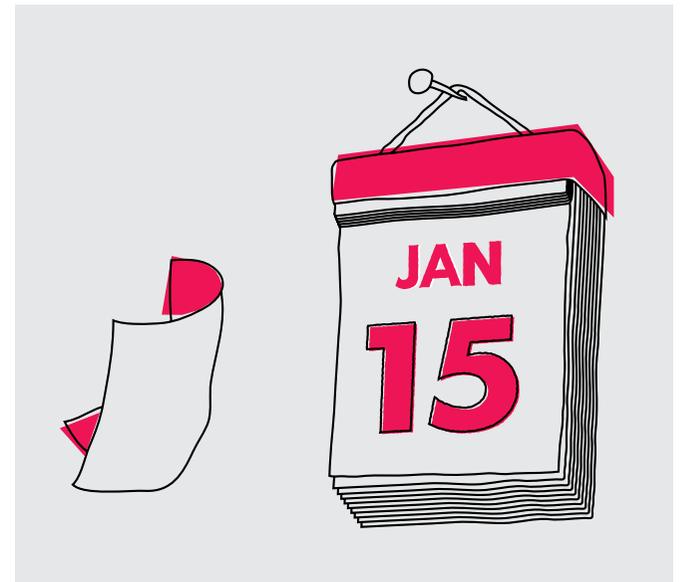
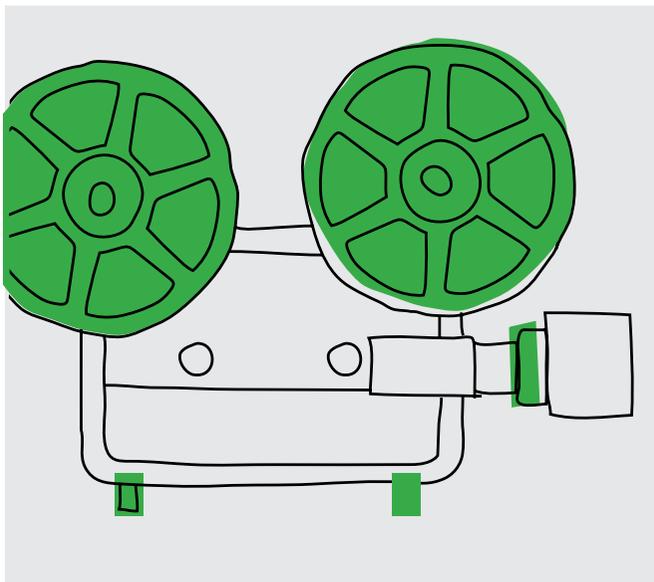
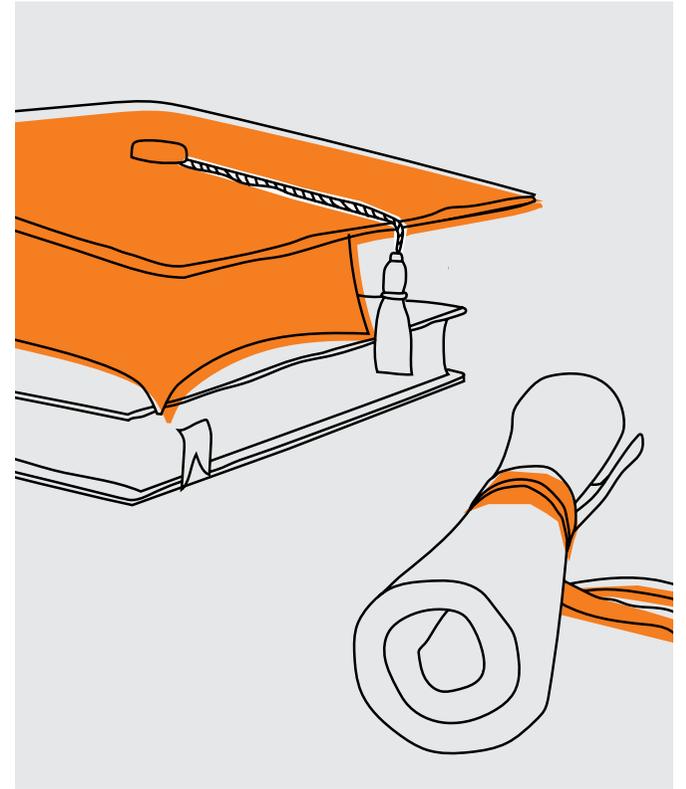
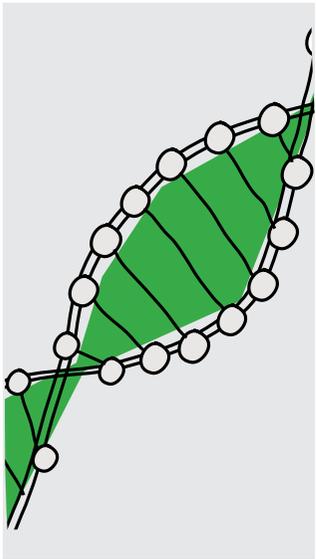


UniBox >>

Thought leadership for teachers giving HE advice

Guiding your Students to University



1

Guiding the way – welcome to UniBox

The higher education landscape is changing. Currently there's almost 50,000 courses offered at over 300 UK institutions. Tuition fees and employability play on every student's mind. The pressure on young people to pick the right degree for their future is sky high – so where do they look for the right advice?

They look to you, their teacher.
That is why UniBox exists.

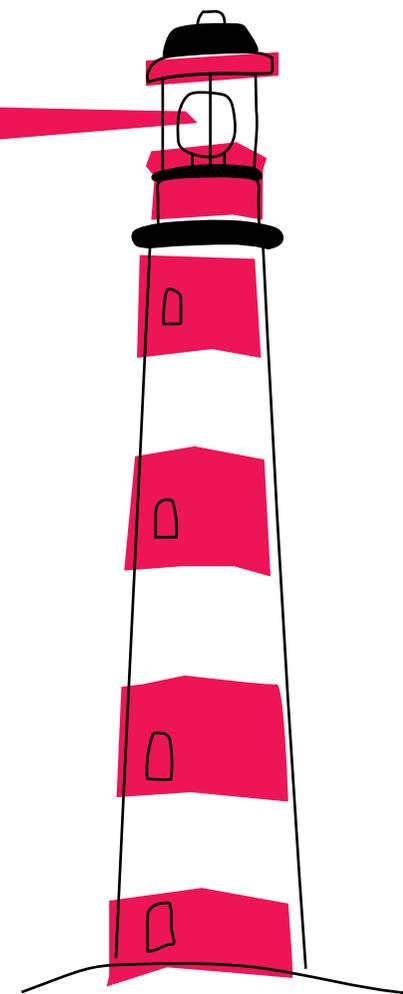
UniBox is a platform for education professionals to research and discuss the best advice to support sixth form students pursuing university study. It's a response to the noticeable drop in the quality and availability of career advice for young people.

Together with fellow UK teachers, you can contribute to shaping thoughtful conversation around higher education and share in teaching resources relevant to both your career and classroom. UniBox is your tool – we encourage you to use it.

Giving good advice to your pupils should be easy, so let's get you prepared for when the questions

roll in: Which university? What subject? How far is that from home? What's university really like? And a few from the parents too: Are they part of the Russell Group? Where do they rank in the league tables?

With UniBox, you're invited to teach your students the most powerful lesson of all: how to own their future.



2

University – the best next step?



Every student is different – it's those unique needs you must draw on when suggesting university as the best next step as that graduate hat doesn't fit everyone. What camp are you in: Greater career prospects? Higher salary? Transferable skills? Confidence in one's abilities? Consider how transparent the picture you're painting is.

It's nice to imagine university as an exciting leap into the unknown, but realistically, there needs to be the promise of a satisfying job at the end of it all. The more impressive a graduate's skill set, the more valuable they are to employers.

According to a 'graduate premium' Telegraph study (2013), men earn 28% more on average than colleagues with a similar

background but no degree. That's a staggering £168k over a working lifetime!

For women? It's an incredible 53% more, or £252k over a working lifetime. With those heavy stats, a degree can clearly connect a student to a more successful career, grow their options and create an education tailored to their experience. Though something's missing...

Confidence. You'll have to engage students who lack the basic self-esteem to even consider themselves as university material. These kids may slip under the radar and into a job, yet what they would benefit from most is your guidance. With your open mind to embrace [Widening Participation](#) at school level, most universities can then commit to reaching out to underrepresented groups. So – how engaged is your school?

3

Making the right choice

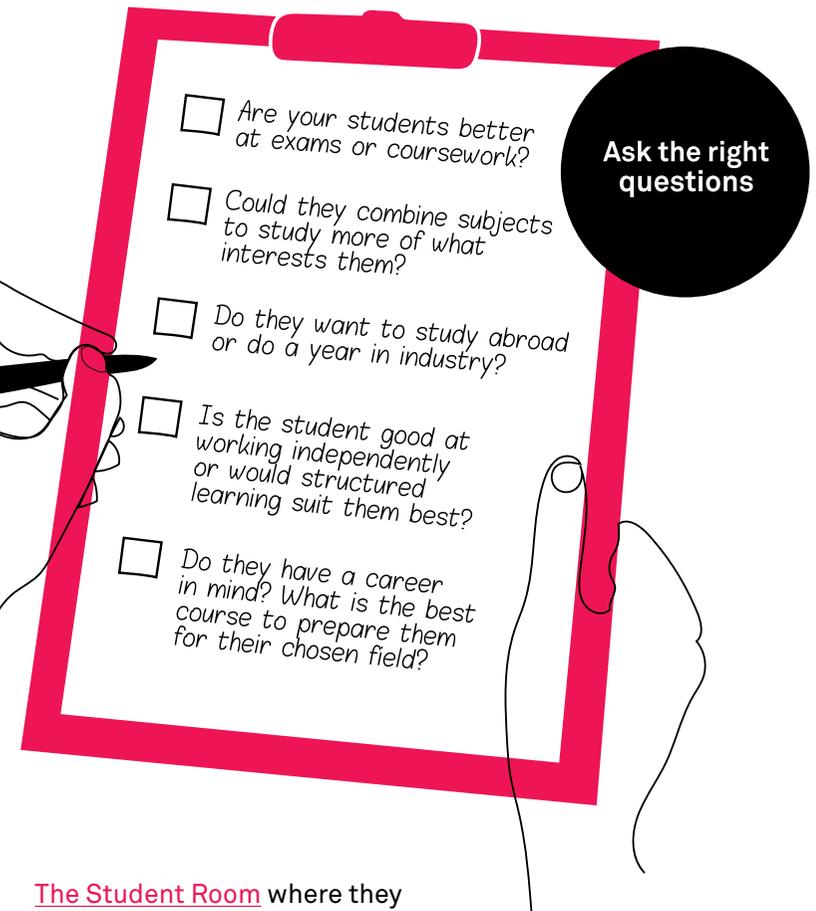
Our best advice? Stick to the facts and ignore the noise. Whether it's Marine Biology or Viking Studies, picking the right course is a simple matter of managing priorities, smart research and drawing up a shortlist.

Some say to-do lists have secret powers. So start with a list of what your student knows they want – Study abroad? Sandwich course? The ability to combine subjects? A specific vocation? Finding a university that offers those very things then becomes the natural next step.

Narrow the list down further by asking if they seek specialist facilities, or whether their course needs to be accredited by a relevant body. Whatever their priorities, the key is [good research](#).

Although obvious, the [UCAS website](#) is the best place to start that research. It's where the most up-to-date information sits, (what a hard copy prospectus may lack) and students can compare course elements, like methods of assessment or favoured teaching styles.

If they have a specific field of interest, investigating the modules a faculty provides is invaluable to their decision. Apart from looking to the league tables, (more on those later) once that shortlist exists, guide your pupil toward

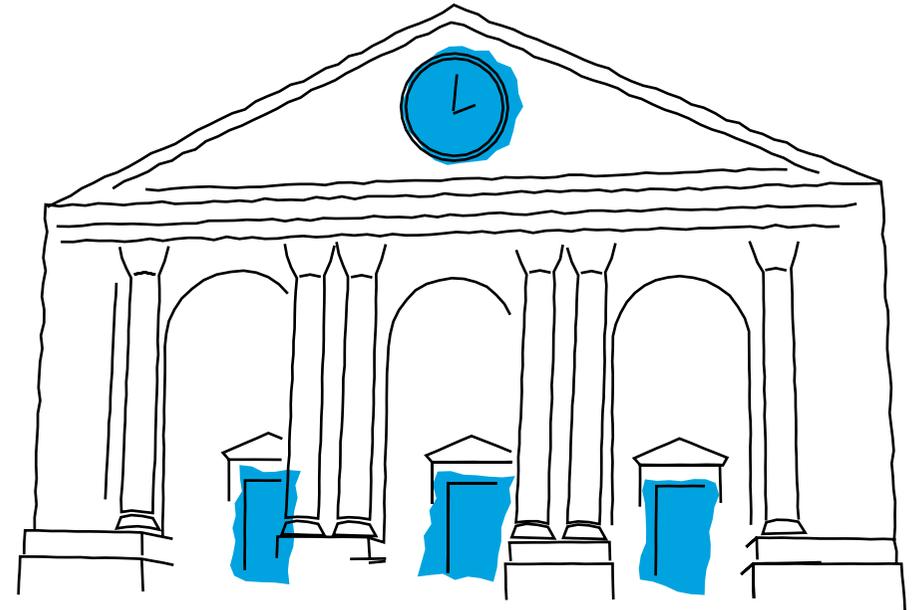


[The Student Room](#) where they can connect with applicants, current students and alumni to ask absolutely anything (transport, campus vibe, hair in the plughole etc.) about the course they are considering.

To make the right choice, a campus visit, in our books, is absolutely essential, (try before you buy!). In one day your students will collect enough information and hot-off-the-press advice to envision their academic future, with a chance still to tailor it how they want.

4

The student's checklist



Finding that perfect degree means finding a university that suits a student's personality and their educational requirements. So in addition to course selection, what can a university offer the student on an individual basis?

So that students can immerse themselves in university life, fitting in and feeling comfortable has as much to do with location as with the course itself. Encourage your pupils to draw up a personal checklist of the top 5 features their ideal university offers. Suddenly a clearer image will emerge of the sort of educational setting they will thrive within.

To tailor a student's university experience beyond simple course and subject selection, joining sports clubs and societies is one of the smartest choices. Making friends, easing into the lifestyle and keeping up their favourite hobbies will all help to build a stable environment for the academic side of their new home away from home.

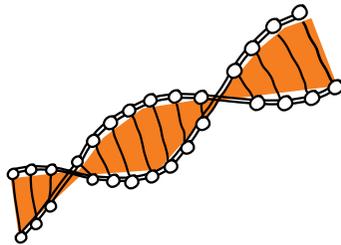
Also on environments – the campus set up plays a large part in shaping a student's next few years. Small city or urban sprawl? Manageable distance or miles away? Space to study, space to think? Answers will vary with institutions, which is why encouraging your students to research more detailed aspects of their choice produces a much more rounded view of their future university.

5

Subjects – a league of their own

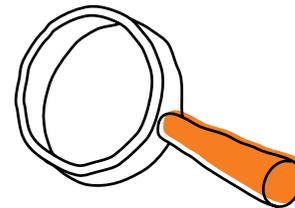
Guardian University League Table 2016 by subject

It's what's inside the degree that counts. A lot of exciting things are happening under the surface of League Tables as universities continually grow in their areas of expertise. Looking at the [Guardian University League Table](#) results by subject rather than institution, we can see that Cambridge are at the forefront of prepping students for the courtroom, Royal Welsh College and Sussex are centre stage for Drama & Dance, while UCL is the top spot to study bodies and bones.



Biosciences

1. Cambridge (1st overall)
2. Oxford
3. Exeter
4. Gloucestershire
5. York



Forensic Science and Archaeology

1. UCL (12th overall)
2. Oxford
3. Cambridge
4. York
5. Liverpool



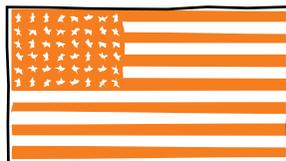
Nursing and Midwifery

1. Glasgow (24th overall)
2. Edinburgh
3. Liverpool
4. Keele
5. Huddersfield



Law

1. Cambridge (1st overall)
2. Oxford
3. Queen Mary
4. Durham
5. London School of Economics



American Studies

1. UEA (20th overall)
2. Swansea
3. Liverpool
4. Winchester
5. Manchester

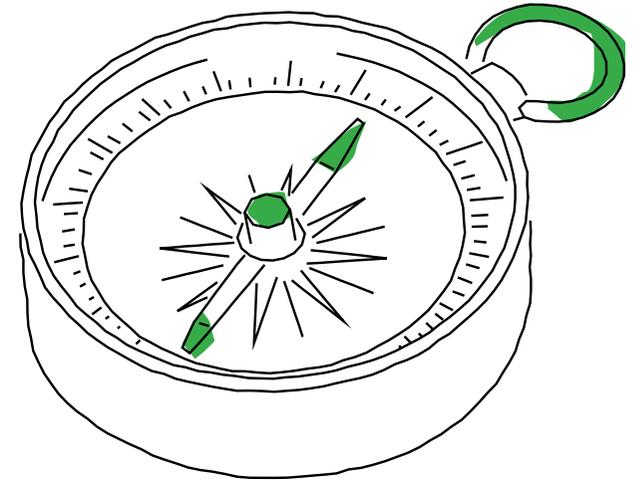


Drama and Dance

1. Royal Welsh College
2. Sussex
3. Surrey
4. Warwick
5. Lancaster

6

Navigating league tables – consensus is key



Your priority is to help students access the best university possible. What does 'the best' mean to you? To create a widespread understanding of what actually constitutes a leading institution, both teachers (and parents) need to let go of some long-held myths.

Universities have been known to employ elite teams of statisticians to work out exactly what each league table illustrates, so students can be forgiven for struggling to decipher these things! The reality is that you just need to know what to look for.

League tables are a good resource for judging quality and avoiding the hype with up-to date information – provided they're used correctly. Do your pupils know that none of the tables available are definitive on their own? They all draw on information gathered by the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) and it depends on how that data is interpreted.

On the main menu of league tables are: the Guardian, The Times and Sunday Times,

and the Complete University Guide, all of which incorporate student satisfaction scores, student to staff ratios, graduate prospects and entry grades.

But a young person's priorities should come above fancy table rankings. If a university appears top of a table that doesn't mean it's right for your student. Equally, if it appears in a less favourable position that doesn't mean it's not right for them either. To know what is right – attend a [higher education convention](#) or Open Day so the university has a chance to back up or better its ranking.

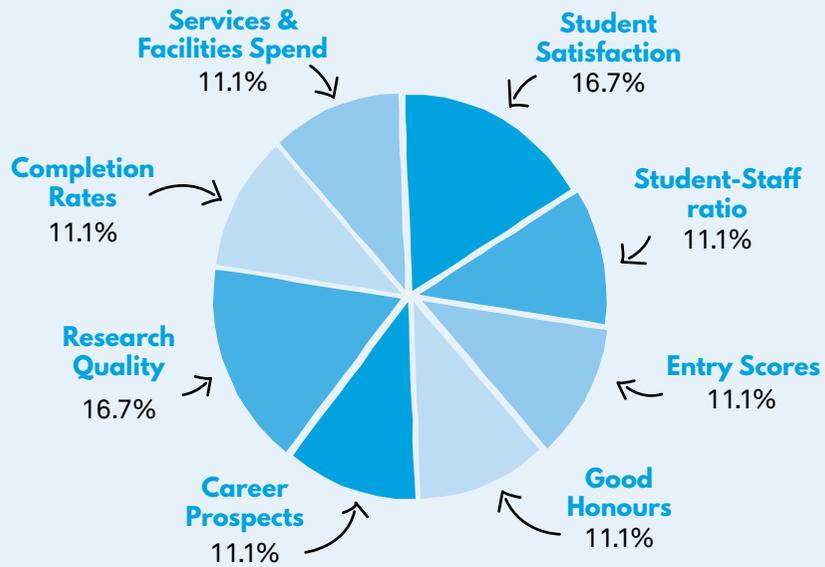
Your students can also draw on their research and analytical skills. Universities that have made a significant jump in the league

tables are worth a look – suggest to students they compare results from consecutive years. Institutions with subject specialisms but no presence in the higher tiers of the tables shouldn't be overlooked either. Venturing beyond the Russell Group cluster is not akin to opting for second place.

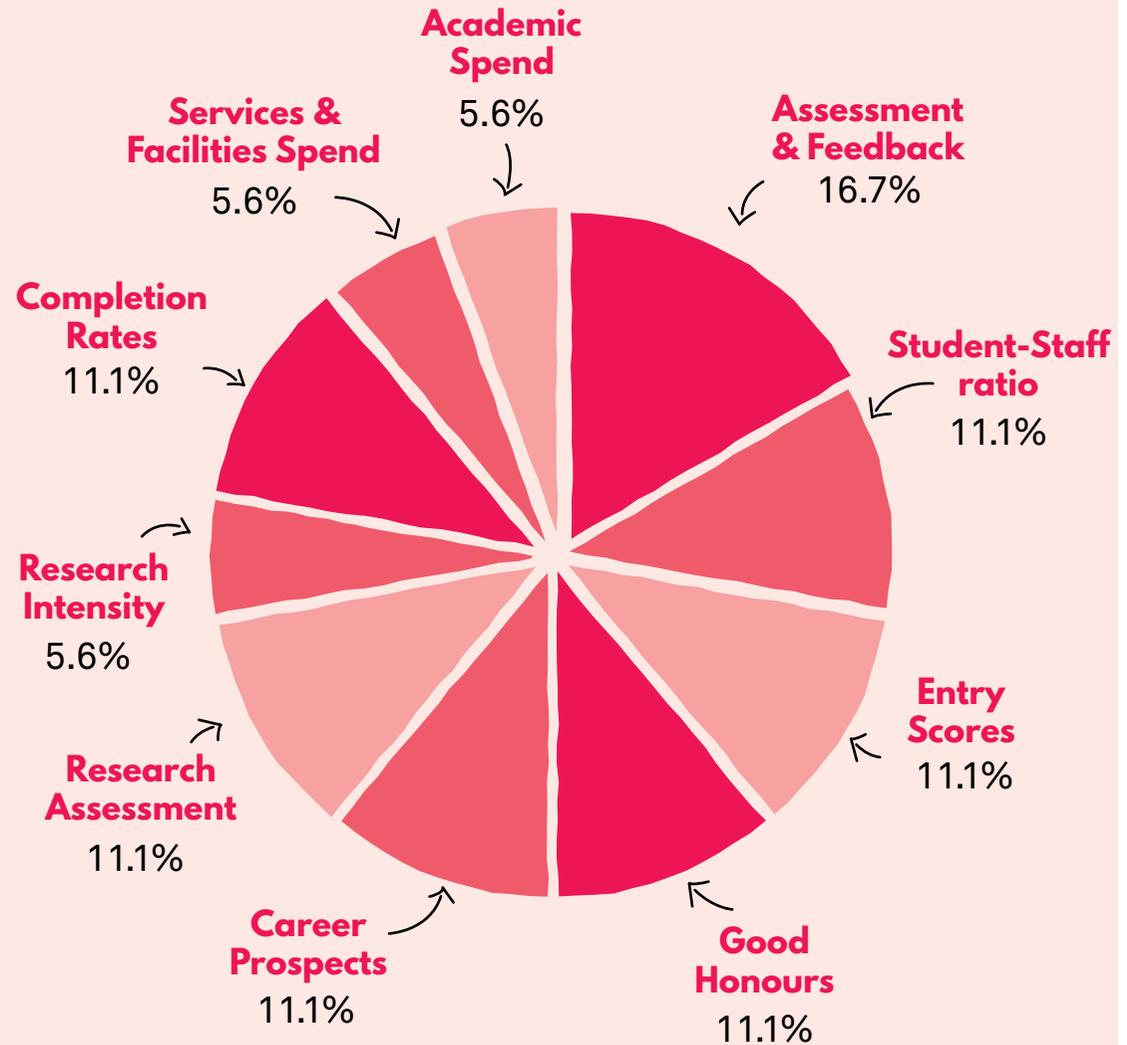
How can you steer students clear of the spin and dig for information useful to their unique situation? An alternative source of advice can be found via the [Unistats website](#), informed by the [National Student Survey](#) (NSS). Its results are from one of the most influential, honest sources available in the UK – almost half a million current undergraduate students.

Navigating the league tables: weightings explained

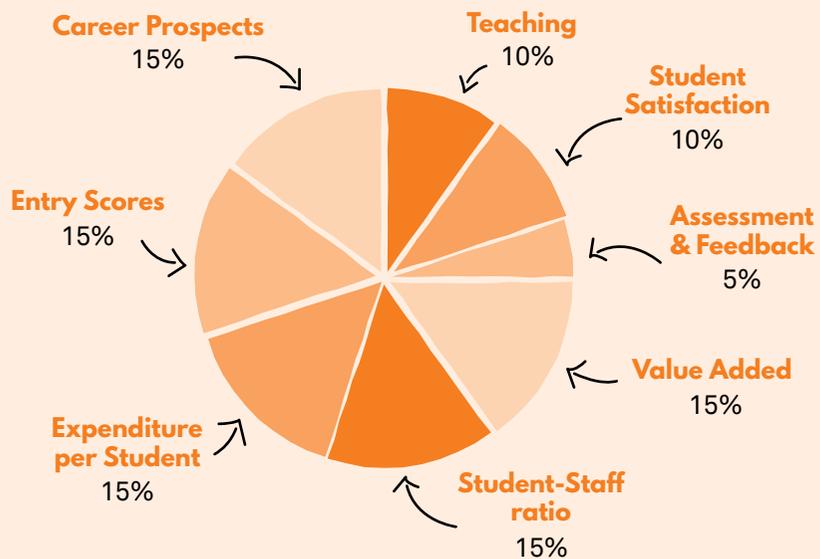
The Times Good University Guide



Complete University Guide



Guardian University Guide



League Table methodologies and weightings have been sourced from the corresponding website of each table; accurate as of July 2015. Figures have been rounded to nearest decimal point.

7

This time – it's personal

Admissions teams see thousands of applications every year. The best personal statements they read are concise and authentic, with a natural excitement for the course. As an educator, how can you help your students stand out in just 4000 characters?

The Body

A personal statement should reflect the student's personality throughout. With an opening paragraph that is succinct, smart and original, their excitement for the subject should practically jump off the page. As the statement unfolds, the writing should show a strong understanding of the course alongside that passion. Link supportive evidence. Reference specific skills. Confidently describe good qualities that will complement the university community.

Their individuality should underpin the application – help them avoid sounding forced or robotic. Strike a creative balance, for example, remind your students that their social networking sites need a proper spring clean as Admissions departments can Google search just like everyone else.

The Mind

A brilliant academic mind should be centre stage in a university application. Encourage students to explain their A level subjects in a unique way, rather than quoting the curriculum. By drawing in the transferable skills they've acquired and how beneficial they can be for their degree, an image of an accomplished, practical thinker emerges.

What if the student has an interest in a subject, but limited experience? This is when their enthusiasm in the small taste they have had of the subject becomes crucial. How will they build upon that? What significance does the subject hold in their past or future?

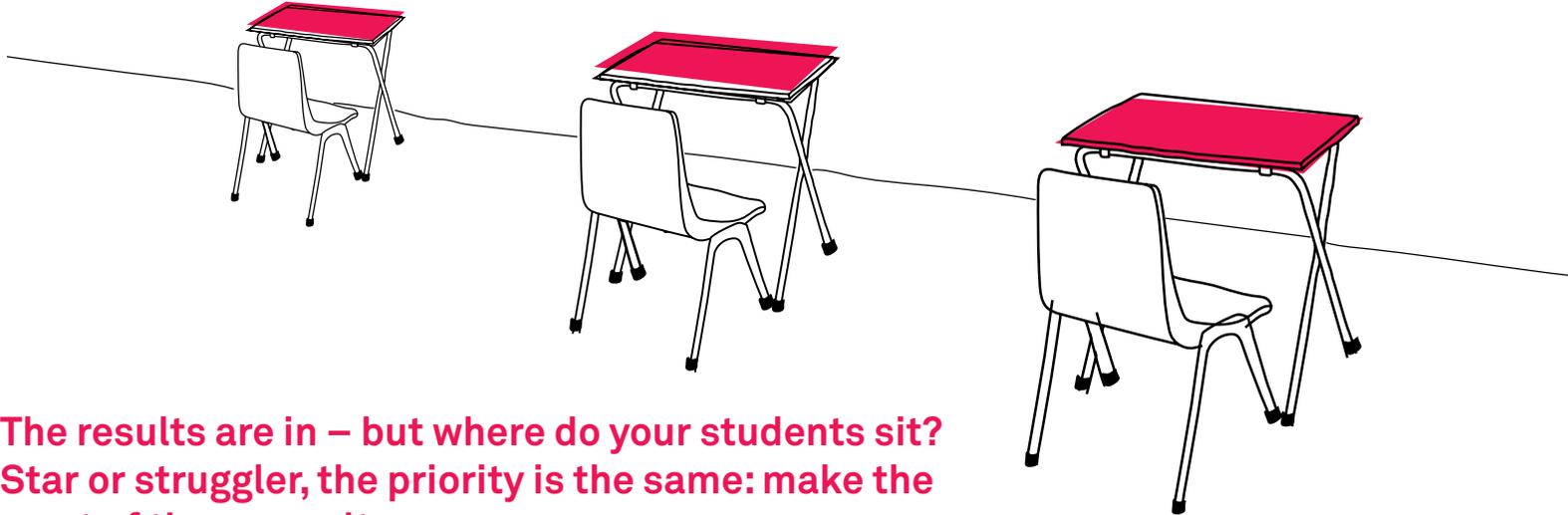
The Soul

Encourage your students to reflect thoughtfully on their activity outside of academia – not just list their part-time job or social calendar. The extra-curricular aspect of a personal statement allows the university to see how well a student will integrate and actively pursue opportunities. It also shows an ability to juggle personal and academic pursuits; hugely important to getting the most out of their experience. A student's extra-curricular activities highlight their interests, talents and an ability to focus and apply them selves outside of their comfort zone.

[Advice on writing Personal Statements](#)

8

Results – the reality



**The results are in – but where do your students sit?
Star or struggler, the priority is the same: make the
most of those results.**

Sure, you provide plenty of guidance for your students on getting their predicted exam results, but what support do you offer afterwards? The best case scenario: all goes according to plan and your student can accept their firm choice conditional offer. If not? This is where you step in as a reminder that it's not all doom and gloom thanks to [Clearing and Adjustment](#).

The quicker the student engages in Clearing, the more options become available. As an education

professional, you might have connections, partnerships or institutions to call upon to help create opportunities from the grades they hit. Even if they don't get the nod right away, being proactive might gain inside information for those crucial Clearing phone calls.

It's the organised students with initiative who benefit most; they have a shortlist of backup institutions ready to contact. A Clearing offer lasts 24 hours,

so rather than 'impulse buy' it's hugely beneficial to follow up as many leads as possible to make an informed decision.

Adjustment enables students who perform above expectation to switch to a course with higher entry requirements. Again – patience is key. A young person's mind can change with the wind, so it's important they understand that making a snap decision prevents them from seeing the wider range of courses now opened up to them; the full panorama.

9

The bottom line



Cut through the spin by focusing on the sum students actually repay, not an overwhelming future figure that they'll never face.

Going to university is a sound investment in an education; a well-paid career; in creating a more worldly individual. Despite the changes to degree fees, higher education still deserves to be seen as a very viable prospect for all young people. It won't saddle them with debt and it definitely won't require the student, (or their parent) to sell a kidney to attend. In fact, it's unlike any other loan you'll ever take out in your life: it's affordable.

There's a growing misunderstanding of [how student finance actually works](#), largely driven by the government's cuts to taxpayer

funding of universities, but also carrying a concern over affordability and value for money. This is felt by parents, often trying to fund their child's education, and that worry is in turn reflected onto your students, all of who seek answers.

For an answer, look past the media, beyond the fear factor of debt, and in reality the rise in tuition fees has actually resulted in many universities putting more money aside to assist applicants from lower income families. Available loans, scholarships and bursaries mean that regardless of financial situation, there are still options

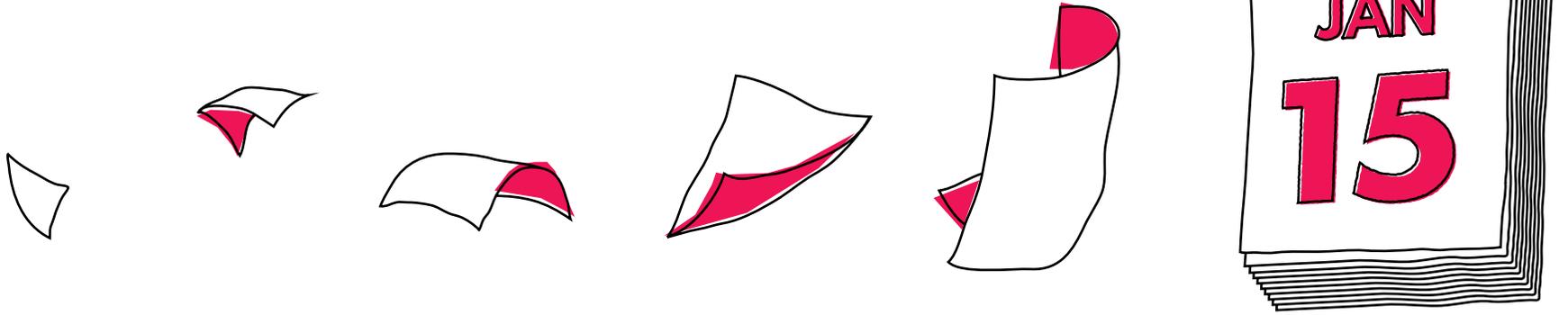
for potential students to fund their studies.

Tuition fee loans are designed to be faff-free. Repayment begins once a student pursues a job with a salary over the £21,000 threshold and if they never hit that, or 30 years pass, the whole thing dissolves. Interest included.

If a student or parent is considering spending a hefty portion of savings on university fees, how would you advise them? Are they wasting their money? Short answer: yes. To read the long one, try [Blair's blog](#).

10

Timing is everything



Specialist entry requirements. Early application deadlines. The crucial bits you can't let slip, for your student's sake.

It's vital your students understand any special entry requirements and criteria for courses outside the regular UCAS process. For example, some Art and Design courses require submissions a year before commencement, along with Creative Writing, they also require work samples. Drama degrees nearly always involve an audition. Giving your students the space and resources to prepare and practice for these additional requirements is invaluable.

Try an interactive exercise where students research key dates and draw up a calendar to help visualise their timeline. Here's the full list

of [UCAS dates to kick it off](#). Considering preparation usually begins 16 months before commencing a degree. June is the recommended time a student should start sampling HE fairs, attending open days and putting pen to paper drafting their application. This includes a reference from their school, which must be completed before a UCAS application is sent.

Leaving a school reference till last minute not only adds pressure to your teaching time; it could result in your student missing the cut-offs... Most UCAS applications have a deadline of January

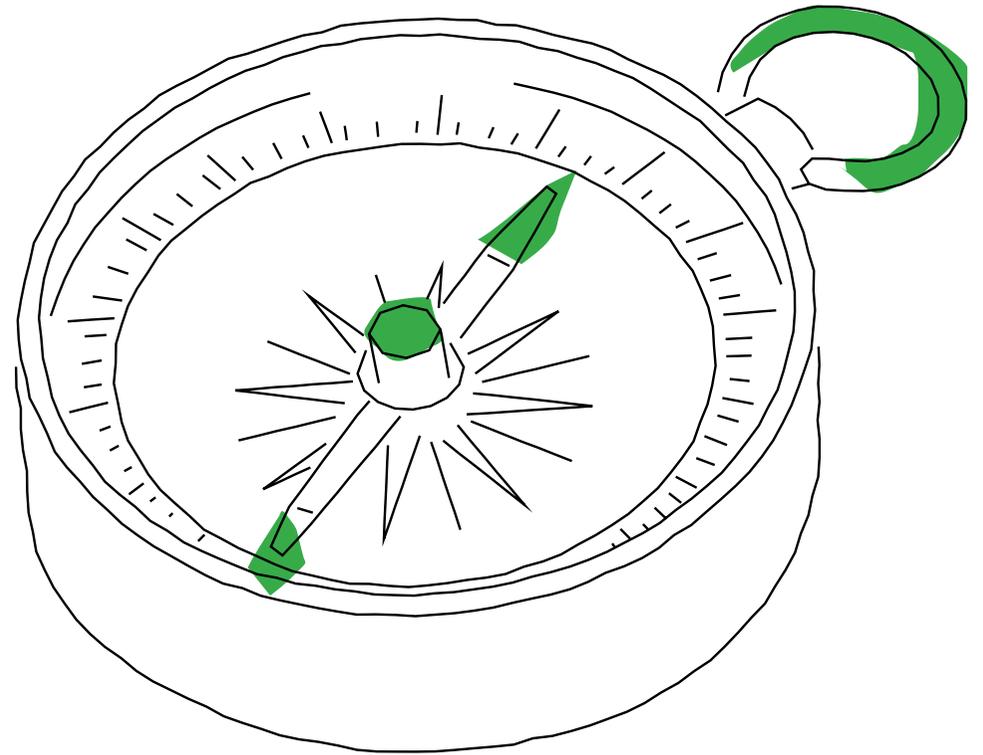
15th, but care must be taken as Cambridge, Oxford and the majority of Medicine, Veterinary Medicine/Science and Dentistry courses require that students submit as early as October 15th.

A late application period allows students to choose courses until June 30th, after which they are entered into Clearing, where plenty of positive opportunities still await. There's also the option of [UCAS Extra](#), open February to early July.

For a range of additional resources to help guide your students, explore [UniBox Resources](#)

Think inside the box:

unibox.uea.ac.uk



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