

Elizabeth Sneddon
Age 21

“I took two years out before going to university because I didn’t believe I would get the grades to enable me to go. I had always known I would go though. I only planned to take one year out but when the time it came to apply again I still hadn’t decided what I wanted to do. I was also in the middle of an Open University course: “An Introduction to Social Sciences” which would help me decide. Whilst doing the course I worked a few different jobs, which helped me decide that I really did want to go to university and that I didn’t want to work in retail.

Once I had completed my Open University course I knew I wanted to do a course related to sociology. I looked through prospectuses to see which courses were on offer and decided to do a BSc in Criminology and Sociology at Northumbria University. I am now in my second year of the course and enjoying it a lot. When I originally went to University I thought I was going to be older than everyone else but there are quite a few people who have decided to take their time in deciding what to do so there is a range of ages.”

Emma Irving
Age 21

"After leaving school at 17 without any A Levels, I started a full time job in administration, through which I received a Level 2 NVQ in Business and Administration. It wasn't until I had been working for a couple of years that I realised that I wanted to further my education. I decided to go to night classes to gain HEFCs (A Level equivalent), I studied Psychology when I was 19 and achieved a Distinction for this. I then realised that if I achieved two more HEFCs then I could go to University. The following year, when I was 20, I successfully completed HEFCs in Health Psychology and English Language. I applied to go to Northumbria University to study Psychology and was accepted.

I am now at University and because I made the effort to go back to school to gain my qualifications, it helped me to realise that this was what I wanted as opposed to just going along with the crowd when I was 18 and going to University because I thought I should, instead of because I really wanted to. I now feel that I will have earned everything that I might achieve this year because I made the choice and the effort to return to education. It was a difficult decision at the time to work full time and attend night classes every week, as it was a lot of hard work, and then the subsequent decision to leave my job to attend University. The thought of leaving a stable and well-paid job was scary but in the end I decided that if I wanted to do anything good with my life then this was my last chance to achieve something. I am very happy at University and I am glad of the decision I made. It is all very well having a job but if I had stayed then I would have wondered if I was missing out on a great opportunity."

Rebecca Sutherst
Age 21

Going to university was terrifying enough because leaving home and moving to a large city was completely out of my comfort zone, so the last thing I wanted to worry about was money. I decided that to make my money last until the next loan instalment I would divide it between the number of weeks it had to last me by. Although there could be flexibility within this, it meant that I did not have to worry about finances and did not have to rely on baked beans for days on end! By getting the weekly money out on a Monday morning, it meant that whatever I had left on a Sunday could be spent on shopping!

Many students leave university because of problems with finance, however by doing this it meant that I organized my money enough so I did not end up being in uncontrollable debt. Due to this, I could afford to do a second degree without financial issues holding me back. I could not have started a second degree in 'Midwifery' without the experience of my first degree in 'Archaeology and Ancient History'. I used the confidence that my first degree gave me to start midwifery, so university is not all about gaining the qualification but is also about gaining confidence and independence. It's an exciting time but extremely daunting for everyone, so just be yourself and remember that everyone else is as scared as you are, even if they don't look it!

Terri Anne Robinson.
Age 21.

“I originally applied to do BA Hons Ancient History, at Newcastle University. They gave me a conditional offer of, B,B,C, so when I discovered I had got A,B,D, I was worried they might not accept this. I rang up the university and found out they didn’t have a place for me on their Ancient History Course but could offer me a place on their Joint Honours, Ancient History and Archaeology. I accepted their offer and I never regretted this decision.

I moved into university accommodation in Newcastle for my first year. I loved having the freedom to do what I wanted when I wanted, but still being in close enough proximity to go home when I wanted to. However at the end of my first year I began to suffer depression, and although I had already arranged to move into a house with friends, I made the decision to move home and commute to university. I soon bought myself a car and found it gave me back some of the freedom I was missing because I’d moved home. I never found living at home a problem for university. People have asked me if I felt a bit cut off from university life but I never found that I was. Many of my friends also travelled from home or had flats of their own where I was always welcome to stay, so I never found living out of Newcastle a problem. I stayed home for the next 2 years until I graduated.”

Fraser Adams
Age 21

I was quite lucky in that I knew exactly where I wanted to go in life, I wanted to be an engineer in agriculture, and the logical choice was to apply for a degree in Bsc Agricultural Engineering. There is only one university left which does this course so I left school after doing my A levels in CDT and Physics and went to Harper Adams University on a 4 year course which included a year in industry.

I came to university not knowing what to expect, I was moving away to a university of just over 2000 students situated in rural Shropshire with no car, so transport was going to be an issue as the nearest town was 4 miles away from campus. I didn't know anyone who went there nor did I know anyone who had been before. However I didn't let this faze me, I had already been down for an open day and thought it was pretty good.

I thought money would be a real struggle but since I work every summer on farms, I had managed to save up something before I came to university. Keeping a close eye on my money was vital though because I really needed to buy myself a car as I was to be living in town in the 2nd yr. I've managed alright so far on my student loan but I couldn't have afforded the car I now have had I not worked every summer.

Once I started at university I found out I was dyslexic, but I had my eyes opened to the opportunities that were out there for people leaving university. I changed my degree from Agricultural Engineering, to Agricultural Engineering with Marketing and Management as I thought this might be more relevant in getting a job in a big company.

Going to Harper Adams was the best choice in life I have made so far, I have made a lot of friends and have not only learned a lot about engineering but I've also learned a lot about myself and loved every minute of it.

Going to university isn't just about the qualifications, it's about meeting new friends, experiencing new things, going new places and getting away from the constant nagging of parents. But most of all, it's about having fun!

Lydia Outhwaite.

My name is Lydia Outhwaite and I left 6th form in 2003. I then took a year out, which was so much - you didn't have to worry about work or applying to university in upper sixth. I just relaxed and earned some money and saw a lot of my friends who stayed around too. It was also a great opportunity to stop and think about where I should go from there. I always knew I wanted to go to university but wasn't sure whether I should pursue my love for Drama and go straight to a drama school or go to university.

I decided to go to university and I'm now in my third year at Loughborough University studying Drama. University is the most fun, amazing experience and I would tell anyone in the world to go. You meet so many new people from all parts of the country and other countries. You go out all the time, meeting people and socialising and if you do what you most enjoy, your whole experience can be made ten times better. I love my course and all the work and I have never been in that situation. I always disliked exams but here I don't have to do any, just practical and coursework based.

You can basically chose whatever course you want to do and if you don't enjoy it universities often let you change to something else that suits what you'd like better.

I'm so sad that I'm going to leave soon but so happy that I came and did it all. Now I have friends everywhere and I experienced living in a house with my friends in second year. It is something that I believe everyone should do if they want to.

Hayley Thanner

The finances of a student are probably the most stressful thing of going to university. I greatly underestimated the situation I found myself in, especially from going from living at home with my parents to paying rent, tuition fees, household bills, etc (and believe me when I say the list is endless!!!). The student loan does help greatly and for me paid for the big things, like tuition fees and my rent but that was it, they tended to cost that much that you needed another income to cover everything else. Personally I used up my entire overdraft within my first two semesters at university because I was not used to managing my money and some habits are hard to change!!!! I found that although I just about managed to cope with a lot of help from my parents, who I am still paying back! In all honesty if I did it again I would find myself a part time job in first year and stick with it, it's probably the only way to get through without the sleepless nights of worrying about missing rent!

However, the financial experience is different for everyone; some friends of mine had actually prepared for university and had savings, although they still did get stressed at times. Others were worse than me, one good friend, had a great paying job, full loan, no tuition fees to pay and still was in a worse situation than myself due to the worst possible thing a student can do, credit cards! She thought it was great at the time, being able to buy and thought the repayments would be fine but all her wages went on paying them off and she was left with nothing. Credit cards have caused more stress than anything else, in my opinion, just don't go there!

There is help if you find yourself in problems, I myself in second year had problems with a housemate and found myself eligible to pay his rent. In those situations the university can help with the Access to Learning Fund but it's not much and can only be claimed once a year if you have special circumstances.

Although, many of my experiences are not great, all you need is management and to listen to advice, the one thing I learnt was to actually listen to my parents and talk to them when I found myself in a financial hole. They tended to know an answer and had been there and wanted to help, but even when they couldn't work it out, it did help to just tell someone to get perspective on it! Most of the time it really wasn't as bad as I thought it was, it always worked out and it hasn't put me off, I'm going back to university to do another degree, I'm just going to do some saving first.

Good luck to all, don't let the money put you off!!!!

Matthew Penny

I'm in the final year of my degree at Bath doing a Masters in Chemistry. I'm hoping to do a PhD next year (had an interview on Thursday at UCL) in Synthetic Organic Chemistry. I'm not sure what I'll do after that but I'd quite like to go to work in the pharmaceutical industry as I did a placement at GSK last year and had a really good time.

I've had a really good time at Bath and would thoroughly recommend going to university. However I wouldn't say university is for everyone unless they really know they want to study a particular subject because they enjoy it. I was lucky that I ended up doing chemistry because I really enjoy it, I wouldn't have been able to make that decision at the start of upper 6th when we had to apply.

John Farrer

I have always wanted to be an engineer, preferably in the aeronautical industry due to my interest in aircraft. I looked at degrees and studied A-level subjects that would allow me access to engineering courses at university, such as, physics and maths. I took a year out when I finished my A Levels so I could chill and save money for when I went to university.

I started my degree at University of Surrey's Farnborough College of Technology. The first year at Farnborough was good fun; it gave me the chance to meet new people in a different part of the country and to learn new skills. However it was quite expensive to live there, as the university had no accommodation so I had to lodge with a family. I hadn't expected this due to the fact that I had visited the college the year before and it had university accommodation but it was closed for renovation for my first year.

The issues of living and the cost continued to grow so I decided to move to another institution. I waited until I had received my first semester results before proceeding so that I could see for myself, my level of skill in this subject. I found that I had a high module average so a move to another university would not be out of reach. I contacted my second choice university, Salford. The university has quite high standings in terms of engineering. I contacted the university by letter and received a reply relatively quickly, telling me to ring one of the lecturer's who deals with transfers. I was given a conditional place at Salford University on the basis that I pass all 12 modules from the first year. The university then sorted out a new UCAS application form for entry into the second year of their Aeronautical Engineering degree.

I passed all 12 modules and informed Salford University of my results. I also informed Farnborough College of technology so both institutions could arrange the transfer. Once this was completed I travelled to Manchester to sign the relevant paper work for the transfer. This also allowed me to take another look around the university. Around this time I also had to sort out university accommodation online, and fill out the student loan forms with the change of institution details. It seemed like a lot of paper work but the university system made it easy for me to transfer.

Starting at Salford meant I had another freshers week to look forward to. I moved into Castle Irwell Student Village the night before freshers began.

The guys from the 6-bed flat I moved into were great and within an hour of moving in they had taken me out to a house party. They already knew each other as they had lived together the year before but they accepted me straight away and being the only Geordie, I soon became the centre of attention for Geordie jokes and bad impressions! They also introduced me to someone who was doing my course, which meant I knew someone in my lecture class before I started the course. This made it less awkward for me on my first day of lectures. The work was very similar to what I had been doing at Farnborough, so within 2 weeks I was working as well, if not better than I had before.

I graduated from Salford with a First Class Honours and now work as a mechanical design engineer for Composite Design Support Ltd, in conjunction with Komatsu UK Ltd. I left Manchester with great friends and times that I will remember for the rest of my life.

Christopher Russell

My GCSE results were not as good as I hoped. The two grades I got that were worth doing something with were two B's in Engineering. I was interested in engineering but not sure what I wanted to do.. As I did not have 5 GCSE grade C and above I could not stay on at school to do engineering. My maths paper was remarked at a later date and I did get a C, which would help me with my engineering.

The reason I went to college was because of my GCSE grades, I wanted to stay on at Queen Elizabeth High School but I didn't have the grades I needed. I decided to go along to a college open day and find out what courses they offered in engineering. I was told about a few courses to do with engineering and was told with my grades I could do aerospace engineering, I was really interested in this area of engineering and had been for some time. The only problem I had with the course is I have to do A Level maths and science. Which I thought might be a struggle but I'm managing fine.

I was also very hesitant about going to college at first. For the first week I found it uninteresting but after the first week we started more practical lessons and got to go to the airport and work on planes, which I really enjoy. I have a lot more freedom at college although there is a lot more work to do than I had been used to at school. But I feel it was definitely the right choice, going to college rather than staying at school.

When I started at the college I was in the access class, which is a class that takes 6 months longer before moving on to the Diploma. This course is for students who do not have 5 GCSE grades C and above, but are good at engineering. After my maths paper was remarked I was moved up straight to the Diploma course. Now with only 2 months left of my first year of this course, I am glad I went to college. I have made a lot more progress now than I ever did at school. This is because I find my course very interesting and I enjoy going to college.

My course involves a lot of theory work but also has a good amount of practical work. Monday to Wednesday the theory lesson is in the classroom. On Thursday's we have a practical lesson at the Aviation Academy at Newcastle Airport. The facilities at the airport include a fully operational 737 and models of the landing gear and other parts of the plane such as different engines.

I travel to college on the service bus, which I was able to get a bus pass for from County Hall, which I would have had to have to travel to school anyway, costing the same £360. You can pay this monthly, which works out at about £9 a week which is great.

Emma Crowe
Age 22

I arrived in Glasgow not knowing what it would be like or who I would meet. I knew absolutely no one there, nor had I been to visit the place before I had moved into student halls. At first, I was completely daunted. Glasgow seemed, at the time, absolutely massive! I remember, on my first day of lectures, getting lost on my way to university, because I had no idea where to go.

I didn't get put-off by any of this, and I stuck with it. One of the reasons I came to Glasgow was to try out the "city-life", and I thought I'd do it while I was young, to see whether or not it suited me. After four years here, I love it! It is easy to get around, especially when you make friends and go exploring together, and the subway makes life a lot easier.

I only applied to do English Language at University, but I found when I got here that I had to do two other subjects to gain credits. I did English Literature and Scottish History in First Year, and English Literature and Classical Civilisation in Second Year. Doing these extra subjects was useful as it prompted me to work harder and it gave me ideas of when I wanted to do after university. They also offered an opportunity to change what your final degree would be, for example, someone could apply to the university to do German, but leave with a Politics degree.

In second year, I originally planned to do a joint Honours English Language and Literature, but I didn't get the grades to carry on with Literature. Now I'm in my final year, and I'm glad I didn't carry on with Literature, as I realised afterwards that I didn't particularly enjoy it in comparison to Language.

Money is a huge problem for me, and I would argue that constant saving is probably the only criticism I have of the student life. I am especially glad that I was sensible enough to save money before I came to university. I cannot get financial help from my family, which surprises a lot of people. I rely solely on my student loan and money I earn in the holidays. This means I have to be very sensible with money, so I tend to not go out drinking much, and I relish special offers in supermarkets!

Being in this situation has allowed me to fully appreciate the value of money more and I feel I can manage money a lot better than others who rely on their parents for rent and other luxuries.

Going to university is the best thing I have ever done! I have met new people from all parts of the world and I've made some great friends. I have been to places I would never have gone had I not come here, and

have experienced all kinds of weather – in Glasgow, it can be sunny, cold, windy, rainy and snowy all in one day!

People think that university is all about studying for exams and getting drunk with your mates, but it is much more than that. The culture surrounding it allows you to meet great people, see new places and try out things you've never done before. You find out a lot about yourself - you take that final leap into adulthood and grow up. Most importantly, you enjoy yourself!

I came to university homesick, lonely, yet optimistic and excited, and I will leave educated, happy and independent with plenty of happy memories!