seem to relate to the degree studied. Press pause to take a few moments to match the graduate to the destination or jobs they went into. You can reveal the answers when you're ready by pressing play.

Politics - Editor, researcher and writer

Drama - Further Education teacher

Accounting and Finance - Management consultant

Law - Social media manager

Geography - Environmental analyst

Mechanical Engineering - Building restoration

The answers highlight the variety of roles you can secure from studying a degree. It also shows you do not need to have a clear career goal in mind when you start university. Graduates are able to apply key employability skills such as critical and analytical thinking in a range of different settings.

Slide 13 - Graduates from any subject wanted

There are many careers, employers and jobs at a professional or degree level that employ graduates from any subject area. Household names such as the NHS, Sky, Deloitte and Amazon that take graduates from any discipline into professional and managerial level jobs in a range of different sectors. They offer graduate training schemes where they train you over a few years and sometimes offer professional qualifications.

Many also offer placements for university students in the summer or during a placement year. It's worth finding out about these when you're at university, as it offers fantastic experience that will really help your future employability. Some also offer summer schools for A-Level and BTEC students too.

Slide 14 - Graduates from any subject wanted - Civil Service example

I have an example to show you. The civil service offers roles that require degree in any subject in many different sectors including commercial, finance, project delivery, the diplomatic service, communication,

human resources and also the two that you can see on the screen now. Houses of Parliament and digital data and technology.

In four years of training you can understand how they are able to upskill a graduate and build on their firm foundations. It's interesting to note the range of entry requirements, from 2:2 for the Houses of Parliament role to 2:1 for the digital data and technology role. Also both have a healthy starting salary for a recent graduate.

Over the past five years, we have started to see some major shifts in how employers use grades when recruiting. We have seen a reduction of vacancies requiring a 2:1 and minimum UCAS tariff scores. Many employers are choosing to use online psychometric testing as part of their recruitment process to identify the right candidate for their organisation and role, using personality and ability tests to do this.

Slide 15 - Common concerns - isn't university expensive?

Another common concern of going to university is the cost. We can't deny that university is expensive, with tuition fees of £9,250 per year and a living cost loan or maintenance loan of up to £9,000 a year to cover rent, food, phone, travel, books, course equipment and more.

Remember that you don't start repaying loans until you earn over £26,525 per year. So, if we consider average graduates starting wages are between £21,000 and £25,000 per year we can see that many graduates don't start paying back their loan for some time.

If you were earning a salary of £27,000 a year you would be paying back 9% of your income over the threshold, which would equate to £3.60 a month, which is a less than a monthly Netflix or Spotify subscription.

It's estimated that approximately 80% of students won't pay the loan back in full and we also need to remember it's written off after 30 years. And remember if you have a break from work to have a family or you're unwell and can't work, or maybe there's a situation such as the one we're in now and you're made redundant your income drops, you stop making the repayments.

If, for example, at some point in the future you want to get a mortgage and you are credit checked, your student loan won't show, so it should have no impact on your lifestyle.

So yes, the amount of debt can be great but we need to remember the repayment method is flexible and very achievable.

With maximum borrowing of £9,000 a year for living costs some students still have a short fall. Sometimes parents can contribute but we need to remember there are sources of funds you can access. Scholarships are non-repayable and often given by the university or another organisation. They are often awarded for excellence, which could be academic, sporting or musical or other factors such as parents' jobs, or where you live. For example, the University of Roehampton has an E-sports scholarship which gives £1,500 per year to the students selected.

Bursaries are also non repayable and given by universities. It can vary a lot from financial support with fees or accommodation to cash gifts. Some are large sums such as £5000 or much lower for example £250 per year. The criteria they used to select students also varies so it's important find out more when you're looking into universities.

Placements in between years two and three often pay a wage which enables students to save and use the money in their final year reducing the need to work. Currently 8 out of 10 students have a part-time job, which could be in term time or the holiday time or both.

Slide 16 - The benefits of university: A student's perspective

Let's consider the benefits of university from a student's perspective. Let's meet Jacob. He is currently studying art, drama and media studies. He likes illustration, making short films and photography. He works part time as a waiter in a hotel and he is currently considering two courses for his next step. One in animation and one in digital media.

Help Jacob to decide which might be right for him. Read the information on the next two slides about the two different courses and think of three reasons why Jacob might decide to study one of these university courses.

Slide 17 - Animation

Option 1 – BA (Hons) in Animation at the University of Bedfordshire.

- Engage in debates on art, design and literature.
- Complete individual and group projects, and have the opportunity to collaborate with students from Photography Video Art, Illustration and other courses.
- Learn how animation's origins are rooted in the disciplines of art and design.
- Explore the artistic, critical and cultural contexts associated with contemporary animation.
- Use the very latest technology – Macs, light boxes, high-tech cameras and digital studios – to create your work.

Slide 18 - Media Studies

Option 2 - BA (Hons) in Digital Media at UWE Bristol.

- Learn the fundamentals of programming, web technologies and design and visualisation techniques.
- Explore multi-platform deployment, physical computing, testing and project management.
- Specialise in design and coding, web development, media production, games development and audio technology.
- Study the art and science of communication and develop an understanding of the ethical, commercial and legal environment the industry operates in.
- Get involved with student-run projects with guidance from professional software developers.

Slide 19 - The benefits of university: A student's perspective - Reflect on Jacob's choice

Both courses would build on Jacob's foundation in art and media. The media studies course has a stronger focus on the development of technical computing skills required in the industry. Jacob would also explore how industry operates within its commercial constraints. The animation course would enable Jacob to work with students from photography, video art and illustration, which may enable him to build on his interests. The programme offers Jacob the opportunity to consider issues in contemporary animation and use the latest technology to develop his skills.

Jacob needs to delve into the module descriptions to get a fuller understanding of what would be expected of him and what skills he could develop. Booking onto a virtual open day would help he would have the opportunity to speak to tutors and current students and ask questions and maybe take part in a virtual tour to see the facilities.

Jacob could do either course. He has the qualifications. Next steps would be for him to do some further research.

Slide 20 - The benefits of university: An employer's perspective

Aardman Animation recently recruited into a vacancy. Read the vacancy advert on your screen now and then consider why Aardman might benefit from recruiting a graduate.

Aardman Animation

Can you demonstrate a real passion and enthusiasm for the industry?

Have you got experience in watching television, seeing films, going to events such as festivals and exhibitions?

Have you made personal contacts within the industry, and kept up to date with the relevant trade and technical press?

Can you evidence "oodles of creativity and patience"?

A course at art school or film school is immensely helpful and desirable.

<https://www.aardman.com/faq/#jobs>



Slide 21 - The benefits of university: An employer's perspective

Aardman don't specify a particular degree. In fact they don't stipulate that it is an essential requirement. So what would be the benefits for hiring a graduate for this employer?

At the moment I could happily say I have lots of experience watching TV. But I can't evidence oodles of creativity. However if I had done a creative degree I would have had the chance to develop a wide ranging portfolio and explore my creative voice over the period of my studies.

If I chose my course well I could have had industrial experience on placements or met visiting speakers from industry, so developed my personal contacts in industry. Through studying I would have used relevant trade and technical press to support my assignments. If I'd been solely working I may have been working to a brief and not developed my own style and explored my own creativity in full.

Let's delve deeper into this and look at Aardman's FAQ's. They state that although it's not essential to have completed a course at art school or film school it's immensely helpful and desirable to employers as

often people find their individual style during those years. Also we need to bear in mind that higher education can prepare you well for jobs in the future too. At university you will have been taught the current thinking and used new technologies to help future proof you.

Slide 22 - Most important factors when recruiting graduates (CBI)

Remember, employers who take on graduates are keen to discover your skills. Perhaps surprisingly the university results or degree is less important than the skills and attitudes that a person has. This survey of employers confirms this.

University study can help you to develop the skills and attitudes employers' value, especially if you go on placement or take part in extracurricular activities. You'll develop your team work skills, learn how to present ideas, carry out research, manage your time, as well as skills in prioritising, critical thinking, analytical thinking, report writing, using information sources to support decision making, independent work and objective setting and much more.

It's interesting to note that the actual university you attend isn't a very important factor for many employers.

Slide 23 - Should I go to university?

Should I go to university? It's a very personal question that only you can answer.

You can see a list of common views that we hear from students. It is important to understand which are true and based on factual information. Some things matter to some individuals, and for others not so much. For example, "I don't know what I want to do in the future". For some this will be a scary statement that makes them feel they're not ready to make a decision about future study, whereas others feel "I will be learning and growing and finding out more about the world while studying, so I'll be in a better position to decide about the future while I study."

How do you find out more to make the right decision for you?

Slide 24 - Finding all the information you need

There is a digital handout available to download where you launched this presentation with links to some of the websites I'm about to talk you through.

The first point of call is UCAS as it has the most accurate listing of all courses. You can search using entry requirements, location, type of degree (for example honours degree or foundation degree).

If you need an ideas generator you can use the SACU website where you can answer questions about your likes and interests to receive a list of 'good match' courses to explore. The Uni Guide website has an A-Level Explorer where you can enter the subjects you are taking now and it will show you a list of courses that match well with your subject areas.

If you have a particular career in mind you can look at job profiles to help you understand the pathway and qualifications required for that work area. You can use the National Careers Service, Careerpivot and Prospects for this. Prospects has a very interesting page 'what to do with your degree'. It gives examples

of graduate destinations for those who studied the subjects. So if you are interested in a subject but don't know where it can take you, this page will help.

League tables can help you look at things from a different perspective. But remember that each league table uses different factors for their rankings so think about what is important to you. Is it the research an institution has done, or are you more interested in outcomes for students or student satisfaction?

You can find league tables at Discover Uni, What Uni, The Complete University Guide, the Guardian and The Times Higher.

Subject guides are available on UCAS and The Complete University Guide. They give you an idea of what it's like to study a subject, what they are they looking for in a candidate and the typical offers they make.

If you need to find out about finance you can head over to the student finance pages on the .gov website. You'll find a calculator to find out how much you can borrow. Also, you can use the scholarship guide where you can search the database of non-repayable funding. I will show you Money Ready for University website on the next slide.

Opendays.com is where you can search for a big database of virtual and physical open days taking place this summer. They are likely to have webinars you can join and online Q&A sessions.

Slide 25 – Black Bullion – Money advice site

The Money Ready for University website allows you to build on some of the points we've covered today about the benefits of going to university. You can look at how much you would pay back depending on your salary and most importantly you can plan your budget so you can be sure that you can manage financially during your time at university.

Slide 26 - Next steps

So what next?

- Assess the pros and cons of all the many opportunities that are open to you - If you have a career in mind find out if you need a degree.
- Research courses, higher education providers, look at UCAS Apply, get a sense of student life, look into the finance you'll need, what the entry requirements are and the grades you'll need.
- Research some alternatives and make an action plan.

Most importantly start exploring now as you may change your mind and remember research takes time.

Slide 27 - Thank you for watching

Thank you for watching. We really hope you found the information useful.

To help us improve our sessions it would be great to get some feedback. It just takes 2 minutes to complete the short online survey – we'd be grateful if you can. This will appear on the next slide after this presentation finishes.

If you have any questions about the topics I've covered or any other aspects of exploring and applying to university, please email our team at the address on the slide – prehecareersadviser@uwe.ac.uk We will try our best to answer them. 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.

Many thanks and good luck.