

A Guide for Parents / Guardians

Introduction

Going to University marks a new chapter in a young person's development. Moving to independent learning and living is an exciting time – one of exploration, not just of the subject that they have chosen to study in more depth but also exploration of themselves as people.

University will be the first time that many students meet people from cultures and environments that are very different to their own. It may also be the first time that they have to plan their own time, manage their finances and undertake independent study. This can be both exciting as well as disorientating but it is a natural part of making the transition to University as well as adulthood.

We recognise that it is a new chapter for parents/guardians too. You will likely find yourself adjusting to a different relationship as your young person becomes more independent, you see them less often and adjust to having less input in the decisions that they make. It can be a joy to see a young person flourish but also challenging as they perhaps take different paths to the ones you expected or anticipated.

We also recognise that, following the pandemic, those coming into University have perhaps had a different journey through their pre University years than other recent generations of students. For younger students coming from School, the last three years have seen them experience an interrupted education as well as more time at home at a point in their lives when they should have been mixing and exploring more with their peers, forming more relationships outside of the home and getting used to mixing independently. For older students, the disruption will be not less impactful.

How have students been impacted in the last few years?

There is a lot of discussion at the moment about the impact the last few years has had on the wellbeing of young people in particular as well as their perceived ability to manage the transition to independent living having had, for a number of them, extended periods of parental/guardianship input. Our early impressions are that, in some cases, some students seem less able to cope with obstacles or barriers which crop up. Some had a tendency to 'catastrophize' and need help in working their way through their challenges in a rational way. Usually a conversation helping them put things into perspective and giving them some coping strategies works but for others they may need some more ongoing support.

Our view is that being involved in education is positive for anyone's wellbeing – being part of a community, learning and exploring new things, and having a sense of purpose. The past few years may have had an impact on their development but we are convinced that, with the right support, young people can make the adjustment to University, building on the skills that they have utilised to get to Queen's.

How can you help your young person make the transition to University?

Parent / guardian support and encouragement can be integral to a student making a smooth transition. Each student is different – so for some this may be staying in very regular contact,

for others it might mean 'letting go' a bit more and encouraging them to make decisions for themselves and self-manage the situations they find themselves in. We all need the support of friends and family throughout our lives, but there is a point for young people when they need to be encouraged to become more independent and responsible for their own path.

Helpful tips in supporting a young person into University life;

- Remind them that feeling disorientated is normal and to stick with it – particularly in the early days of University
- Encourage them not to 'catastrophise' and remind them their support is available. Rather than avoid challenges, working through them are essential learning experiences that will stand them in good stead from life during and beyond University
- Encourage them to get involved in their course, preparing for seminars and communicating with other students. Courses will have welcome programmes and will also design the early part of the course to help students get involved in group work so that they can meet each other early
- Encourage them to explore different ways to get involved in wider University activity including Clubs and Societies either in their School or in the Students' Union; there are also opportunities to get involved in volunteering activity which is a great way to meet people and learn new skills; and a number of students also chose to work on campus, not just for the income but also to give them some further contact with people outside of their course or accommodation
- If they are struggling with their course or feeling like they are getting behind encourage them to speak to their Personal Tutor
- Students can also [access support](#) through a range of services in the Student Guidance Centre including the daily drop in for our [Wellbeing Service](#). We also have a [Learning Development Service](#) which helps students with core study skills. Encourage your young person to have a look at the web based material
- If they are really struggling to settle in their accommodation, and living in University accommodation they should speak to a member of the Residential Life Team. If they are in private accommodation and the issue is with their flatmates, they will need to discuss this with their friends. If they have signed a contract then they will likely have to honour that but if the situation becomes untenable, for example they are getting no sleep, then they can contact University Accommodation to see if there are any spare places.

Perhaps think first before you do the following;

- Don't panic if your young person is unsettled when they first move up to University – this is normal and is likely to settle down
- If they are not living at home, think carefully about encouraging them to come home too much initially. We recognise that many students will go home at the weekends but more than that and they will struggle to form early friendship groups, and their isolation will become more acute.
- Don't jump in too quickly to sort the situation for them. By all means provide them with support but do encourage them to take proactive steps to resolve their situation, which may include encouraging them to speak to the University directly
- Remember that you may not have all the facts about the situation that you are presented with and are perhaps getting just one perspective. This is particularly true if your young person is involved in a conduct, complaint or academic appeal investigation either on or off campus. Again, provide support but encourage them to engage honestly and transparently with the process – something that is much better for them in the longer run

How does the University communicate with parents/guardians?

We recognise that a large part the reason many students have made it to University is because of the support of their parents. We also recognise that as the majority of them are legally adults they have a right to privacy. The University cannot share information about students with anyone, including parents/guardians, without a student's permission.

Given the support that you have provided to get your young person to this point in their life, we recognise that this can feel difficult and that you are being kept at arm's length. This is not our intention but we do need to operate both within the law but also in a way that encourages student independence and ownership of their information.

What if I have serious concern about a student's wellbeing?

It's important for you to know that if you have serious concerns about your young person, you can of course contact the University. Significant concerns could include

- you not being able to contact them for a period of time and that this is unusual for them;
- serious concerns you have about their wellbeing following conversations with your young person (ie they mention self-harm, a sustained period of hopelessness or even suicidal ideation);
- or information that you have that would suggest they are at risk, for example social media posts.

How does the University manage concerns from parents / guardians / other external sources?

We will listen to you, take seriously your concerns and act on what you say. However, we will not necessarily confirm that your child is studying with us, their progress on their programme or whether or not they are attending their classes. Further, we will not contact you to confirm that we have spoken to your young person or, if we do make contact with them, the nature of that conversation. Be assured, we will do all we can to encourage the person to be in contact with parents / guardians but will respect their rights, as adults, to privacy. We will also always strongly encourage a student to contact their parents and/or the person who has raised the concerns. We will only come back to you without their consent if we have very serious concerns about the wellbeing of the person about who you have contacted the University.

Does the University contact next of kin or operate a 'trusted contact' system?

All students have to give the University an Emergency Contact and a GP when they register at the University. These details are used if we need to contact someone about a student in an emergency – this usually means if there is a threat to life – either the students, or another person as a result of the actions of a student. We normally require a students permission, or

at least knowledge, to contact a next of kin but would go ahead without permission if the situation warranted it.

A 'trusted contact' is someone who a student agrees we can contact if we have general concerns about their wellbeing but there is no immediate threat to life. Students are asked for a 'trusted contact' when they engage with the Disability and Wellbeing Service and are judged to be at level 2 or 3 of our stepped care model of support. In taking the 'trusted contact' information we explain our view that it is helpful to have wider family or friends involved in their situation and that we would normally only use it with their permission. If students withdraw consent to use the information at a later date we would take a risk based decision as to whether or not to use the information

When does the University contact parents / guardians about the wellbeing of a student?

Our core principle is that students should be at the heart of decision making about whether or not we contact a parent or guardian about their wellbeing.

If you have already been in touch with us, we have contacted the student, and we have very serious concerns about their wellbeing we will let you know but only if the student gives us permission. On the very rare occasion that a student does not give permission we will take a risk assessed decision as to whether or not we will break their confidence. If we make the decision to respect their right to privacy but we do have ongoing concerns we will be linking them with mental health services and other professional support services. Please note that University staff are not mental health practitioners working in a clinical setting. The risk assessments we take are based on agreed protocols and on how the student presents at a point in time.

If you have not been in touch with us and we are working with your son / daughter and have concerns we usually work with students to include their parents / guardians / trusted contacts in their situation. Bear in mind that students may not put their parents down as their 'trusted contact' and therefore ask us to include someone else other than you. If the situation is urgent and the student has not contacted you themselves we will take a risk based decision to contact you if your information has been given as the Emergency Contact.

My young person has a disability, can I be involved in discussions about their support?

We recognise that the young person is likely to be at University because of the support you have given them. We prefer students to work with us directly as we think that this is more realistic in terms of their development. This will help them take ownership and responsibility of their situation, something that will be part of a life long journey for them. As ever, each student will be different and we find that some naturally want to use moving to University as a way of moving from parental involvement – others may need more support in the initial transition. We therefore very much work with what each student wants in terms of their initial engagement with Disability Services – but would encourage students to move towards being more independent over time.

Students are regularly pointed to information on Support Services through the [MyQueen's](#) website.