



# BRANDS NEED STUDENTS

Our five essentials to help you reach prospective students, get their attention and engage with them effectively.

# EVERY YEAR, OVER **500K YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK** LEAVE HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME AND START HIGHER EDUCATION

Like learning to drive and being able to vote, it's a significant step on their journey to becoming young adults. It's also a major life event—a time when they are **2.5 times more likely** to try something new.

**This makes it a key moment for brands**—engage with young people now and you can build brand awareness and trust that lasts through their student days and beyond.







## AT UCAS, **WE KNOW STUDENTS**

We've analysed verified first-party data from **4,320** of them to identify five key insights of how to engage and communicate successfully with prospective students.

**Read on to learn how to get discovered,  
be relevant and create effective long-term  
brand awareness with a new generation.**

## START EARLY

# THE EARLY BRAND CATCHES THE WORM!

Students and their families start thinking about and shopping for university long before they get their results. So while Freshers' Fairs are important – **72% of students attend** – successful brands have been targeting students for many months before.

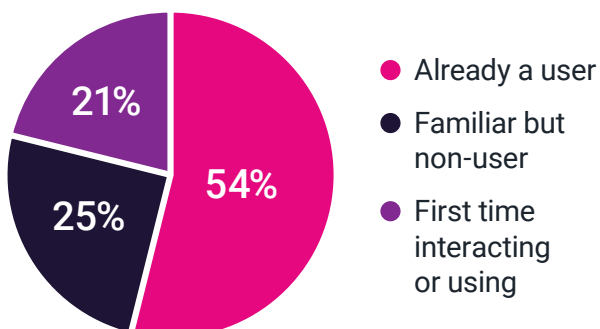
## WHAT WE KNOW

- Students start thinking about big purchases—particularly tech such as laptops, tablets and TVs and headphones—long before they get their results, often in May or before. **Plus, up to 40% also buy bedroom and cooking essentials early in the summer.**
- **Recognition is everything**—students are more likely to buy or engage with brands during Freshers' Fairs if they've already heard of or connected with them.

## WHAT YOUR BRAND SHOULD DO

- **Act early to get engagement**—get your brand in front of students and parents/guardians in the months leading up to results day.
- **Don't wait for Freshers' Fairs to target students.** Consider targeted campaigns through summer and into the first term to leave a lasting impression.
- **Building recognition early** is particularly important for smaller brands who need to push through the noise of larger brands.

## BRANDS BOUGHT BY STUDENTS SINCE FRESHERS' FAIR





## IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

# PREPARING FOR LIFE AT UNIVERSITY IS A TEAM EFFORT

Families and students make decisions and purchases together—even after university starts. Parents and guardians are often gatekeepers as well as guides—a key influence as young people start this new chapter in life.

### WHAT WE KNOW

- Our research found that both young people and their parents/guardians are involved in decisions, purchases and pre-university tasks. Getting ready for university is a collaborative process.
- While students like to use social media for research, **they prefer to get advice from people they know and trust**. Most young people actually go to their parents and guardians for financial and budgeting guidance, emotional support and insights into living independently, ahead of TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook.
- Sites like UCAS.com are trusted too.

# 73%

of parents/guardians expect to contribute financially towards their child's university expenses

Top 5 areas for financial support:

- Day-to-day living expenses
- Transport costs to travel home
- Books and stationery
- Accommodation
- Shoes and clothing

### WHAT YOUR BRAND SHOULD DO

- **It's important to talk to everyone**—parents as well as students.
- **Consider DM** as an effective way of talking to everyone.
- **Think about producing useful guides** that focus on the practical things mum and dad are worried about—budgeting, safety, health and nutrition.



DON'T JUST SELL. EMPATHISE.

# LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING WINS THE DAY

Young people are more worried about the academic challenges they'll face as they start university than the practical planning. And these worries continue well into the academic year.

## WHAT WE KNOW

- **Over half (54%) of students are concerned about how well prepared they will be for university-level study.** They often worry about the academic demands of their course, coping with new ways of studying and meeting deadlines.
- Parents worry a lot less about the academic challenges, and more about the practical ones—**60% of them hope that students will “learn life skills” and “gain independence”.**
- Students found advice from current students and alumni the most helpful in dealing with study challenges.

**Top 3 student concerns in the first weeks at university or college:**

**72%** adjusting to a new environment

**64%** settling in

**55%** learning how to manage my study time

### GOOD TO KNOW

Some parents or guardians may not have been to university themselves, and if they did, their experience of higher education is likely to have been significantly different.

## WHAT YOUR BRAND SHOULD DO

- **Walk in their shoes**—rather than only focusing on ‘what you need to buy’ lists (though these are useful too!), aim to establish real engagement with students by empathising with how they feel.
- **Think about how you can give them what they need**—offer useful advice to make life easier for them in other areas so that they can focus successfully on their studies.
- **Make it authentic**—consider working with student peers/recent graduates to deliver relevant and supportive content that feels genuine and relatable—perhaps on how to manage study time, make new friends or top tips for settling in at university.

## SHARE THEIR EXCITEMENT

# NEW STUDIES, NEW FRIENDS, NEW BEGINNINGS!

New starts—of any sort—are powerful moments in our lives. And for young people the move to college or university is a massively exciting step forward in life. They're ready to seize the day and brands need to be with them.

## WHAT WE KNOW

- Young people are looking forward to taking this step and building a new, independent life.
- Even though they acknowledge that they might face challenges like homesickness and feeling isolated at university or college, **students generally focus more on the opportunities for self-discovery and increasing confidence.**

## WHAT YOUR BRAND SHOULD DO

- **Build engagement through early content** that recognises this excitement, rather than solely focusing on the practical worries of becoming a student.
- Take opportunities to build emotional connections by **supporting their dreams and hopes rather than simply selling.**
- **Find a balance**—content that is about excitement, self-expression and leisure can be just as impactful on brand loyalty and visibility as content about products and services.





## THE PLACE TO BE

# WE ARE THE **MOST TRUSTED** BRAND IN EDUCATION

If you want to reach and connect with tomorrow's students, then you're in the right place. Students actively come to UCAS to plan their futures, making it one of the few places where Gen Z is genuinely focused and ready to engage.

## WHAT WE KNOW

**65%**

email  
open rates

**30M**

average website views  
per month in the summer

**1.3M+**

young people engage  
with UCAS every year

**750K**

participants providing  
verified first-party data

- We are the most important source of info when prepping for university.
- UCAS is the first place students go when they get their A level results.
- We build a trusted relationship with students over many months—even years—at a formative stage in their lives.
- Students trust us as much as the NHS and more than the BBC.

## WHAT YOUR BRAND SHOULD DO

- **Build trust by association**—we are your ideal brand partner for student comms—when you trust the messenger, you trust the message.
- **Take advantage of our powerful media ecosystem**—place your brand where students already actively turn for advice and guidance to make informed, life-changing decisions.
- **Connect through moments that matter**—meet students at a significant life moment and a point of high engagement.
- **Tap into our insights**—our detailed data can help you make decisions on how to activate, when and where.







# READY TO MEET THE STUDENTS OF THE FUTURE?

We're ready to partner with brands and media agencies who share our mission to give young people positive choices.

Request a callback or explore our powerful media ecosystem:

**CLICK HERE**

or visit [ucas.com/business/marketing-services](https://ucas.com/business/marketing-services)

UCAS | MEDIA