

Decisions: Year 13

A student guide to help prepare for next year

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Coping with change



Change can be a daunting prospect, and there's been a lot of it over the last few months. Many of us aren't sure how to deal with change so here's some excellent tips on how to face change head-on. Although sometimes change can seem overwhelming, it can also be exciting and refreshing. Knowing how to deal with it is key.

Acknowledge your feelings

It doesn't matter what your reaction to change is, it's important that you acknowledge how you feel internally about it. Your emotions and feelings are part of what makes you, you. Listening to them is a crucial step in accepting changes in your life.

Denying how you're feeling or denying that things are changing can cause more stress. Accepting things are changing will allow you to prepare and adapt successfully.

Be the instigator

This can be difficult at the moment as it feels like lots of changes are being imposed on us, but it's important to try not to let change boss you around. It's going to happen, but it can be on your own terms. By understanding how you feel about upcoming change, you can own it and be the agent of it, rather than simply a bystander who gets swept up in it.

Some of this comes with being prepared for what's ahead. Think about what some of the big hurdles might be over the next few months and come up with a plan for dealing with them. Of course, some things are out of your control. Even in these situations, you can take back the initiative by figuring out how you'll rise to meet the challenges.

Useful tip: Come up with a list of positives that may come from the upcoming changes. It will help you understand what you hope to achieve from the new circumstances.

See change as an opportunity

Change may seem like it's going to turn your life upside down, but that doesn't necessarily have to be an entirely bad thing. For example, you may be facing a very different start to university than the one you had planned. It can be an opportunity for you to try new things and make positive changes to your life.

By embracing change and throwing yourself into your new situation, you'll be able to look towards the positives that will come out of it.

Useful tip: Learn to reward yourself for trying new things. Give yourself a treat after every challenging piece of work you complete, or indulge in something you love after trying out a new hobby or society at university.

Look forward and back

When big changes are taking place, they can sometimes take up all of your thinking (and worrying) power. Not only does this distract you from other important things in life, but it can also create a cycle of anxiety.

Try to look past this time and focus on what you want life to be like after it passes and life returns to normal. Imagine yourself thriving after the change happens. Similarly, look back at other times you've overcome changes in your life. They've made you who you are today.

Useful tip: Keep a journal of your thoughts. It can help you think rationally about your worries and gives you a future reference for how to deal with change.

Seek support

It's easy to bottle your emotions up in times of change. You may want to avoid dealing with upcoming situations. However, this isn't always the best strategy. Turn to friends and/or family to help you deal with change. Even though some of the changes at the moment are unprecedented (such as the possibility of starting university online), you'll find that many people have gone through other big changes before and can give advice and support. Even if they just listen to your concerns, it can be enough to help you organise your thoughts.

Moving away to university



If you're reading this, there's a good chance that you'll soon be off on your university adventure. Congratulations on making it this far! Having done the hard work, it's now time to look ahead to when you move into higher education. We've got some pointers on how to make the transition from school or college to university as easy as possible.

Home comforts

The chances are that you'll be moving away from home, possibly for the first time ever. Whether this is daunting to you or not, it's a significant change to your life. At such times, it's always good to have some things to ground you while you settle in – items that represent comfort, reassurance, and familiarity.

For example, you probably can't take an endless supply of your parents' cooking, but you can bring pictures of your loved ones. Taking your entire cuddly toy collection isn't practical, but one

or two exceptionally soft/sentimental ones could probably keep you company.

Useful tip: The temptation to go home a few days/weeks into your time at uni might be strong, but try staying it out for the first semester. You'll feel more settled in the long run.

Social areas

Even with some universities starting the year online, most students in the UK will still start off their university experience in student halls of residence. In such situations, you're usually thrown into a living environment with many other people just like you. With everyone being on the same level, it's a great time to make some new friends.

When you're first transitioning into university living, make an effort to spend time in social areas as much as possible. Whether it's a common area/kitchen in your halls or a gathering place on campus, try and spend time there and get to know the people you're living or studying with. If it's difficult to make friends in person with social distancing restrictions in place, universities are holding virtual events to make sure students still get the chance to meet and make friends.

Useful tip: Aim to join at least one club or society (even if it's virtually) during fresher's week. It's a great way to meet new people.

Manage your workload

Although your timetable might look fairly free and breezy when you first start at university, especially with more lectures online than normal, you're expected to do a decent amount of work under your own steam. The pace of learning is much faster than at school or college, and lectures and seminars don't always go into full detail.

Part of the expectation is that you manage your own workload and do reading and research in your own time. There's no one to force you to do this (or even to go to lectures), so you have to show maturity and dedication to your chosen subject by self-motivating.

Useful tip: Our guide on 'Managing your workload' has plenty of resources to help you stay on track, and there's lots of apps that can help you stay organised.

Freedom

Part of the attraction of going to university is the independence that it gives you. Once you start, you'll be free, as free as the wind blows, as free as the grass grows. This sounds great (and it is), but you're not free of responsibility.

Try and stay grounded and have some sort of routine, this is especially important when lots of your lectures and seminars will probably be online when you first start. Plan your study time

and leisure time. Make sure to keep your room and shared areas (and yourself) clean and tidy. It's easy to get into bad habits, so try to recognise the everyday things that are important and make sure you do them. It'll help make the transition easier.

Moving away: the pros and cons



When it comes to higher education, many factors can influence your choice of university, not least its distance from home. For some students, moving away to study is a huge appeal, while others prefer to have family and home comforts close by. There are pros and cons to both, and no right or wrong choice.

The pros

There are many great reasons to consider leaving home to study, and students have a broad range of options to choose from when it comes to finding somewhere to live. Here are some reasons you may want to think about moving away to study:

The independence

For many students, university is the first chance they get to live away from home. It can be a liberating experience (especially after months in lockdown), although some find it daunting at

times. Take a look at our moving away to university guide for guidance on settling in. Cliché as it sounds, it really can be a chance for you to discover and express yourself.

The learning experience

As well as studying for a degree, there are a lot of practical things you have to figure out when you're living away from home – how to wash your clothes, how to cook, how to budget, and how to plan your time. It's a genuine chance to learn some of the essential life skills that will stay with you as you grow.

The friendships

Moving away to university often means a move into halls of residence. Few places give such fantastic opportunities to socialise and create such a sense of togetherness. You've a good chance of meeting some like-minded people who you'll remain friends with throughout university and beyond. Those living at home can still have this experience through meeting people at lectures, seminars and student societies, but those friendships might develop a little more quickly in halls.

The convenience

Even though most of your lectures and seminars will probably be online at the start of the year, it's likely you'll be spending more time in university buildings as the year progresses and social distancing restrictions relax. Most halls of residence are situated close to the main university building, making it easy for you to go to and from your lectures and seminars – particularly handy if you have a few hours free in between them. It's likely that you'll also be fairly close to the student library and bars.

The cons

Living away from home isn't for everyone, and you shouldn't feel pressured into it. Equally, it's important you don't feel obliged to remain at home if you don't want to. It's your choice to make.

The cost

Depending on where you choose to study, tuition fees can be expensive. Add on accommodation and other living costs, and it can really add up. Living at home is often much cheaper and it could mean that you won't need to find part-time work to support yourself, freeing up more time to focus on your grades.

The homesickness

Although some students may be eager to get away from home and have their own space, it's not the same for everyone - family ties and obligations can be hugely important. Many young people moving to university find that they miss the people they're closest to and the home comforts they've grown up with. You may prefer to have that support network around you when faced

with demanding exams and essay deadlines.

The space-sharing

Usually, when you move away to university, you'll need to share at least some of your space with others. If you're in halls of residence, you don't get much of a say as to who these other people will be. Whether it's sharing a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, or common area, you'll have to respect the property of your flatmates and contribute to the cleaning and maintenance of the shared area. This in itself isn't a bad thing, but it can be difficult if you prefer privacy and your own space.

The responsibility

Learning how to cook, clean and manage a budget are all great learning opportunities, but it can come as a big adjustment when you're also studying towards a degree. Some students prefer to have a more gentle transition into university life, even if it's just for their first year.

Choosing the best option for you

It's important to remember that there's no wrong option here, provided that it's your decision and you're happy with it. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Don't let others influence you too much.** Your friends may all be encouraging you to move out, while your family may really want or expect you to stay (or vice versa). Both groups will have their reasons, but make sure you focus on what you want. The other people in your life must respect that.
- **Think about your uni lifestyle.** Are you someone who's mad for partying? Or do you prefer your home comforts and a quiet night in? Don't let student stereotypes influence your decision too much. Focus instead on what you want to get out of the experience and which environment best suits your learning style.
- **Know you have finance options.** According to some reports, disadvantaged students in the UK are over three times more likely to live at home while attending university than the most advantaged students. Sadly, this can mean that their access to the best universities is limited unless they're willing to commute long distances. The cost of living away to study can seem quite daunting and this option might simply not be feasible for you, but it's important to note that many universities offer incentives such as grants, bursaries and other programmes to make it easier for those who would otherwise struggle. Before you decide to write any options off:
 - Get familiar with how tuition fee and maintenance loans work - it might not be as bad as you think. Click on the 'Finance' tab in our UK universities Know-how section and read the guide that applies to you.
 - Get in touch with the universities you're considering applying to to find out whether they offer any incentives that might make it easier for you to move away from home.

Deferred entry: pros and cons



‘Deferred entry’ refers to when a student delays their university place by a year, in order to take a gap year or pause their studies. You can apply for deferred entry when you first send off your UCAS form, or request it after you have received your offers. Here are the pros and cons of deferred entry.

Pros: why you might want to apply for deferred entry

Peace of mind

If a student is planning to take a gap year, but knows exactly which university course they want to study afterwards, they should apply for deferred entry to try to ensure they have a place guaranteed once they get back. This can alleviate a lot of stress during the gap year, since the university application process won’t have to be considered again.

Time to decide

A student might want to apply for deferred entry if they do not yet feel ready to go to university. Deferring a university place by a year can offer precious time to decide whether a course is really for you.

After leaving school, working and travelling, you might decide that you want to change course or not go to university at all. If this is the case, it is possible to contact the university before attending to reject the place you've been offered.

Some students are considering deferring their place this year to wait and see what the university experience looks like with social distancing restrictions in place, or in the hope that they can have a more normal freshers experience next year.

Tip: If you're planning to defer your university place because you're worried about social distancing restrictions, remember that in all likelihood the current situation is temporary and it's very unlikely to remain the same for your whole degree.

School support

Applying for deferred entry allows students to apply to university with the support of their school/college. While a student is at school, teachers can write their reference and assist with their personal statement. If a student waits to apply during their gap year, teachers may either be unwilling or unavailable to help with their application.

Cons: why you might want to give it a miss?

No game plan

It is unwise to take a gap year if you have no clear plan for how you'll spend this time. This is especially important at the moment when gap year work or travel plans may be difficult. It can also be hard to spend so much time without a clear goal, especially if friends move away to university whilst you're still at home.

Unpopular with universities

Most universities welcome deferred entry but if a student has no reason to take a gap year it may seem suspicious on their application. If you're applying to defer your place, it's important to justify your reasons, including explaining how it will benefit your future studies. You need to be prepared to give persuasive reasons for this change.

Certain subjects or universities are less willing to defer places. This is because it can be hard to maintain a sufficient level of knowledge if you are not in full-time education. For example, courses such as Medicine, Mathematics or Natural Sciences often require a concrete reason for deferring entry, such as a year of relevant work experience.