

The Student-Parent's Guide to Navigating University¹

The advice in this five-step guide comes directly from a **nationwide survey of student-parents**. Their voices have been captured to help you navigate your university journey.

We hope the Guide will help you to **settle into university, manage the challenges** that you will face as a student-parent, and help you **understand the level of support** you can expect from your university.

If you have any **comments** about this Guide, if you have any **tips or advice** to add, and/or if you'd like to join a **national online community** of student parents, **please click** the link on the right and let us know!

[Click link here!](#)

If you are interested in hearing more about life as a student-parent, please do subscribe to **The Student-Parent Podcast**, available on Spotify [here](#)
(Also available on Apple podcasts, Audible and Amazon Music)

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¹ This Guide was produced by Andrea Todd using the responses to a nationwide survey which asked student-parents a series of questions about their university experience. Student-parents, for the purposes of this Guide, means those who are parents of, or guardians for, a child under 18. 41 student-parents from 14 UK universities responded to the national survey. The respondents are aged 20 to 51 and range from foundation year students to recent graduates. Thirty-six women and five men answered the survey. The first draft of the Guide was considered by a focus group of student-parents who worked with the author to finalise the Guide and provide some additional tips.



STEP 1: STARTING UNIVERSITY

What our student-parents say:

'Parenting can be challenging, so mixing that with the challenges of being a student can be overwhelming'

'Our needs differ considerably from students without children'

'Children are an entire commitment that impacts absolutely everything'

The Emotions:

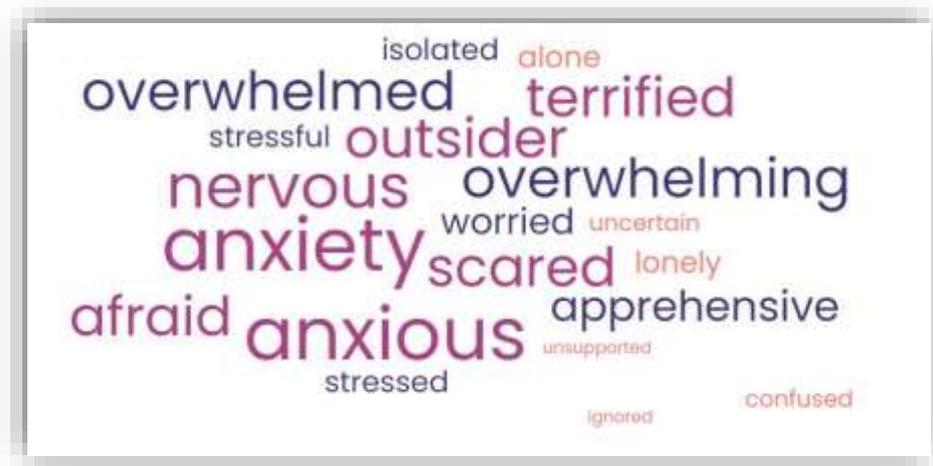
We hope you are feeling **excited**, **motivated**, **determined**, and **proud** of your achievements when you start university. Congratulations to those of you who do! Some of our student-parents reported feeling these positive emotions when they started university too.

If you are also feeling any of the emotions shown in the word cloud below, you are not alone. The word cloud shows the most common negative reactions that our student-parents reported experiencing when they started university.

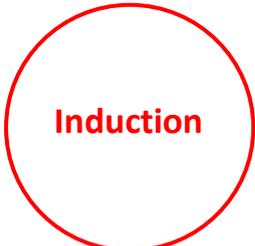
Like our student-parents, you may have been **out of education** for a while or taken a decision to **change career**. You may be worried about the **financial**

implications of going to university or about how you will be able to **balance your work and home life**. You may be feeling **guilty** at the prospect of studying whilst your children need childcare. Many of you will feel more than one (or even all!) of these emotions. Rest assured – this is perfectly normal.

The key to managing some of these emotions is understanding what to expect when you arrive at university and knowing what information and practical support you are entitled to from your university. We hope the information below helps you with this.



The Practicalities:



Induction

When you arrive at university you should have what is known as **'Induction'**. This is a session, or series of sessions, with your academic department and your personal tutor before the teaching on your modules starts. You may also be invited to a **'pre-induction'** session, which may be organised by the university specifically for student-parents before term starts, which our student-parents report being well worth attending to get to know some fellow students and help you get your bearings before your first day.



Personal tutor

All students should be **allocated to a personal tutor** when they arrive at university (you may even hear from yours before term starts). Your personal tutor is a lecturer from your department who is responsible for supporting you on a personal and academic level during your studies, and for helping you if any issues arise. If you are not allocated to a personal tutor when you arrive at university, you should speak to your Head of Department who will be able to arrange this for you. You are entitled to this support, so do not be afraid to ask.



Timetables

You should be given access to two timetables when you arrive at university (these may be included in one document):

1. The weekly **teaching timetable**, showing you, week by week, when you need to attend taught sessions with your lecturers; and
2. The **assessment timetable**, showing you when the assessments are due for each module² you study.

If you are not provided with these documents during Induction, you are entitled to ask for them. See later in this guide for things to think about when you receive these important documents.



Expectations

University students are expected to be **'independent learners'**. This means that you need to take charge of your own workload. Your university timetable will not be full of sessions from Monday to Friday. It will probably

² A module is a subject that you study within your degree. Students will typically study between 3 and 6 modules per academic year.

contain a handful of lectures³ and seminars⁴ spread across various days of the week. There will be large blocks of what looks like free time. You will need to fill the remainder of your weeks with independent study. This just means work that you do on your own to prepare for seminars and to check your understanding and finalise your notes (this is known as ‘consolidating’) after these sessions. You will need to create your own timetable which incorporates both taught sessions from the university timetable and the independent work you need to do to keep on top of your modules. We have some tips on how to do this later in this guide.



Documents

During induction, or shortly thereafter, you should be given access to the following documents and information (in addition to the timetables mentioned above):

The **Programme Handbook**: this usually contains an overview of your degree programme, and it should include details of who to contact for various issues such as the university’s wellbeing team, finance office and academic skills team. If you are not provided with this information, you are entitled to ask your personal tutor for it. See later in this guide for information on how you might use these services.

A **Module Handbook** for each module you are studying: this should contain the details of what you need to do to prepare for each of the seminars that you need to attend. Without this, you will be unable to organise your time properly. You are entitled to ask for a module handbook (which will be in paper or electronic format) at the start of each module. If you are not provided with this, ask your module leader⁵.

Many universities allow students to swap the teaching groups they are allocated to, in order to make their timetable work better for them. Details of the rules around who can ask for a swap and how to go about it should be contained in a **seminar swap policy**. If you are not provided with details of this policy during induction, you are entitled to ask for it. It will help you to organise your time (see Getting Organised, below).

The university’s **mitigating circumstances policy** will be a very important document for you to refer to throughout your studies. It broadly deals with what you can do if something unexpected happens (e.g. your child is ill) when one of your assessments is due to be submitted. We deal with this in more detail below, in the Assessments section. If you are not provided with a copy of this policy during induction, you should ask for it.

³ A lecture is a session (live or recorded) in which your lecturer will give you an overview of an area you are studying. You generally do not need to prepare for a lecture – you just need to listen and take notes. Where delivered live, they are generally delivered just once, to all students who study that module at the same time.

⁴ Seminars – also known as tutorials or workshops - are smaller sessions (typically groups of up to around 20) in which students discuss the detail of topics. There are several seminar groups repeated across a week. You need to prepare to attend these sessions so you are ready to discuss the topic at hand when you arrive.

⁵ All modules have a module leader (sometimes called a module convenor). This is the lecturer who is responsible for making sure that the module runs smoothly, for setting the assessments, and for ensuring that any other lecturers on the module team deliver the material in a consistent way.



Social

Some of our student-parents reported feeling isolated from their fellow students during their own induction periods, particularly if their new acquaintances were socialising during the evenings when they needed to be at home for their families.

Some universities have established **support groups** to cater for student-parents and/or mature parents (we know that not all student-parents are necessarily also mature students). Some academic departments also have student-parent support groups, and/or **study groups**.

During induction, we recommend asking whether the department and/or university have these support groups and if so, how you can join. See later in this guide for more information on these support groups, and on making connections more generally at university. We also recommend making sure you get hold of a list of **social induction activities** you may be able to join in with during the daytime if childcare is tricky for the evening.



STEP 2: MAKING CONNECTIONS & ACCESSING SUPPORT

What our student-parents say:

'I would not have finished my course with the grades I did without [my personal tutor]'

'Linking in with other parents who face the same struggles [...] can offer a support network for each other'

'socialise with others on your course – everyone is in the same situation'

'If you have concerns speak to [Student Services] – they will help'



YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR

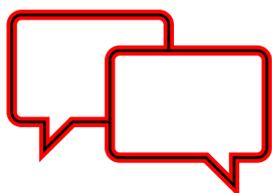
As a student-parent, your relationship with your **personal tutor** will be very important, as they should be able to assist you with navigating your timetable, deal proactively with any absences, and guide you when unexpected issues arise around assessment time.

You should spend time getting to know your personal tutor and take the opportunity to attend any meetings they invite you to. If they are not already aware when you first meet them, we recommend letting them know that you are a parent. We recommend that you how old your children are, what your childcare situation is, and whether you foresee any issues with the timetables you have been given (see later in this guide for how to deal with this final element).

Many universities ask their personal tutors to check in with their personal tutees (usually by way of organising a meeting) once per term. However, part of a personal tutor's job is to meet, speak

and/or email with you outside of these times should you need it. You do not need to wait to be invited to a personal tutor meeting to have a chat with your personal tutor. You should ask your personal tutor during induction about the best way to contact them (e.g. some prefer to be emailed, others prefer you to come to their office, or to meet them online). This way, when you need them, you will have their contact preferences to hand.

The value of developing a good relationship with your personal tutor is underlined by our student-parents...



'Without [their] support I could not have continued'

'I could not have [made it] through my undergraduate without her being by my side.'

...as is the importance of proactively contacting them as soon as you feel you need to:

'I did struggle and often by the time I spoke up I was over consumed in worry'

Do not be shy to ask your personal tutor for support if you have queries you need help with, or if an issue arises. If they cannot help you, they should be able to signpost you to someone who can. If you do not feel you are getting the support you need from your personal tutor, you are entitled to raise this with your Head of Department (this is the person who line manages the lecturers who work in your department).



CONNECTING WITH FELLOW STUDENTS

Feeling a sense of community at university will help your wellbeing and enhance the likelihood of you staying on at university even when times are tough.

Fellow
parents

University-wide, and departmental, **support groups for student-parents** can be very helpful in making you feel connected to your fellow student-parents, who understand the challenges you are facing. These groups may meet up in person or be hosted online (as a chat function much like WhatsApp, or as online video catch ups).

There is no obligation to be actively involved in the groups' activities, but joining them, and having **a line of communication** with fellow student-parents, will most likely be useful to you: you never know when you might have a query which is best answered by someone who has experience of what you are encountering (e.g. questions about using your Childcare Grant might be answered more quickly by a quick message on the chat board than by trying to navigate Student Finance).

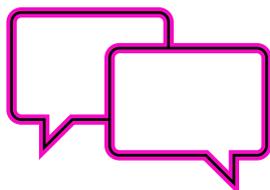
If your **department** does not have a student-parent group, **would you like to see one set up** for the benefit of you and your fellow student-parents? If so, it would be worth raising this with your personal tutor to see how this might work.

Might you and your fellow student-parents be interested in setting up a **study group** which meets on a particular day in the library to work on preparation and to have a chat during coffee

breaks? This might be a nice way to ensure you block out time to work on your preparation whilst also making connections with students who have similar circumstances to you.



Having said that, don't forget about **making friends with students who do not have children!** Your needs are different to students without children, but you are all on the same journey (and many may have other demands on their time such as working almost full-time hours to help them fund their studies). Our student-parents shared their experiences of being open to making friends:



'Speak to your cohort and make friends. I learnt a lot from the younger students and was inspired by them'

'My fellow students supported me and I supported them. We constantly encouraged each other to carry on, keep going, not give up and that the final goal was right in front of us and that we would be finishing this together'

'I have met some amazing friends, who will be my friends for life'.



EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

Universities are well known for the wide range of clubs and societies that students can get involved in. There is no obligation at all to join any of these clubs or societies (indeed it is likely that your time will be too squeezed to commit to a time-intensive extra-curricular activity).

However, it is worth keeping in mind that many universities and/or academic departments organise activities and events that are designed to help you **enhance your CV**. For example, a law department might give you the opportunity to volunteer in giving free legal advice to members of the community, or your department (or university Careers team) may host one-off events with guest speakers on particular careers, or on skills for work, such as networking.

It is worth considering getting involved in these activities and events so that your CV stands out when you graduate. There is no rush to do so – **you may choose to wait until first year is over** to get involved, for example. It is worth checking out when events take place (if in the evening, and you cannot attend, you can ask whether there will be a live stream of the event or a recording to listen to – this should be easy for the organisers to arrange) and asking how much of a commitment any volunteering opportunities would be (it may be that you can fit such volunteering into your university day so that it does not encroach on your family time).



SPECIALIST SUPPORT TEAMS

During induction you should be provided with details of the remit of, and how to contact, the university-wide teams noted below. They are often grouped under the heading of 'Student Services'. If you are not provided with this information (or told where to find it), you should ask for this from your personal tutor.

The university's **wellbeing services**. Most universities will offer mental health support to its students. Our student-parents reported needing support with their mental wellbeing during university, so it is worth ensuring that you have the details of this free service to hand should you need them.

Wellbeing

Academic
skills and
library

The university's **academic skills** and **library teams**. Most universities offer a service (separate from your department) which helps students with things such as the skill of writing an academic essay or undertaking (and referencing) research for an essay, which you may well not have encountered before. You may feel it would help to access the services of the academic skills team and/or the library team, especially if you have been out of education for some time. This team may also offer advice and support on time management. We recommend looking into the useful services that your university's academic skills team offers early on in your studies, and then accessing this service sooner rather than later if you feel it would benefit you. These services are free of charge and are designed to help you maximise your chances of doing well on your course, so it makes sense to take this opportunity.

The university's **finance office**. If you are struggling financially, you may choose to look into accessing bursaries to help fund your studies. You may choose to contact the finance office sooner rather than later to enquire as to what bursaries (if any) are available and what you need to do to qualify, and apply, for them. This team should also be familiar with the rules relating to the Childcare Grant.

Finance



STEP 3: GETTING – AND STAYING - ORGANISED

What our student-parents say:

'university is a very independent learning environment - organisation is key'

'I was stressed due to poor time management'

'Stay organised, students who aren't parents need to do this anyway but with a child it really is vital'

'Half terms are always difficult as the university runs through these periods'



CHECKING YOUR UNIVERSITY TIMETABLE WORKS WITH CHILDCARE

Your university timetable may show that you are in university for only a few hours per week, spread across several days. This is normal for a university timetable. The timetabling team within a university are usually separate from the academic departments and they will have hundreds of modules, and thousands of students, to timetable into a limited number of rooms.

The first thing you need to do when you receive your timetable is work out how your timetable fits with your childcare arrangements. If the timetable does not work for your childcare, you can speak to your personal tutor to discuss the following:

1. If the **timing of sessions makes it impossible for you to attend** due to childcare commitments (e.g. the sessions start at 9am or finishes late in the afternoon):
 - a. **Where the module is optional** (i.e. you choose from a list which modules to take, rather than being told what you are doing): would it be possible to change to an alternative optional module whose timetable works better for you?
 - b. **Where the module is not optional, or you cannot/do not wish to change modules:**
 - i. For lectures (which are usually only delivered once, to all students) - is there a lecture recording that is available to allow you to catch up?
 - ii. For seminars (which are usually delivered several times, to different groups of students) – would it be possible to swap to an alternative seminar group which has its sessions at a time that allows you to attend?
2. If you are **timetabled over several days but only a few hours per day**, would it be possible to swap seminar groups to allow you to come into university on fewer days, thus saving on childcare costs?

It **may not be possible** to find alternatives, but it is worth having a conversation with your personal tutor at an early stage to discuss this possibility if you feel you need to.

TIP: Bear in mind that coming into university on as few days as possible might not be the ultimate goal - it might benefit you to be in university over more days, giving you the opportunity to do

independent work around your timetabled sessions on university premises (see the 'Building Your Own Weekly Timetable' tips below). This will very much be a decision for you and will depend on your own circumstances.



BUILDING YOUR OWN WEEKLY TIMETABLE

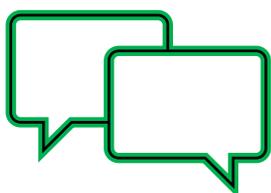
The sessions on your university timetable will not be the only time you need to spend on your university work. Each university module is worth a certain number of credits and each credit is worth ten hours. **On an undergraduate degree**, each academic year is worth 120 credits. This means you are expected to spend around **1,200 hours** over the course of each full-time academic year on your studies. This includes the time you spend in class with your lecturers (in lectures and seminars) as well as time spent preparing for, and consolidating after, your timetabled sessions, in addition to working on your assessments.

After attending a lecture in which your lecturer will give you an overview of the topic, you will typically be expected to do some **independent reading** online or in textbooks/journals, to deepen your understanding of the area. You will commonly be expected to undertake **preparatory exercises** and prepare answers to some questions which you will bring with you to discuss in a seminar.

To plan your time, you will need **access to a module handbook** for each module, as mentioned above. Your module handbook will be important in helping you to plan your time outside of class, as it will include **instructions on what you need to do** for each seminar and will help you understand how much work you need to do and when. If you do not plan in your preparation and consolidation time, it will be **easy to fall behind**, or find yourself working into the night when your children are in bed which is likely to leave you exhausted, so we recommend **getting into a routine** as early as you can. It will be helpful to discuss your plans for managing your time with your personal tutor – they may be able to give you some insight into the times of year when your time is more likely to be squeezed by seminar preparation and assessment preparation.

Some of our student-parent recommendations on planning your time are included below:

'Treat university as a full-time job, plan to study 5 days a week during term time and school hours and use breakfast clubs and after school clubs if needed. That way when the kids are at home you should be able to spend your time with them'



'Try to stay and do work at uni so home life won't be a distraction.'

'Be organised with your timetable. Know your childcare routine and have plans in place. Study when you can and remember there must be a life balance.'

'You can use the childcare grant for the days you are not at Uni to give yourself study time.'

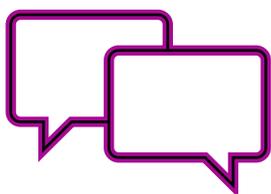


FACTORING IN CHILDREN'S HOLIDAYS

If you have school aged children or use a childcare setting which closes for certain periods, you will need to factor this into your planning. Your university **holidays may not match** with your children's school holidays so you may have classes timetabled, or university work planned into, the weeks your children are off.

You should **check this** as soon as your timetable is released. It may be that you need to get **childcare** plans in place for some or all of your child's school holiday in order to get your university work done, or if you wish to avoid this, you may need to **move your workload** and fit more work into the weeks leading up to, and following, school holidays so that you can be free to spend time with your family when the children are off school.

You may feel **guilty** at the prospect of using childcare when you are studying. You are not alone – our student-parents also reported this feeling:



'I had mum guilt putting them in childcare when I was at home.'

'[I had] to be disciplined and take myself away from my son at weekends to study or find additional childcare which was costly and often left me feeling guilty.'

However, remember that your long university summer break will allow you to spend time with your family, and that your university years will be over sooner than you know. As one of our student-parents commented:

'[student-parents should know that] it is going to be extremely hard [but] it is possible. Also - pain is temporary, [a] degree is forever!'



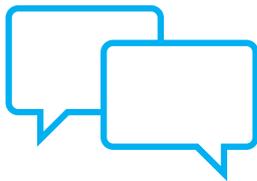
DEALING WITH ABSENCE

As a student-parent, it is likely that you will need to **miss sessions** for one reason or another. Your child may become ill, your childcare may fall through, or you may simply need to attend a parents evening or sports day.

Being an independent learner does not mean that you cannot ask for help. On the contrary, your module leader or module lecturers are expected by the university to offer you assistance if you need it. It is not the role of lecturers to spoon feed you the content of their module, but you are entitled to expect that if you miss a session and fall behind (as may be the case if your child is ill or if your childcare falls through), that they will explain **how to keep on, or get back on, track**. As well as you taking the initiative to speak to a classmate to see if they have any notes you may borrow to understand what you missed, we recommend that you **contact your module leader** or module lecturer as soon as you know you will miss the session to explain your absence, and to **ask** about the following:

1. Can you attend an **alternative live session** (if there is one) as a one-off to replace the session you could not attend?
2. Is there a **recording available** of the session you missed?
3. Were there any **documents handed out** during the session that you can have a copy of?
4. Is there **anything else** they recommend you do, to make sure you have caught up on the missed session?

We recommend that you do this at the earliest opportunity. We also recommend speaking to your personal tutor at the earliest opportunity if you feel you are falling behind. Here is some insight from our student-parents into why **dealing with your absence proactively** is so important:



'It is easy to just fall under as [we] get bogged down with so much'

'You miss a week or so off lectures, you fall behind and need to play catch up.'

'There will be times when your child gets ill just as a piece of coursework is due or an exam is happening. If you are not on top of your work already and have been missing lectures and seminars, this is going to be detrimental to achieving your potential. However, if you have been staying organised, you can afford to miss the odd night if your child is ill (or just being a nightmare!).'



STEP 4: MANAGING ASSESSMENTS

What our student-parents say:

'unexpected events can occur more often to a student-parent'

'things are more likely to take an unexpected turn, especially if children get ill'

'being a parent is a responsibility that cannot be paused'

'when my child is ill, it's impossible to meet deadlines sometimes'



WORKING OUT YOUR TIMEFRAMES

The **assessments** on your assessment timetable will need to be worked on in the run up to the assessment deadline. Some assessment questions are released at the start of term, others a certain number of weeks in advance, and you are expected to do others within a certain window (e.g. 24 hours, or a 2- or 3- hour block for a traditional exam). You will need to think carefully about how to organise your time (and your childcare) to make sure you can prepare for, and undertake, these assessments. If it is not made clear on the assessment timetable itself, you should **ask how long in advance of the deadline each assessment is released**, so you know how much time you have available to work on each one. Some coursework assessments are set to be handed in just after a university holiday, with the expectation that students will be able to spend their spare time on preparing these assessments. This is a challenge for student-parents, especially when a number of deadlines fall at similar times, as your **children are likely to be off school/away** from their childcare setting at this time. Our student-parents found this a struggle:



'It is a lot harder for students that have children at home to complete assignments'

'Christmas [is tricky], especially when assignments are due, as I want to do well but be there for my children'

'Deadlines being so close together, it's so hard to get so much free time in a short [period]'

This will need to be factored into your assessment preparation. If there is sufficient time to work on the assessment in advance of the holiday period, consider whether you can do this. If not, and you need to work on the assessment during the holiday, consider what childcare plans you can put in place to enable you to spend time on your assessment.

In the case where the assessment will not be released in sufficient time for you to work on it before the holidays, and where there is nobody available to help you with childcare so you can complete it in the holidays, speak to your personal tutor at the earliest opportunity. They will be able to give you some advice on whether an **extension or deferral** may be possible (see below).



MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

All universities have mitigating circumstances policies. These may also be known as extenuating circumstances, or exceptional circumstances, policies.

These policies are in place to help students who, for reasons beyond their control, are either unable to submit an assessment on time, or unable to submit it at all, or who do submit, but their performance is adversely affected.

Given the nature of parenthood, and the number of assessments you will be handing in over the course of your studies, **it is likely that you will need to rely on the mitigating circumstances policy** during your university journey. This is nothing to worry about- the policy is there for a reason!

You should **get hold of a copy** of this policy at your earliest opportunity and speak to your personal tutor about how it works, so you know what to expect should you need to rely on it. Considering the policy with a clear head will be easier than trying to navigate it in a panic with an ill child and an impending deadline!

Each university's mitigating circumstances policy is different, and you need to check the exact rules of your policy, but a few notes are included below to help you understand the general rules.

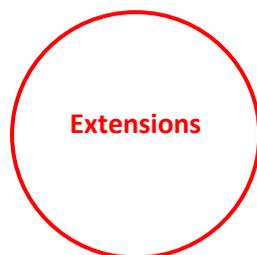
Generally, students are **penalised for handing in late or not handing in** at all:

If a student hands in an assessment late, they can either be marked as having failed that assessment, or have marks deducted from their score to penalise them for handing in late (known as a 'late penalty').

If a student does not hand in (or turn up for) an assessment at all, they will be marked as having failed that assessment.

In most cases, students have three attempts to pass an assessment, so the student would move on to the next attempt of three, which would usually be capped at the pass mark of 40% (so even if they scored 70%, their record would show them having scored 40%).

There are usually different **types of application** that can be made:



An **extension** is where you apply for extra time – usually a number of days - to hand in an assessment if there are circumstances which mean you will not be able to submit it by the deadline (this will generally not be available for time constrained assessments e.g. exams and 24-hour assessments).

If accepted, you can hand in late without receiving a late work penalty and your work will be marked as if you had handed in on time.

Deferrals

A **deferral** usually relates to:

- where you know you will not be able to submit the assessment at all during the current assessment window; or
- where you did hand in the assessment, but the quality of your work was adversely affected by reasons beyond your control.

If accepted, instead of being marked as having failed the assessment, your record will show that you have deferred it, so instead of moving on to your second attempt (capped at 40%) in the next assessment window, the work you hand in will be marked as a first attempt.

Late penalty waivers

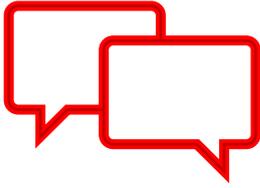
A **late penalty waiver** is where you hand in late and are given a late penalty, but because of mitigating factors that meant you could not hand in on time, you want the late penalty to be removed from your score.

If accepted, the late penalty will be removed from your score.

In terms of **the process**, you will need to fill in an application form (typically online) to apply for mitigating circumstances. There will be strict deadlines to adhere to. The application will either be considered by your department, or by a central university panel. This may depend on which sort of application you have made. Most applications need to be supported by evidence.

It is important to get to the bottom of the **evidence required** for each type of application. Policies at some universities ask for independent third-party evidence (e.g. a letter from a GP) of how an event has impacted upon your child or upon you. Clearly, this will not be possible where your child has been excluded from school/nursery for having vomited, for example, or where your child is ill but you cannot secure a GP appointment, or where school is closed for unexpected reasons. We recommend you speak to your personal tutor to understand the types of evidence required for different types of application. For example, would an email from school/nursery explaining your child has been excluded due to sickness suffice? Some institutions will accept correspondence from school/nursery, or in some cases, a supporting statement from the student's personal tutor corroborating the circumstances you are experiencing. Some universities allow 7-day extensions on certain assessments without the need for evidence. We recommend you seek your personal tutor's support in helping you understand the rules applicable to your university's policy.

Do not be shy to make use of the mitigating circumstances policy. If you have a valid reason - and can produce the relevant evidence within the relevant time frame - **it is well worth giving yourself some leeway** to enable you to do your best work.

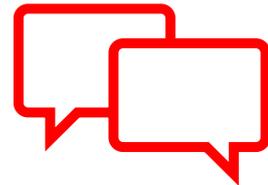


'There are significantly more factors that can affect [our] ability to complete work'

'Tell your lecturers about your caring responsibilities and ask for short extensions on work when needed, it is better than rushing assignments'

Our student-parents, do, however, also **caution against over-reliance** on the mitigating circumstances policy:

'it should be used as a contingency plan - as a last resort. [Be careful because] if you ask to have an extension on one assessment [it may] map over into another'



The key point to think about is the extent to which taking an extension for one assessment will squeeze the time you have available for the next assessment due, and the ones after that. It will be important to take a good look at the assessment calendar, teaching calendar, and your home calendar, and speak to your personal tutor about whether an extension is a good idea in the circumstances. They will have a view of how the year looks as a whole and will be able to offer some guidance.

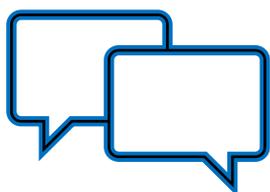


STEP 5: REMEMBERING YOU'VE GOT THIS!

We hope that the advice in this guide will help you to **get organised** with your work, **plan** for your assessments, **feel confident** about your relationships with your personal tutor and fellow students, and be encouraged to **ask for help** when you need it.

Despite the advice in this guide, life as a student-parent is hard. You will have **highs and lows**, you will feel pressure and you may feel **disheartened** at times. You may even have periods when you feel that you cannot complete the university journey. This is **all completely normal!** On this note, we recommend that you locate, and keep to hand, the details of your university **wellbeing and mental health** teams, and, if they have one, your university's helpline to access mental health support out of hours.

Our student-parents - who are on, or have completed, their university journey - provide some final thoughts which we hope will encourage you on your own journey:

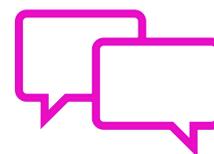


'Do not be afraid to say you are a parent, it is a life experience that offers so many skills.'

'Don't be scared to return to education. It doesn't matter what school you went to or how well you did'

'this cohort has a set of skills that have been formed through experience, which can be extremely beneficial'

'complet[ing] assessments and meet[ing] deadlines was something I needed to persist with to truly follow my passion. My children motivate me to keep up my determination. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have got as far as I have.'



'I knew I was getting a degree which was the starting point for a successful career for me and to give my daughter the best life.'



'I was scared starting University as I thought I would be the oldest there and young students might not speak to me. I felt uneducated as I have only attended a secondary school and have been out of education for many years. I didn't think I could achieve what I did. This was completely the opposite when I got there. I have made some amazing friends of all ages [and] the best bit is I achieved a 2.1 [...] I did it!'

*'Taking time out to spend with your family is an **absolute must**. Try to **include your children** in your student life as much as possible. I don't mean take them to lectures, but to talk with them repeatedly about your experiences, how you're feeling, and why you are taking this journey.*



*Including them in your experience will allow them to see that **you are taking rewarding steps** to increase possibilities in life. This will hopefully show them that **they can achieve anything in life** if they put their mind to it.'*

When finalising this Guide, our student-parent focus group members provided some additional advice which they wanted you to see before turning to the appendices and getting on with your planning:

'Just remember to enjoy yourself. There's a lot of information here about what's going to happen and what you can do - but try not to get overwhelmed and just enjoy the experience.

It is going to be difficult, but as a parent, you've already experienced difficulty anyway.

So just take it all in and enjoy yourself'

'Embrace the journey!'

APPENDIX 1: MY INDUCTION CHECKLIST

PERSONAL TUTOR DETAILS	
Name and email address of personal tutor:	
How do they prefer to be contacted?	
How often will my personal tutor contact me formally?	
What is the best way to set up a meeting outside of these times if I need one?	
DOCUMENTS - do I have (in paper format or via an online link):	
Teaching timetable	
Assessment timetable [do I know how long in advance each assessment is released, so I know how much time I have to spend on it?]	
Programme Handbook	
Module Handbooks	
Seminar swap policy	
Extenuating circumstances policy	
SUPPORT SERVICES – do I have the details of what is offered by, and contact details for:	
Wellbeing services	
Academic Skills team and Library team	
Finance office	
FORWARD PLANNING	
Does the teaching timetable work for childcare? [if not, meet with personal tutor about whether swaps possible]	
Does the assessment timetable cause any issues? [if so, discuss with personal tutor]	
Do I have a plan in place for how I will plan my time outside of taught sessions each week?	
Do I know what I should do if I miss a session(s)?	
Do I know what to do if I need an extension for an assessment (and evidence requirements)?	
Do I know what to do if I need to apply for a deferral of an assessment (and evidence requirements)?	
PEER SUPPORT	
Is there an institutional student-parent group? How do I join?	
Is there a departmental student-parent group? How do I join?	

APPENDIX 2: TIME PLANNING TEMPLATES

We have made this appendix to help you think about how to plan your time week by week. You might want to fill out the weekly time planning table below by answering the questions posed - or use a weekly calendar view (overleaf) to visualise your time in blocks - or both!

WEEKLY TIME PLANNING TABLE

Timetabled Time:	
How many hours of lectures do I have this week?	
How many hours of seminars do I have this week?	
Independent Work Time:	
How many hours of preparation time will I put aside for seminars? ⁶	
How many hours will I put aside for consolidating (checking over and making sure I understand) the work we have done in seminars?	
When is the next assessment deadline? How many weeks is this from this week? Will I put time aside this week to work on this assessment? [yes/no] If so, how many hours?	
Adding these up, how many hours of independent work do I have for this week? ⁷	
Committing to Dates and Times:	
What else do I need to plan in this week? Children's pick up/drop off/other activities? List them below:	
Which blocks of time will I spend with family this week? List days and times you are blocking out:	
When will I fit in my independent work? ⁸ [note the days and the times of the blocks you will put aside for this – we recommend blocks of at least one hour, ideally longer]	
Where will I do this work? [e.g. at home, in the library on campus between timetabled sessions]	
Can I make time for myself (even an hour to grab a coffee with a friend on campus)? When can I fit this in? Commit to a time and a date to make sure you take this break!	

⁶ Ask your module leader or module lecturer how much time you should be putting aside to prepare for seminars. Be careful of what's on early next week – you may need to prepare Monday's sessions by the end of this week to keep your weekend free!

⁷ Remember, independent work is the time you need to prepare for seminars, plus the time you need to consolidate, as well as any assessment preparation/work that you need to build in.

WEEKLY CALENDAR

We have prepared **an example** of how a weekly calendar might look. This is for a student who has three seminars this week (for modules A, B and C), a seminar next Monday (for module D) and an assessment (for module C) due in four weeks. We assume that when on campus, all independent work is done in the university library.

Your calendar will depend on your own university timetable, childcare plans and other commitments – this is just an example to show you the sorts of blocks you will need to think about. As a rule, it is helpful to plan to block out evenings, and some full days, when you are not doing university work to **ensure you get some down time**.

When making your weekly calendar, start by deciding **where you will be** each day (at home or on campus). Then insert the sessions you have been **timetabled** to attend (highlighted in green in the example below). Next, decide where you will be able to slot in your seminar **preparation** (highlighted blue in the example) and **consolidation** (highlighted yellow in the example) for sessions that week and the following week. If appropriate, add in any **assessment preparation** (highlighted pink in the example). Make sure you build in **travel time** to get to and from campus (have a **campus map** to hand - and a plan for where you will park if you are driving!).

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
ON CAMPUS	AT HOME	ON CAMPUS	ON CAMPUS	AT HOME	Block out Saturday all day – no university work	Block out Sunday daytime – no university work Sunday evening: 30 mins to write next week's planning document.
9.30-10.30: Lecture module B 10.30-11.30: Lecture module A	9.15 – 10.15: Finish Prep for module B seminar on Weds 10.15-1.15: Prep for module A seminar on Thurs	10.00 – 11.30: Seminar module B	10.00-11.30: Seminar module C	9.15 – 12.00: Consolidation of module A seminar and module C seminar		
11.30 – 12.15: Break	1.15-2.15: Break	11.30-12.15: Break	11.30-12.30: Break	12-12.30: Break		
12.15-2.45: Prep for module B seminar on Weds – in library	2.15-4.45: Assessment prep for module C assessment (due in 4 weeks)	12.15-1.45: Consolidation of seminar module B 2.00 – 3.00: Lecture module C 3.00 – 5.30: Prep for module C seminar on Thurs	1.00-2.30: Seminar module A	12.30-3.00: Prep for next Monday's module D seminar		
3.15: school pick up	5.00: after school club pick up	6.00: after school club pick up. Late evening: if necessary, finish prep for module C seminar Thurs 11am	3.15: school pick up	3.15: school pick up		

