

A guide for parents, guardians, spouses and partners

Starting University – being a student

When your son or daughter leaves home for the first time to attend university, it is an upheaval for you both. For the average UK student, it is like moving to a different country to start a new job.

For our international students, they do have to adjust to a *different country and language*. A new student has to deal with different living arrangements, concerns about money, dietary changes, taking on *new responsibilities* and their friends and parents/guardians seem miles away.

They have a variety of concerns, ranging from discovering where the nearest supermarket is to finding their lecture theatre and to *living up to their academic expectations*.

For the mature student, starting Uni can bring a host of challenges such as balancing personal responsibilities with Uni life.

For parents, it can be a time of *anxiety* and loss with the parental/guardian role undergoing great change.

For spouses or partners, the challenge is to understand the new and different pressures Uni life can bring.

For both, “it is about renegotiating their relationship based upon the student’s new status as a university student and adult” (Mullendore, 2000).

It is crucial that students read and keep all the information that their university send them. Where they need to complete and return any forms to the University, it is crucial that this is undertaken as soon as possible.

For the most part students enjoy their studies but there are times when things do not go as expected. As a parent/guardian, understanding the *pressures* a new undergraduate faces is helpful both to yourselves and the student.

Parents/guardians, spouses and partners who understand the *ups and downs* of the first year at university are better able to help the transition from school or college to university.

Below are some typical issues facing new students at different times during their first year.

October

- Student excitement/fears about getting to university.
- Testing their new found freedom.
- Making new friends.
- Anxiety about flatmates, academic work, first tests or coursework.
- Experiencing homesickness and loneliness.

November

- Students settle down to the routine of university.
- Problems with flat-mates may arise.
- First round of illness such as flu or colds.
- The dark days of winter setting in.
- Fears about finding a job.

December

- Excitement of going home for the holidays to see family and friends.
- Sadness about leaving new friendships or love relationships.
- Flatmate issues may still be continuing.
- Pleasure (or disappointment) with term 1 marks.

January

- Excitement/anxiety of returning to university and leaving family and friends.
- Positive/negative attitude to start of new term – the days are very short and it is cold and dreary.

March

- Satisfaction (or disappointment) with term 2 grades mid-term blues.
- Financial concerns.

May/June

- Exam concerns.
- Excitement or apprehension about returning home for the summer.
- Sadness over leaving new friendships.
- Concern about finding accommodation for the next year.
- Concern about finding paid employment over the summer to help fund the following year.

Continued over

Kingston University London

Faculty of Engineering

Students may also worry about missing family or holiday celebrations. It is likely that you too will especially miss them at particular 'family' times, such as birthdays and so on.

Most students do go home from time to time (even if just to get their washing done!) and parents, family and carers are always welcome to visit.

Of course there are some major differences between school/college and university which contributes to the pressures students face. To highlight a few:

- Teacher/student contact at school/college is greater than at university, students at university are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and to use the extensive learning resources available in a self directed way.
- Academic competition is much stronger at university.
- Support at university is readily available for any student who wants it but students are encouraged to take more responsibility in seeking advice.
- Motivation – students need to apply more of their own motivation when at university.
- Freedom – students have much more freedom therefore more responsibility. There is more opportunity for distractions.
- Opinions and ideas – university provides the opportunity for students to develop their own ideas and opinions.

Parents/guardians/spouses and partners will tend to play a significant role in a new student's confidence and self worth.

Engineering students within the Faculty will have access to various forms of support including module, pastoral and Foundation and Year One Tutors.

At the University level, there is also support available from the students' union and other university units but initially, of course, the most significant support network will be family and friends.

New students need family and friends to be tolerant, patient and encouraging, allowing them to make independent decisions whilst still being there when they needed.

University is a very costly activity. However, there are many things the new student can do to ease the financial burden. There are bursaries available at Kingston University.

When the student completed their PN1 form, as long as they ticked the consent box and they are a UK full-time student, they will automatically be considered for a bursary. If they have not ticked the consent box, get them to call the Student Loan Company. It is also critical that they provide their national insurance number. No NI number will mean that they will not receive any benefits available to them.

Included with this letter is a small card containing a range of useful information which you can keep in your purse or wallet.

We understand the importance of parents, guardians, spouse and partners role in the life of the new student. On Sunday 19 September, between 1–4pm in the Picton Room, at Penrhyn Road campus, there will be afternoon tea available during which time you can meet the Dean and representatives from Student Union and Central Services. This is an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Please see the enclosed invite for further details.

If you have any queries, questions, concerns or worries, please don't hesitate to contact Dr Akbar Aboutorabi, Head of the Student Experience, Faculty of Engineering on +44 (0)20 8547 7704.

Reference

Mullendore, RH (2000). *Helping your first year college student succeed – a guide for parents*. University of South Carolina.

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