

- * academic or social aspirations not being met by the institution
- * lack of self-management skills for independent living and study
- * lack of commitment to the course
- * financial hardship
- * poor academic progress.

Informing sixth formers of these potential pitfalls and pointing out in advance how they may best be avoided can enable students to optimise their chances for a positive higher education experience. Whilst the move from the sixth form to higher education involves considerable change, good preparation can ease the transition. The following sections give some guidelines on avoiding problems.

Meeting academic expectations

It is important for students to be both intellectually suited and committed to the courses they choose. This may seem obvious, but the HEFCE report notes that peer pressure can influence students to opt for higher education in the absence of other plans, or direct their choice of course. Discussing possible options with individual subject teachers is very valuable in avoiding mismatches. It is also helpful for students to have a basic idea of the teaching structure of lectures, seminars and tutorials, and to know how to make the most of each of them. A common problem amongst first year undergraduates arises from miscalculating the length of time required for assignments and not starting work sufficiently early to meet what seems at the time to be a distant deadline. Therefore, the differences between sixth-form and higher education study should be pointed out and the importance of formulating an effective study timetable emphasised.

Studying at school is much easier as time management is controlled by teachers.

(Jon, 3rd-year undergraduate)

You are more spoon-fed at school; you're very much on your own at uni and often don't find out vital info unless you actively go and look for it yourself.

(Ellie, 3rd-year undergraduate)

Meeting social and lifestyle expectations

Higher education applicants need to ensure that the institutions they have selected fulfil any personal and social requirements they may have. Lifestyle choices are important and can determine whether or not the experience is a fulfilling one. Students may wish to consider the following questions:

- * Are you equally at ease in cities and rural locations?
- * Do you think you would find a small university friendly or claustrophobic?
- * Would you prefer to live on a campus or in the wider community?
- * Is the social life/nightlife offered what you want?
- * Is the cost of living affordable? (there are large variations in the cost of accommodation and

leisure activities across the country.)

* Do you want to travel home frequently and if so are the travel links good?

* If you are intending to live at home, are you near enough to the institution to join in socially as well as academically?

Acquiring life skills

Higher education students need to cope with most aspects of independent living at the same time as organising their studies. The key to success is to be sufficiently familiar and confident about lifestyle skills such as cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing, shopping, budgeting and dealing with administrative matters, so as not to let them become stressful and too time-consuming. Considering these requirements in advance and practising if necessary will help.

I think I'm quite well prepared for university – at home I do all my family's laundry anyway so that won't be a problem, and while I'm no Delia Smith, my culinary skills are fairly good.
(Charlotte, sixth-former)

Financial planning

Most students arrive at university or college with very little experience of managing a budget. Loan payments can initially seem large, but students often do not have an accurate estimate of how much it costs to live as an undergraduate. If students have a reasonably accurate idea of their income and potential expenditure before they begin their studies, they can work out how much they can afford to spend each week.

Details of tuition fees and hall fees can be obtained from the institute in question. Information about student loans and student support is available from a number of government websites (www.dfes.gov.uk, www.aimhigher.ac.uk, and www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk).

MP3 learning to manage money

Personal money management skills are essential for sixth formers. Using new technology, an MP3 audio file presents students' strategies for keeping afloat.
www.palgrave.com/skills4study/html/mp3.htm

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