

Advice from Former Pingle Sixth Form Students

James Dennis

Sixth Form: 2005-2007

Warwick University

I have been studying at university ever since I left Sixth Form, completing my undergraduate degree at the University of Warwick and my post graduate studies at Royal Holloway, University of London. I am now a Senior Lecturer in Journalism at Portsmouth University. As a result I have experience of being both a prospective applicant and assessing student applications. Hopefully, the following pointers offer some useful advice for you as you choose where to study:

Go to open days: You will spend the next three (or more!) years of your life at university. It is essential that you choose somewhere that suits you. For some people a sprawling city university may be perfect, offering something entirely different from Swadlincote. Personally, I preferred the close knit community offered by a campus university. Open days provide a great opportunity to get a feel for a location and what it would be like to study there.

League tables really aren't everything: With a whole range of columns and often conflicting advice, university league tables are not student friendly. The Guardian prioritises student experience, while The Times is more focused on research excellence. Although you may wish to factor in how a university is perceived for employability in the future, I think there are much more important factors to consider when making your decision, for instance: how much contact time do you get each week (especially for those looking to do a course in the social sciences); how available and responsive are staff; is there a placement scheme or an international exchange programme available? I have experience of working and studying at four universities and these factors can vary dramatically regardless of where an institution ranks in a league table.

Speak to current and completed students: The best way to answer these questions is to speak to those students who have taken or are currently taking the course. The Student Room: <http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/> is a fantastic resource. It has a number of guides that will help you make your decision and a forum to consult others. Be wary of Facebook groups as some are led by university staff who may not offer the same critical insights.

Explore university-specific grants: For many, university is the first time that will manage your own finances. When I received my first loan instalment I thought it would be a great idea to invest £60 in Pokemon Snap for the Nintendo 64 and buy a round for my entire block (52 people!). It wasn't. Fortunately many universities offer grants for a wide range of prospective students. Often these are hidden away on the finance pages of the university's website, so it is worth taking some time to see what is available. Your prospective department's Admissions Tutor may also be able to help you with this.

Show your enthusiasm for the subject in your personal statement: Writing your personal statement can be a daunting task. However, it is important to remember that this is only one part of your application. No university will accept or reject you on your personal statement alone! The key message you want to put across is your enthusiasm for the subject. You can do this by developing your interest outside of your school work. Consider doing the following: (1) read books, blogs, and specialist publications around your subject; (2) follow and interact with academics on Twitter who are active in your subject area; (3) seek relevant work experience; (4) outline how this course will bolster your career prospects; (5) start a blog where you reflect on your subject area.

Check the course content in advance: One thing that I wish I had done prior to studying for my undergraduate degree was check the course structure more thoroughly. The range of modules on offer didn't really match up with my interests and so I had to choose a couple of options that I did not enjoy. Normally you won't find detailed course outlines in the university's prospectus but this information should be available on the website of the department you are applying to. Most will also produce department-specific leaflets that you can pick up at their open day.

Ben Wooton**Sixth Form: 2007-2009****Durham University**

University was a great experience for me, because it quickly pushes you to become more independent. Suddenly you're completely in control of your own future, and the personal development you'll undergo is rapid. Organising your lecture timetable, analysing passages in books and presenting to a group of students may not seem like proper 'work', but actually the transferable skills you develop are invaluable. Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, there's something for everyone to get involved in at most universities, and enough people that you definitely will find yourself with a good group of friends – it's not all booze and socials! In fact often it's the extra-curricular activities that really shine through when you're looking for a job at the end. Whether that's working at the weekends (soft skills are crucial, and retail built my confidence immensely) or getting involved in charity events (I fund-raised to go to Peru, which looked fantastic on my CV and was one of the best weeks of my life), these are the things that you can talk about at interviews when presented with competency-based questions.

A piece of advice from me is don't lose contact with your old friends. Easier said than done sometimes, but I'm still best friends with Dave, Toby and Daniel and it's great to have that network to come back when I'm in the Midlands.

Don't rush your decision, I went to Durham and found out very quickly it wasn't for me. It all came down to a lack of research. Ask everyone for advice, visit the campus, and pick a subject that you have an interest in. Three years is a long time (despite it feeling like the shortest three years of my life), and if you don't find your subject interesting there's no chance you'll stick to it for three years. Ultimately, despite my moaning I clearly did find business interesting!

Something else that stands out towards the end of university is the importance of A levels. Whilst it is easy to assume that once you get to university your A Levels are forgotten, actually an A level in a mathematical or computer-oriented subject can be a necessary requirement to even get your CV past the first stage of an application. That's not to say that everyone should take maths, but it is important to appreciate the value of good A level grades!

I'm soon to start my second year on Vodafone's graduate scheme, and it's been really rewarding so far. University, among other things, has enabled me to do that and honestly, not coming from a privileged background shouldn't put people off the idea of getting into senior or director level positions. If you're passionate about 'success' and willing to push yourself, you'll get where you want to be.

Lucy Smith**Sixth Form: 2012-2014****Loughborough University**

The Pingle Sixth Form was a definite catalyst for pursuing and bettering my future. However, I remember that making the decision on what happened next was so important, though for me it was an easy one. Choosing a subject of interest is key, something which you are passionate about and undoubtedly enjoy. It was all about taking the reins and controlling the next step to higher education, my future. Of course, it was always clear that The Pingle School 'had my back'. Teachers were there with guidance and advice, and needless to say it was always easy to talk to any one of my tutors. Personally, I have a lot to credit the school for equipping me, with the tools to go forward.

As a Fine Art student at Loughborough University, I have found total happiness in my choices. For me university has so far been enlightening, enriching not only on a level of study but on a personal level. Meeting and making friends with a diverse crowd who have new ideas and opinions, is one which you can only really express through the experience of university. It goes without saying that, there is a lot of fun to be had and the friends you make are very much your friends for life. But more importantly, university has challenged and pushed. In my field, university has opened the door to explore with a range of facilities and apparatus to use at leisure and pursue any ideas.

If you love learning or if you want to broaden your horizon, university is for you!

Alexandra Banton

Sixth Form: 2013-2015

London College of Fashion

My name is Alexandra Banton and I am a previous student of the Pingle School Sixth Form. From an early age I knew I wanted to pursue a career as a Makeup Artist for Film and TV and never really considered anything else. I completed my GCSEs at The William Allitt School and also took any opportunities that gave me relevant work experience. Whilst studying for my exams I always kept in mind what I really wanted to do so I never turned down any experiences and constantly thought ahead to my CV and personal statement.

After my GCSEs I decided to come to The Pingle School and complete my two years of Sixth Form to get me the qualifications I needed to apply for my dream University. Art and Design was a huge factor for me when choosing which Sixth Form to attend and after visiting on an open day I loved the previous students' artwork and the whole space was really welcoming so this helped me finalise my decision.

Before deciding my final four A-level options I Googled and phoned my University asking for their advice and what options they believe would help me to be a successful applicant, I took on their advice and chose: Art, Product Design, English Literature and Psychology. I've always known I was more of a creative student and after my first year I decided that Psychology wasn't for me so decided to drop it to really focus on my other three subjects. I did focus mainly on Art but to my surprise I enjoyed English Literature the most with Mrs Matthews and Miss Robinson, before Sixth Form I was hesitant to take this subject, but my University said that this would be a huge benefit to me if I got on the course and they were right. So this proved to me that taking chances often pays off.

The second year came around so quickly and turned out to be one of the most stressful times, I wanted to ensure I had a really strong personal statement as well as my required grades, along with these, I was trying to gain as many experiences as possible to add to my statement and had my part time job that I still go back and work for now to help fund things whilst at University alongside this I volunteered at The Air Ambulance shop in Swadlincote to gain more team work skills and confidence.

Once I was finally happy with my statement and after getting it thoroughly checked by multiple teachers, I uploaded it. I then applied to three different Universities, Leeds College of Art, Arts University of Bournemouth and London College of Fashion, I didn't use all of my options because there was nowhere else that I wanted to go, in my head I knew London was the only real contender for me and I wouldn't have been happy anywhere else, however my family told me over and over, "don't put all of your eggs in one basket" but that's exactly what I did, I purely focused on London and was not going to settle for anything else, I believe if you want something so desperately why bother approaching it half-heartedly?

University Interviews soon came around and annoyingly London College of Fashion was last, to add even more pressure I had my driving test that same week, so overall it was extremely stressful. My interview was for a place on the Hair, Makeup and Prosthetics for Film and TV, at the open day the course leader announced that this was the most applied to course with around 600 applicants every year and only 40 places available, to put things into more perspective she carried on to say it was the equivalent of getting into Oxford to study Maths! This surprisingly didn't help with my nerves and to be honest knocked my confidence quite a bit as I began to doubt myself.

I got through my interview and then had the horrendous wait to find out whether I had got a place. During this time, I carried on studying for my A-level exams, even more determined to get my required grades and UCAS points. The teachers at The Pingle School were extremely engaged and didn't hesitate to help guide me and show me how to get my work to its best standard.

After my exams, my family and I went on a trip to Cornwall and it was during the week I got my A-level results back, when that day came I signed in to my UCAS and it said I had been accepted on to the course! It quickly hit me that in around a month I would be moving to London by myself, this was an extremely exciting but scary thought, all of my friends had chosen somewhere much more local and knew a few other people that were going the same place.

When I moved to London it was very overwhelming and I got really bad home sickness, my course wasn't starting until the beginning of October and so I came home after only one week of being there, now looking back on it I'm so glad I did, it gave me a fresh start when I returned. My course started and straight away I knew I was in the right place, I have met so many people and made friends for life. I have had unbelievable opportunities, I have attended film Premieres in Leicester Square, have met a number of makeup artists that work on Game of Thrones, The Revenant and American Horror Story for example and recently I just completed a job working on the X Factor with three of my friends, where we did makeup, face painting and interviewed the contestants. Now I'm on my way into my second year where we have to complete a placement, I am hoping to get work with a few ITV shows and once I am graduated my dream is to work on various TV, Film and Music sets travelling all over the world.

If I was to give advice to any one applying for their dream course/university/job it would be to get as much work experience as possible and show people you have the interest and passion to succeed, use the facilities and people at Sixth Form for advice and do "put all of your eggs in one basket" if you are willing to work hard and not settle for anything else.

Faye McConnell

Sixth Form: 2008-2010

York University

I would say my top tips for university and then entering law are:

Pick subjects/modules/areas of work that you enjoy. Many people choose based on what they think they *should* be doing, rather than what they want to do. If you are studying or working in something you are interested in, you will be far more successful.

Try to get as much work experience as possible – a lot of employers look for work experience to differentiate applicants. Standing out from the crowd and having real experience in a field will help you show enthusiasm and guide you to what you enjoy doing.

Think about your end goal and work towards it. Through university and beyond you will need to put a lot of time and effort into your study/work. If you are doing it to achieve your end goal then it seems a lot better!