



Finding Their Place

UCAS



Turning Insight into Impact:
A Strategic Action Plan
for Higher Education.

2025

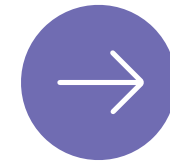
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WHAT IS THIS ACTION PLAN?





This action plan draws on the latest insights from our ***Finding Their Place: Higher Education Edition*** research report.

Our data covers the summer before higher education and the first two months of university or college (May to August). It reveals key student and parent needs during this pivotal time — when young people and their families prepare, transition and adjust to university life.

This year's research reveals five key opportunity areas where universities and colleges can improve support and engagement - each with clear, practical recommendations.

From academic confidence and domestic preparedness, to social belonging and financial resilience, these themes reflect the real moments that shape student success - but are often overlooked in early university engagement.

This document is designed with university marketing, admissions, student recruitment, student experience, and student support teams in mind. Each recommendation is designed to be immediately actionable, forming a clear, strategic framework.

You can use them to support better-prepared, more confident, more connected students — and to engage families as essential partners in the transition to higher education.

Following these suggestions will help you:

Differentiate your institution with targeted, emotionally intelligent communications that resonate deeply with students and their families.

Build earlier, stronger connections with incoming students, boosting long-term retention and student satisfaction.

Close 'expectation and preparedness gaps' — with the right support, at the right time, in the right way, we can realign what students and their families expect university to be like (rightly or wrongly) and how ready they feel (rightly or wrongly) to deal with this perception.

Position your institution as one that listens deeply to students' real experiences.

By responding to what matters most to young people and their families, you can build stronger connections, enhance key moments, and offer support where it's most needed.

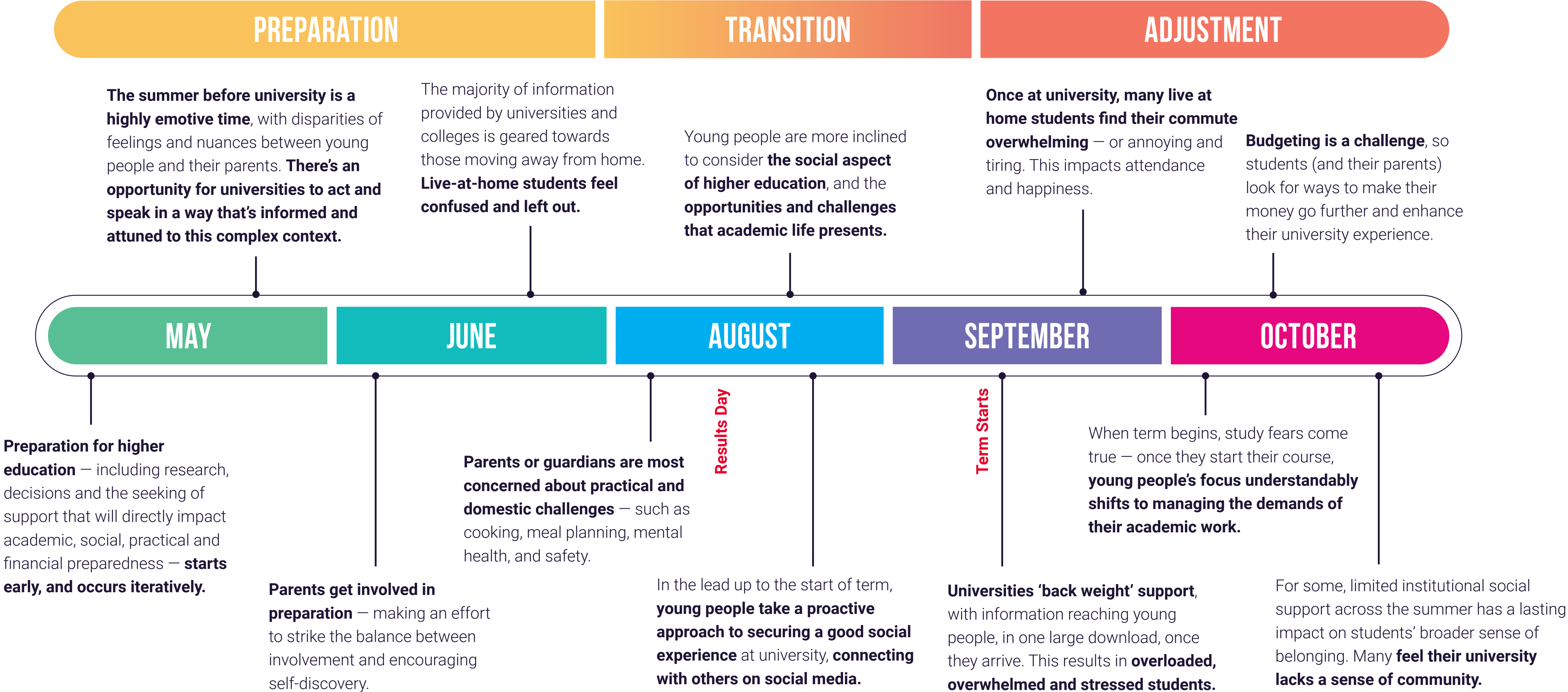


OUR KEY INSIGHTS FOR 2025





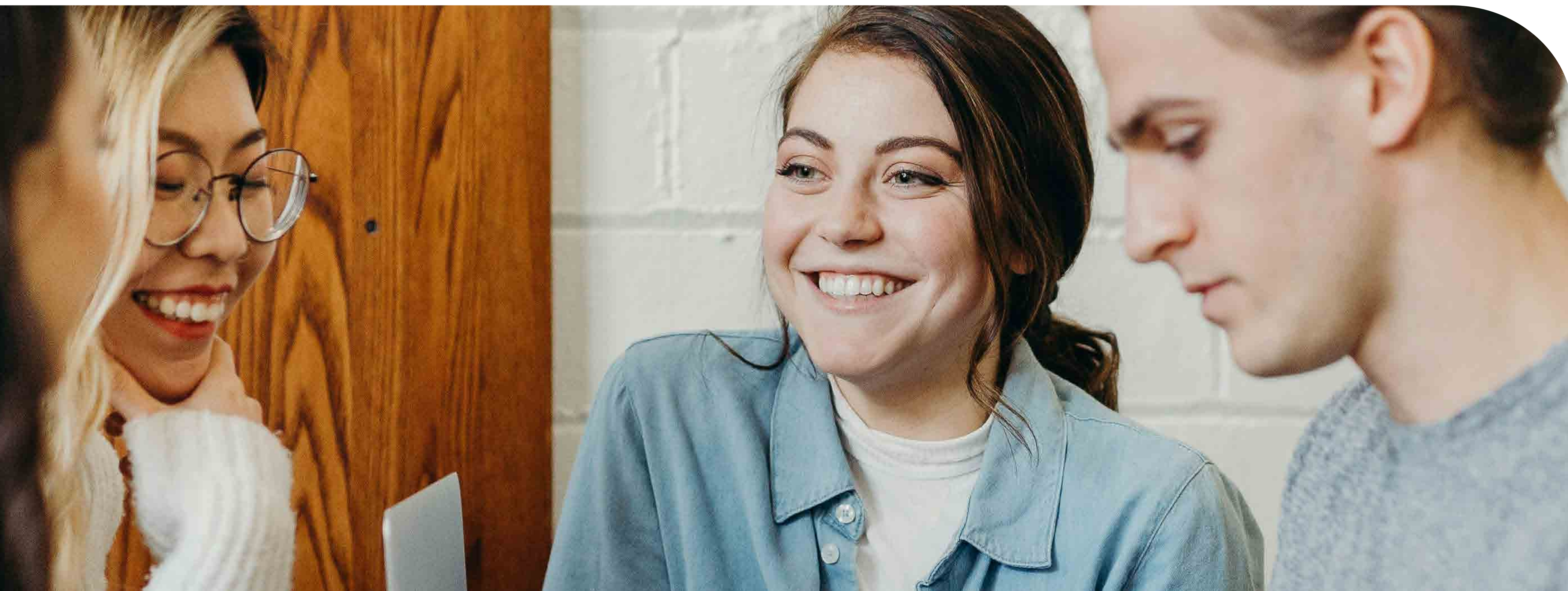
OUR KEY INSIGHTS FOR 2025

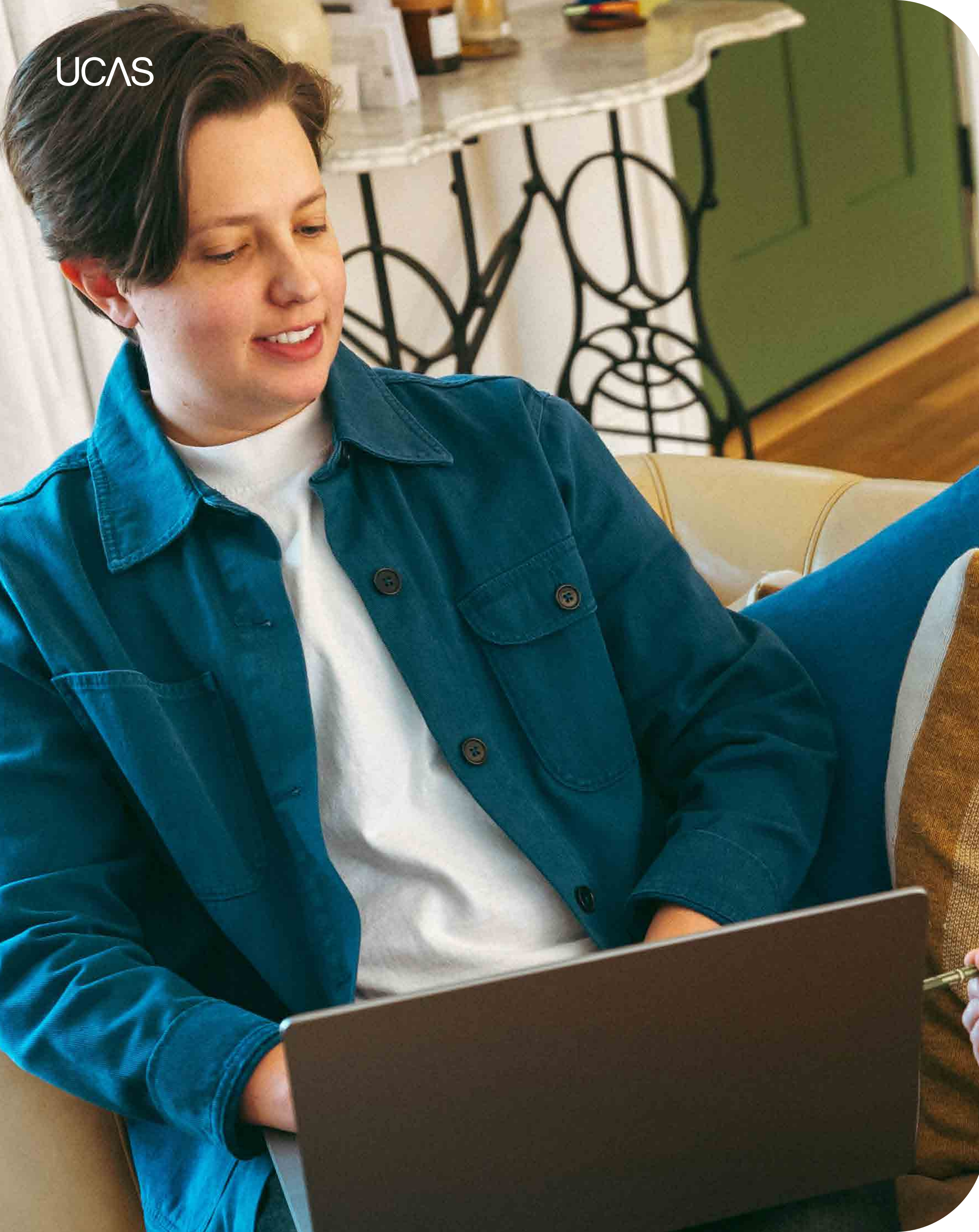


1.

ACADEMIC PRESSURE

Turning anxiety into achievement.





Students-to-be worry about university level study — they're concerned about increased workload, time management and deadlines. But few feel fully supported to prepare. There's an opportunity to close the gap between institutional assumptions and the lived reality of young people.

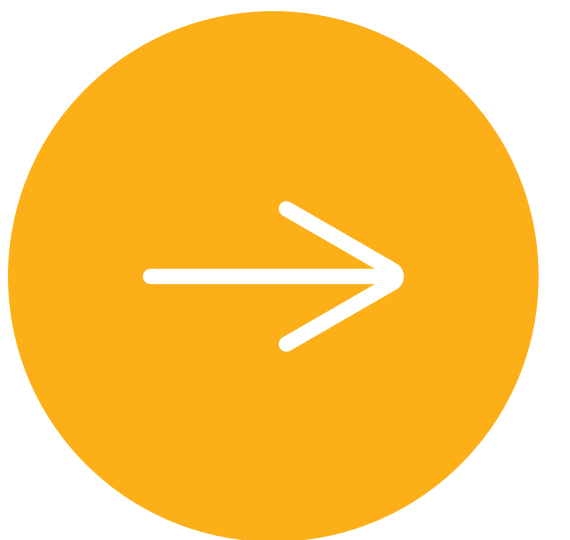
"I'm not really sure what to expect in terms of workload, but I am willing to give it a go!"

Student, Living at Home



Academic pressure

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?



1 BUILD 'ACADEMIC-READINESS' CAMPAIGNS



- 1.1. Develop communication programmes for students-to-be focused specifically on academic preparation. Tailor messages by subject or faculty to reassure students about their academic journey and help foster early connections.
- 1.2. Our Next Generation: Building Connections report confirmed that students find short-form visual and audio content particularly engaging. Explore formats such as video guides, digital 'Study Survival Guides', webinars and podcasts.
- 1.3. Feature advice and real-world experience lessons from both academic staff and current students to ensure the tone is approachable, inclusive and entertaining.
- 1.4. Deliver the content iteratively across the summer. Take inspiration from programmes like NHS Couch to 5k and ease students-to-be into academic confidence week by week with friendly, motivating bite-sized advice.

2 CREATE PERSONALISED ACADEMIC WELCOME EMAILS



- 2.1. Personalise email campaigns beyond “Hi [first name]”. Include subject-specific ‘study hacks’ with messages and ‘lessons learnt’ from current students and faculty. Clearly address common academic anxieties such as workload management, assessment expectations, and time management.
- 2.2. Deliver detailed reading lists, timelines and checklists to make sure students feel academically informed, supported and prepared. Use different content formats such as video and audio, and optimise delivery times, to increase engagement.
- 2.3. Continue academic support (and a sense of community) into the first term. Create approachable, authentic content with subject lines like “So you’ve received your first assignment...”

3 INTRODUCE EARLY 'PEER MENTORSHIP' INITIATIVES



- 3.1. Promote dedicated academic mentorship programmes that pair students-to-be with trained second or third-year mentors from the same course or subject area.
- 3.2. Market these programmes as academic and wellbeing initiatives, with peer mentors providing study advice and emotional support.

2.

HOME TRUTHS

Dealing with domestic and wellbeing worries.

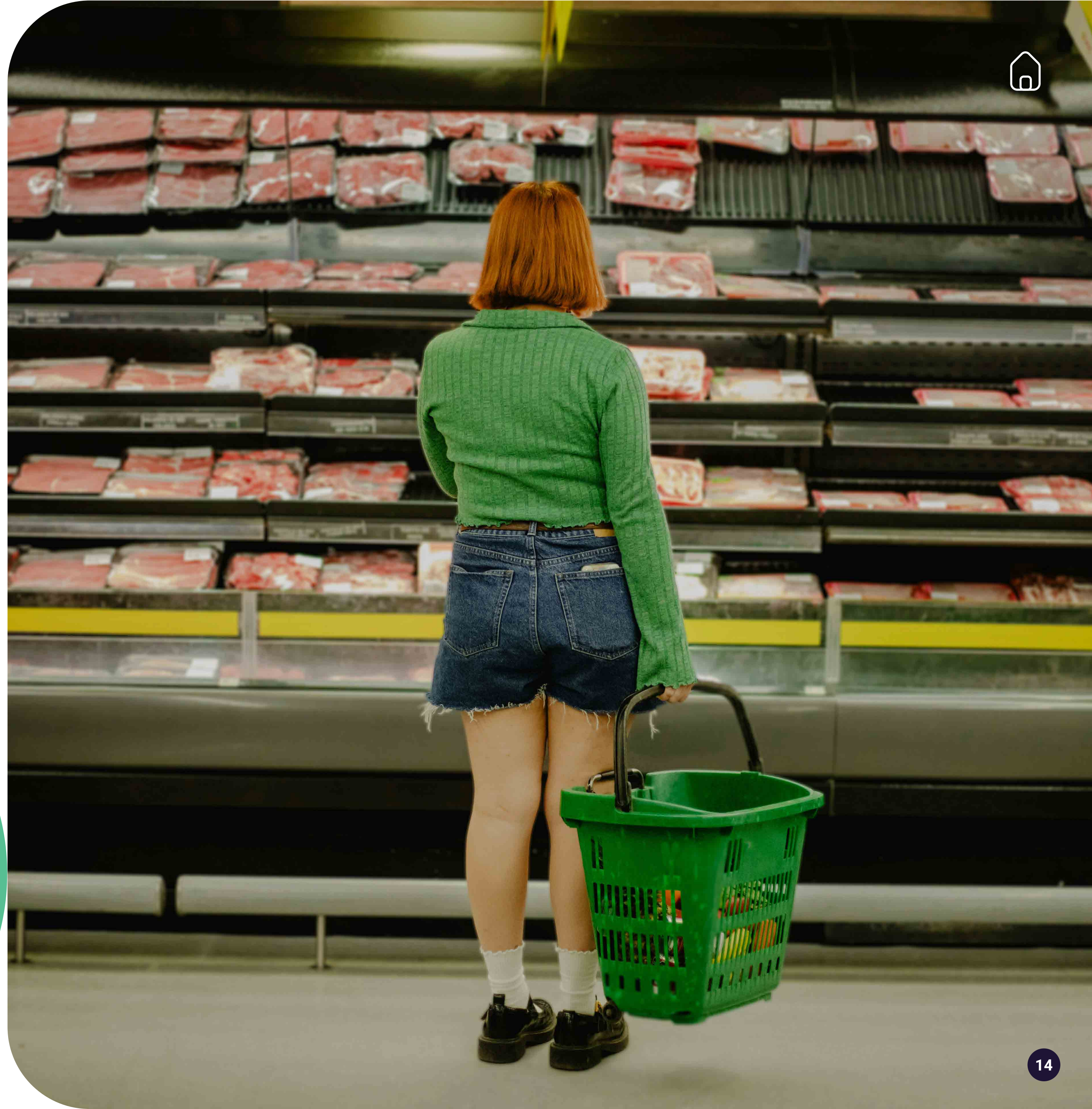


Parents and guardians worry about the life skills and safety of students-to-be, so get involved in preparation for higher education by giving domestic guidance.

There's an opportunity to acknowledge how collaborative and emotional this process is, with practical, relevant support that resonates with everyone's feelings.

"Being independent, learning to manage your own life, which we're all experiencing with the whole thing about food, budgeting, making friends, you know, standing on their own two feet."

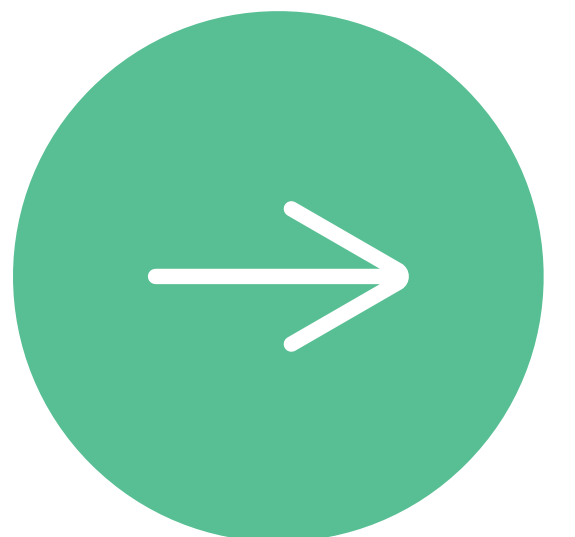
Parent/Guardian Respondent





Home truths

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?



1 CREATE A PRACTICAL LIFE-SKILLS DIGITAL HUB



- 1.1. Build a dedicated, accessible online resource (such as a section of a website or even a separate platform or hub) offering essential domestic guidance. Include cooking tutorials, laundry guides and campus safety briefings. Consider 'gamified' and 'group-chat friendly' content to compliment the collaborative way young people and their families prepare for university together.
- 1.2. Incentivise current students and their families to contribute to the resource with their own tried-and-tested recipes, tips and tricks. This will ensure everything feels inclusive, authentic and relevant.
- 1.3. Use interactive formats (such as videos, quizzes, and downloadable checklists) to make the information engaging and shareable.

2 USE FORMATS THAT KEEP ALL FAMILIES IN THE LOOP



- 2.1. Re-format key information for incoming students to be 'print-out-and-stick-on-the-fridge-friendly'. Or simply include family-conscious calls-to-action like "Share this with your parent or guardian after reading".
- 2.2. Remember: no two families are the same. Segment and personalise your communications, acknowledging that some young people will have parents, others guardians — and others will be carers themselves.

3 HOST FAMILY-FOCUSED WEBINARS AND Q&A EVENTS



- 3.1.** Schedule and market a series of targeted webinars and live Q&A sessions specifically designed for parents and guardians. Cover topics like student safety, campus wellbeing support, and practical home-life management.
- 3.2.** Promote these events through email, parent-focused webpages, and social media channels. Include recordings, so the information is easily accessible for later viewing or listening.
- 3.3.** Remember: families start considering the domestic aspects of university life as far back as May. Deliver your family-focussed resources iteratively across the summer.

4 DEVELOP DEDICATED PARENT AND FAMILY CHANNELS



- 4.1. Create parent-focused communication channels (regular newsletters, dedicated web portals, or targeted email updates) and market them as a supportive resource throughout the student transition journey.
- 4.2. Frame these channels as essential touchpoints, providing timely guidance and reassurance (for example sharing and commenting on relevant local news stories). As well as positioning your university as a trusted partner, they will generate a genuine sense of community, and allow families to help each other.
- 4.3. Provide timely guidance and reassurance, and use social media to facilitate families helping each other (for example sharing and commenting on relevant local news stories). Ideas like moderated 'Parents of [X] University' social media groups.

3.

MONEY ON THE MIND

Mastering budgets to maximise experience.



Financial concerns are among the biggest sources of stress for students and their families. Many young people enter higher education without the tools or knowledge to manage their money.

There's an opportunity to help students budget confidently and balance work with study – closing perceived 'financial gaps' and laying the foundations for a fulfilling university experience.

"I've never had to fully budget for myself before, so I expect there will be a bit of a learning curve here."

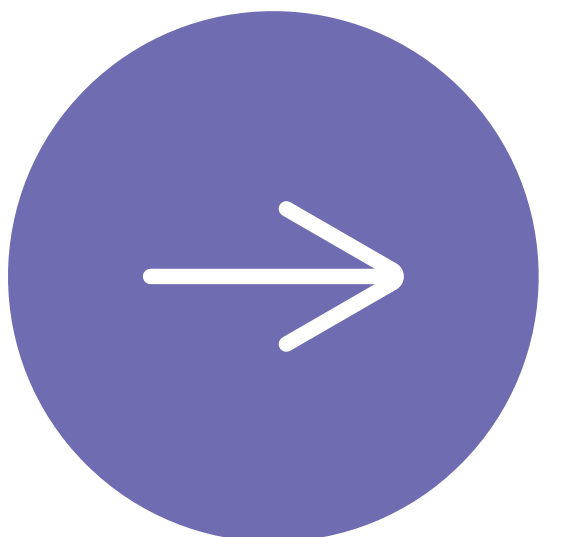
Student, Accommodation



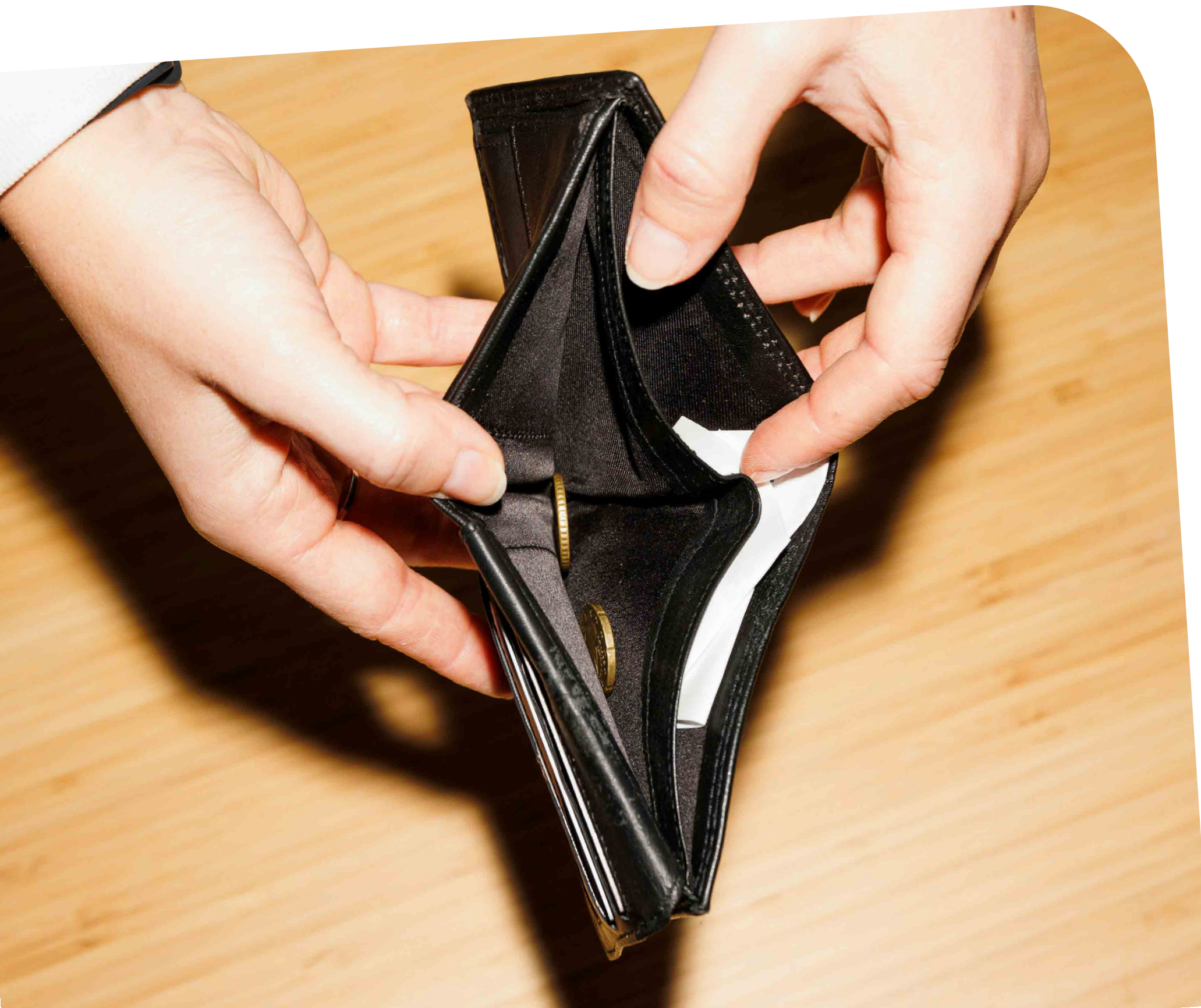


Money on the mind

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?



1 PROVIDE PROACTIVE FINANCIAL LITERACY INITIATIVES



- 1.1.** Run early budgeting workshops (online and in-person) and offer students tools, templates and calculators. Link to UCAS resources or adapt them to fit your brand. Highlight financial literacy resources early in the recruitment process, personalised for different living arrangements and financial situations (for example, students with caring responsibilities).
- 1.2.** Co-create financial literacy materials with current students, so that the tone of the advice is approachable, quick, and playful. Take inspiration from the likes of Monzo or Starling Bank, whose communications and product features are robust and trusted, but down-to-earth and engaging — making money-management simple, and even exciting (for example, Monzo's '1p Saving Challenge').
- 1.3.** Connect housemates-to-be earlier in the summer. Facilitate joint shopping lists for shared 'household essentials', in the style of a wedding gift list, to avoid duplication and save everyone money.
- 1.4.** Clearly communicate what's already included, or not, with university accommodation so that students-to-be don't buy things they don't need.
- 1.5.** Have a strategy for students living at home, too. Make sure there are always different versions of your budgeting content, personalised for different living arrangements and financial situations (for example, students with caring responsibilities).

2 GET CREATIVE WITH VISIBLE ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT AND WORK-STUDY GUIDANCE

3 AFFORDABILITY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

- 2.1. Promote your university's part-time employment opportunities. Tailor communications by subject, and explain how students can balance a job with their specific academic responsibilities.
- 2.2. Ensure that communications about part-time work give detailed, realistic guidance through authentic student testimonials. This will improve the tone, and students want to understand how other people have successfully managed a work-study balance.
- 2.3. Consider what 'student shaped work' looks like. Build connections between the university and small, independent local businesses who may need an extra pair of hands for a day or afternoon a week. This kind of schedule might not appeal to someone looking for full-time work but suit a student.
- 2.4. Share timetables for lectures, seminars and study sessions early in the student recruitment process. That way, young people will know when they have time to work a job if they want to — and can start planning for this before arriving.
- 3.1. Make transparent and proactive financial planning a central feature of your recruitment marketing strategy. Promote available scholarships, bursaries, hardship funds, and financial support mechanisms. This will showcase your university's commitment to student wellbeing, increasing its appeal to both young people and their families.

4.

FORGOTTEN COMMUTERS



Supporting students who stay home.





Living-at-home students feel overlooked. There's an opportunity to tailor support to tackle their commuting concerns and ensure that logistical challenges don't disrupt a positive higher education experience.

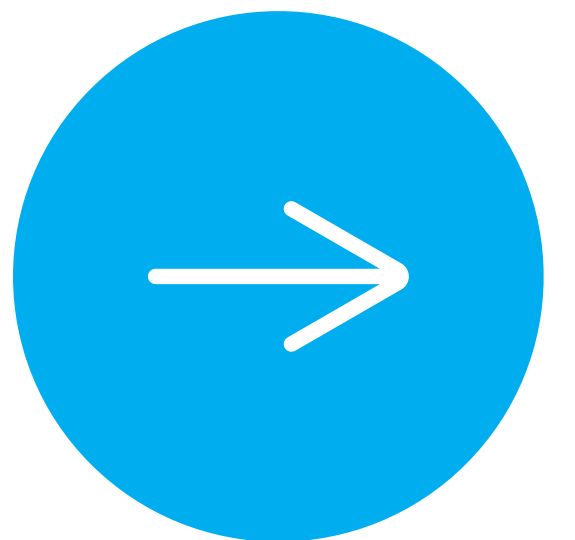
"It was a lot busier than I expected and I am a little nervous about future commutes."

Student, Living At Home



Forgotten commuters

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

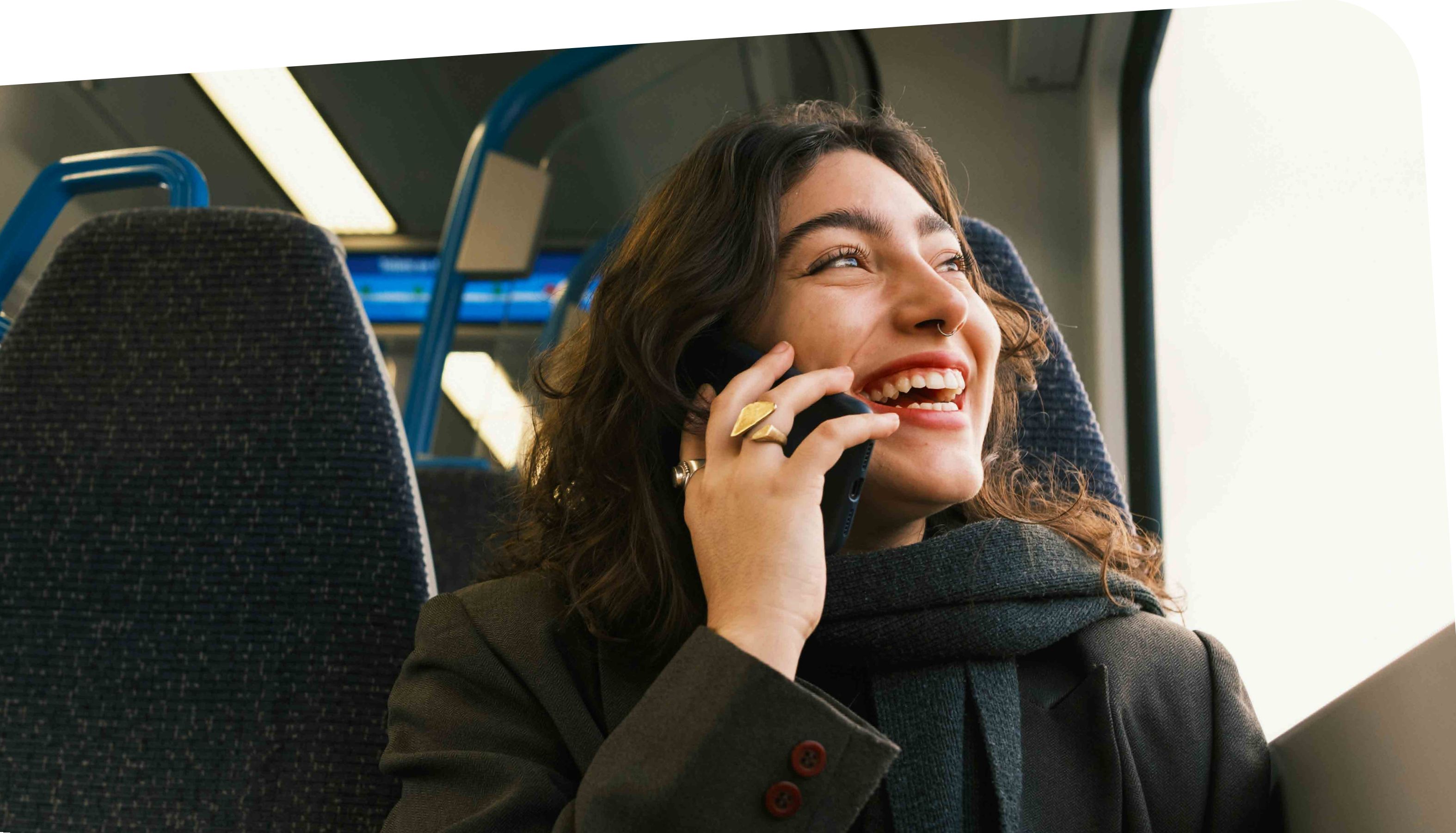


1 CREATE A DEDICATED COMMUTER STUDENT WELCOME PROGRAMME



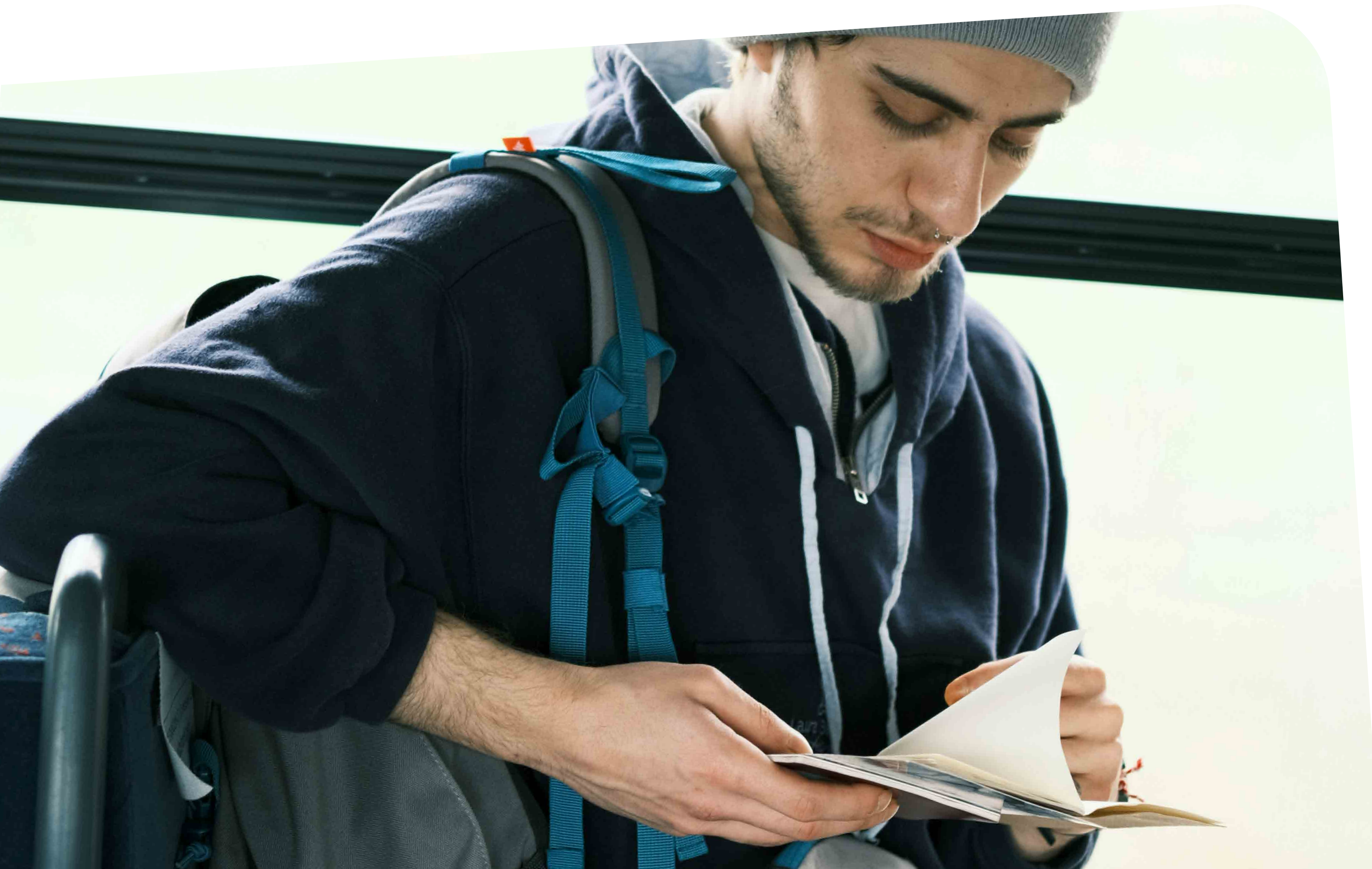
- 1.1. Launch and promote commuter-specific group chats, online forums, and virtual meet-ups – and organise commuter-friendly in-person orientation events (such as ‘commute practice runs’).
- 1.2. Design and market welcome packs tailored to students who plan to live at home, with specific logistical guidance such as travel discounts, campus navigation tips, and parking information. Use segmented email campaigns to ensure this practical information doesn’t get lost in broader communications (and so living-at-home students feel valued, included, and supported from the outset).

2 DEVELOP DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT FOR COMMUTERS



- 1.1. Use social media to support commuting students before term begins. Launch and promote commuter-specific group chats, online forums, and virtual meet-ups.
- 1.2. Create short, shareable pieces of content like commuter student testimonials. If co-created with current students, these will ensure your support is relatable, practical, and positive.

3 MAKE SURE YOUR COMMUTER SUPPORT IS VISIBLE



- 3.1. Highlight commuter-specific resources prominently across your university website, recruitment campaigns and university campus. A commuter-positive stance could form a central part of your university's inclusive student experience strategy (particularly important now, with the recent uptick in students considering living at home).
- 3.2. Explore the possibility of co-creating campaigns with local public transport providers. Student-specific commuting information (and encouragement) could be present at bus stops and stations, or on-board buses and trains.

5.

CONNECTION CRISIS

Combating social anxiety.



Social anxiety is unavoidable.
But early, structured connection
can positively impact young people's
confidence and sense of belonging.
There's an opportunity to build
communities before term begins to
create happier, more resilient students.

*"I'm excited to have a
fresh start and meet new
people. I am also excited
to explore a new city."*

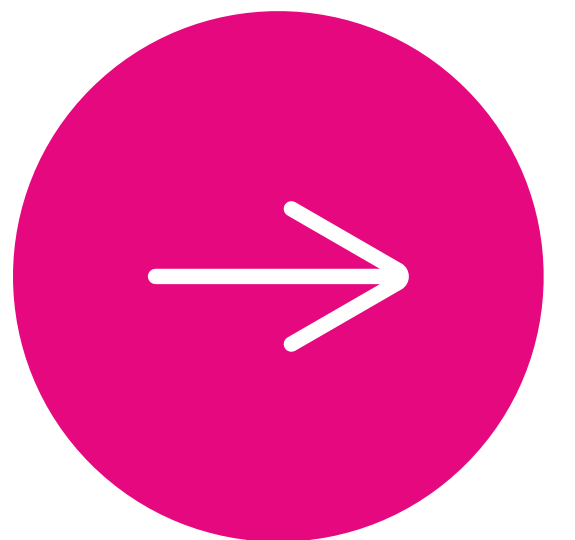
Student, Accommodation





Connection crisis

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?



1 INTRODUCE STRUCTURED DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

2 CELEBRATE STUDENT STORYTELLING

1.1. Create moderated online communities, virtual ice-breaker events, peer-led group chats, and early online meet-ups.

1.2. Market these as crucial tools for building confidence, easing anxieties, and helping young people make meaningful connections.

2.1. Gather authentic stories from current students who've overcome initial social concerns, and use them to emphasise the real-life positive impact of engaging with your resources. Create short, visual, engaging and relatable pieces of content for email and social media campaigns.

2.2. Make it clear to students-to-be that some homesickness and anxiety is normal. Stress that support is available and that you're passionate about fostering a strong community spirit among all students — both those staying at home, and those living on campus.



3 BUILD ON-CAMPUS SAFE SPACES AND CHAMPION STRUCTURED PEER SUPPORT



- 3.1.** Promote designated safe spaces designed to be free of bias, conflict, criticism or potentially threatening actions, ideas or conversations. Introduce structured support groups. Don't wait for students to arrive on campus celebrate and use these resources during the recruitment process, open days and tours.
- 3.2.** Connect these initiatives with your DEI policies to create a comprehensive commitment to student wellbeing and community integration.

4 SEE EVERYTHING THROUGH A 'SOCIAL LENS'

4.1. Events marketed purely as ice-breakers or 'meet and greets' can be intimidating. Instead, see all pre-arrival activity (be it support for finance worries, or commuter concerns, or academic pressure as a chance for young people and their families to safely and securely share contact information and start to feel part of a community).

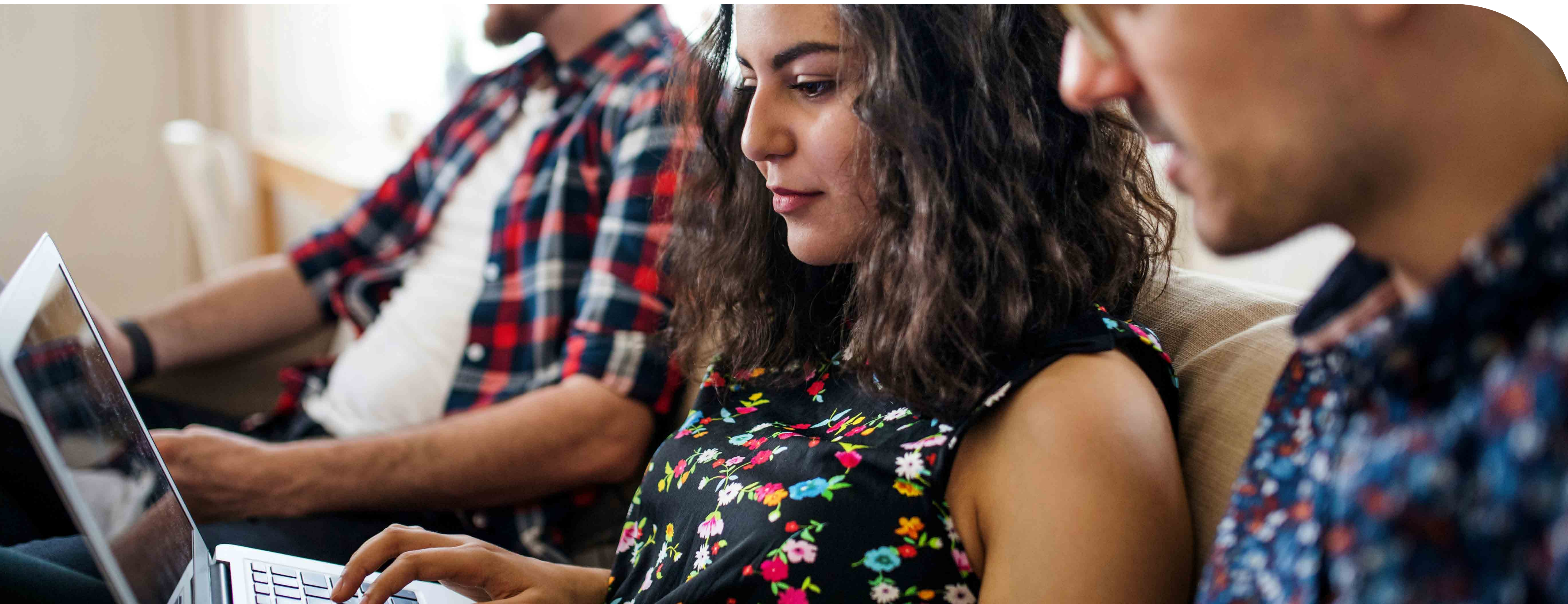
5 REMEMBER: COMMUNICATE CLEARLY, AND COMMUNICATE EARLY

- 5.1. Develop prescient, timely, and emotionally intelligent communications that address the worries and expectations of both young people and their families.
- 5.2. Offer support early and iteratively to position your institution as responsive, realistic, and deeply committed to genuine, positive student experiences.





YOUR STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN





YOUR STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN: AT A GLANCE

1 Help young people prepare academically

- Create segmented, subject-specific academic confidence programmes.
- Establish and promote early academic peer mentorship schemes.

2 Deliver life-skills content that speaks to the full family unit

- Build a dedicated, interactive online life-skills resource hub.
- Clearly offer targeted family webinars and parent communication channels.

3 Point the way to financial wellbeing

- Provide proactive financial literacy and budgeting tools in a tone students trust.
- Highlight on-campus employment opportunities.

4 Don't overlook commuters

- Launch tailored commuter welcome initiatives and make it clear you offer specific resources for living-at-home students.
- Build commuter-focused digital communities and give practical support in your recruitment communications.

5 Foster social connection before term starts

- Set up structured digital community-building initiatives and shout loudly about them to all students-to-be.
- Share authentic testimonials from current students — and remember that every support message is a chance to build community.

6 Engage parents with emotionally intelligent communications

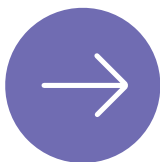
- Create parent-focused communication channels and family-focused webinars.
- Clearly position your institution as a supportive partner for both students and their families during the transition to higher education and beyond.

7 Communicate early, clearly and iteratively

- Develop prescient, timely, and emotionally intelligent communications that address the worries and expectations of both young people and their families.
- Offer support early and iteratively to position your institution as responsive, realistic, and deeply committed to genuine, positive student experiences.



READY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?



CONTACT YOUR CUSTOMER SUCCESS DIRECTOR/MANAGER

About how you can use these insights to
inform your marketing strategy.

