

The background of the cover is a photograph of sand dunes. The top half shows a wide, gentle dune under a clear sky. The middle section features a close-up of the dune's surface, showing fine, parallel ridges and troughs. In the bottom right corner, a starfish is partially visible, its arms extending towards the center. The bottom half of the image is a darker, more textured view of the sand dunes, possibly from a different angle or lighting.

The STAR Project

(Student Transition and Retention)

Supporting Your Student

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Supporting Your Student: Helping Parents to Help Applicants Make the Right Decision

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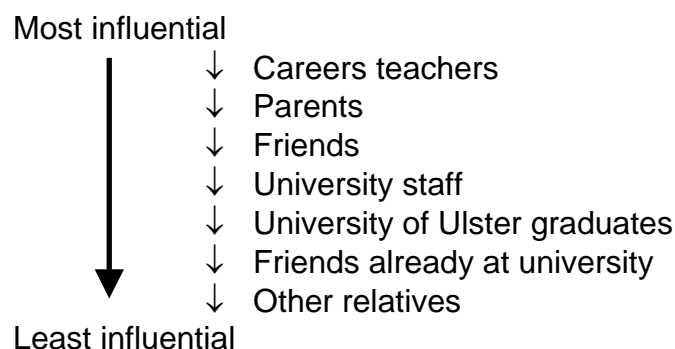
SUMMARY

Family members, particularly parents, help prospective students make choices both of institution and their subject of study. This case study outlines the actions taken by two institutions to ensure that family members are as well informed as possible about the events that both they and the prospective student will experience during their University years. The organisation of different events for family members and the students has resulted in both groups being freer to ask the questions that they want answered.

Keywords: student retention, student attrition, student support, parents, prospectus.

INTRODUCTION

In a pre entry survey of students coming to the University of Ulster the responses of about 2,500 students showed the following ranking of the people who had influenced their choices.



Clearly many students value the advice given to them both by their careers teachers and their parents. At the University of Manchester about half the students attending on visit days are accompanied by family members.

Other surveys have shown that one of the major causes of students leaving early can be interpreted as a mismatch between the institution's provision and the student's expectation (Yorke 1999). While most students can overcome minor disappointments, some do not and they leave. This is a problem which can potentially be solved prior to a student coming to University and, perhaps, better

coping mechanisms can be developed once at the Institution with the support of family members.

RELEVANCE TO THE STAR GUIDELINES

At its outset the STAR project researched, produced and published a set of guidelines based on the causes of student attrition and which pointed the way towards possible good practice. The STAR guideline relevant to this case study is 1.2.

- 1.2 Teachers, careers advisors, family members and other educational institutions are important clients of the institution and should receive up-to-date, accurate and relevant information. Two-way communication should be promoted.

Cook, *et al.* 2005

Family members are recognised both as being of support for their student when at University but also as an influence on their choice of Institution and course.

THE PRACTICE

Both Manchester and Liverpool Hope University College noted that prospective students were attending subject visit days accompanied by their parents or other relatives. This pattern of attendance had two consequences. First more space had to be allocated to activities than would be predicted by a consideration of the number of applicants attending. Second, applicants were much less ready to discuss their futures with or ask questions of academic staff when accompanied by family members. Both institutions therefore, took an early decision to separate applicants from their parents and have developed distinct programmes for the two groups (see appendix 1 for exemplar programme).

The practice of having parent sessions at both interview days and open days was started several years ago in response to an observation that parents are increasingly attending subject visits. This presented its own problems in terms of space during the visits and the observation that quite often parents seem to intimidate their children so that they didn't ask questions and they didn't respond to conversations with staff. When fees were introduced it was decided to separate the two and start a separate program for parents.

Liverpool Hope

The introduction of fees appears to have resulted in parents wanting to ask a different sort of question about the future than would be asked by the applicant. At Manchester, students and family members can select from a list of topics and a record has been kept of the selections made by both groups. This list is given below.

Topics Offered During the Introductory Talk

Topic	Popularity	
	Students	Parents and guests
Introduction to The Victoria University of Manchester		
Finance		x
Introduction to The School of Biological Sciences	x	x
Accommodation		x
What are the Biological Sciences?		
Degree courses and flexibility	x	
Merger with UMIST		
Careers	x	x
University Facilities		x
Night / Cultural Life	x	
The Offer	x	x

At Liverpool Hope, parents were curious about finance and accommodation, whereas the applicants themselves seldom sought this information. Thus the purpose of mounting separate programmes for parents and applicants was to address the different needs of each group in the context of a single visit.

EFFECTIVENESS

To what extent have the differing needs been met? Early, but anecdotal, evidence from Liverpool Hope gave confidence that parents welcomed the special attention and the scheme was expanded.

....It's a recognition of the need to give information to parents and I suppose that we did get feedback on the whole that was quite appreciative and that has meant that the system has grown over recent years.

Liverpool Hope

Responses to a questionnaire completed by parents (Appendix 2) shows an emphasis on concerns about accommodation and costs. Thus parents appreciate the financial information they were given but nevertheless want more. Other significant comments include reassurances about the University providing a safe environment.

Benefits to the Staff

This practice has allowed staff to concentrate on a single audience. Thus when talking to applicants it is now possible to meet their concerns rather than to compromise by introducing materials of interest mainly to family members.

You don't want parents coming along to subject specific sessions and asking things about fees or something wider than the subject because if we can

specialise it then the right people can ask the right questions and the right information is given over then. The staff will feel more at ease because they are dealing with their own area.

Liverpool Hope

Benefits to the Applicants

There is a feeling that separating the parents from the applicants allows the applicants to gather the information that they need without being inhibited by the presence of their parents.

I think subject staff would say that removing parents from the subject induction sessions or the subject open day sessions actually frees up the students to be less inhibited and to talk with them freely about the course and what higher education is like.

Liverpool Hope

Benefits to the Parents

The perceived benefits to the parents are that they get the questions that *they* want answered addressed directly. Further, there is value in making the family members themselves feel part of the process of application and acceptance, particularly since the Higher Education of their students may well represent a substantial financial burden on families.

Parents.... are actually incredibly important. If parents have bothered to come to a visit day it's because they're interested and have probably quite a big influence on that student's choice. So laying on a day that was enjoyable for them I thought was particularly important..... In the first year we changed a few bits and pieces. We are getting feedback all the time and so we changed it this year to make the talk more interactive,because it was covering things that they didn't want to hear about.

Student Recruitment Manager, Manchester

PROPOSED FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Both these programmes have developed relatively recently and while minor modifications are made in response to staff and parent views no substantial changes are expected in the near future.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Treating parents and applicants separately obviously requires two independent programmes for the visit days- two sets of rooms, two sets of guides, two different talks, etc. The resource implications are hard to quantify since they vary with the size of the facility. It may be for instance that without splitting the visiting group there may have had to be more visit days.

CONCLUSION

Even though there is a growing number of non-traditional students entering University, for most courses and most institutions the majority of new students are school leavers. For many, their attendance at University will be their first experience of living away from home. Their parents may have had no experience of tertiary education themselves and be ill prepared for the departure of their son or daughter. Universities can assist in this transition both for the student and for the parent by giving support and advice. In particular it is important that advice be given relating to the nature of the course, the time commitment and the financial implications of University attendance. Separating the applicants from their family during a visit day allows clear signals to be given concerning the independence expected and also facilitates the channelling of appropriate information to each group.

Other institutions give advice by a variety of means including parental advice notes (Appendix 3) and web sites (Appendix 4)

CONTEXT

University of Manchester - The School of Biological Science has an intake of about 350 students into about 20 major degree programmes across the spectrum of the BioSciences. Many of these can be taken as sandwich courses or combined with a modern language resulting in a total of about 50 different programmes. The School gained a total of 24 in teaching quality assessment.

Liverpool Hope University - The Human and Biological Sciences pathway has an intake of about 45 students onto a combined honours degree programme. Most students are seeking Qualified Teacher Status. Organismal BioSciences gained 21 overall in a recent teaching quality assessment.

	Manchester	Liverpool Hope
Student group	All students joining the School of Biological Sciences	All student enrolled for the Human and Biological Sciences pathway through combined honours BA/BSc award
Number of students Yr 1	350	45
% mature students	1%	11%
% Overseas students	About 10%	?
% of students living at home	About 10%	?
Entrance data	BBC (Biology and Chemistry preferred but not essential) 300 UCAS points (BBB)	2 x E at A level including grade C Double Science GCSE 80 UCAS points (EE)

	average qualification on entry. All successful applicants offered A level or equivalent	Only 65% of new students offered A levels as their entrance qualification.
Retention data	Of the 350 entrants in 2001, 5 left the institution early (1.4%), 2 (0.6%) changed course and 3 (0.9%) failed academically. Overall non progression rate is 2.9%.	Approximately 20% failed academically although few failed the Biology component of their combined honours programme.

While the context of the two institutions featured in this case study will be of some interest it cannot indicate the context of the parents of their potential students.

REFERENCES

Cook, A., Rushton, B.S., McCormick, S. and Southall, D. (2005). *Guidelines for the Management of Student Transition*. University of Ulster, Coleraine. Also at http://www.ulster.ac.uk/star/resources/star_guidelines.pdf (Accessed 25-08-05).

Yorke, M. (1999). *Leaving Early: Undergraduate non-completion in Higher Education*. Falmer Press. London

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FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://www.ucas.ac.uk/parents/index.html> - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, Parents Section

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/parents/index.shtml> - Dept for Employment and Skills, Financial Advice for Parents

<http://www.universityadvice.co.uk/ParentConcerns.aspx> - University Advice, Parental Concerns

<http://www.universityoptions.co.uk/parents/default.asp> - Information on HE

<http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/> - Information on HE

APPENDIX 1**Visit Day Schedule for Guests at the University of Manchester**

Time	Activity
11.30 – 12.00	Arrival
12.00	Lunch with student ambassadors
12.45	Talk and Question and Answer Session
2.00	Tour of campus and facilities
4.00	Applicants meet up with guests and either <ul style="list-style-type: none">• take a coach tour of Accommodation• make their way home

APPENDIX 2

Parents' questionnaire from Liverpool Hope

My experiences here today have:	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
Helped me understand how to enable my son/ daughter make a good application through UCAS			
Given me a good understanding of financial matters affecting students: loans, bursaries etc			
Informed me about available accommodation and costs			
Made me aware of what is expected of my son/ daughter in his/her studies in Higher Education			
Helped me to advise my son/daughter on their choice of University/ College.			
What was the single most important thing you learnt today to help your son or daughter?			
What is the single most important thing you feel you still need to know to help your son or daughter?			

Only 12 parents completed this questionnaire. Quantitative data would, therefore, be misleading. Most parents agreed with the statements above except for the assistance the sessions provided for the completion of the UCAS form.

Responses to the open-ended questions revealed that parents thought the most important thing learned in the day included:

- Accommodation
- Finance (3)
- Knowledge of a safe environment for my daughter
- Courses information.

And parents still felt they needed to know more about:

- Distance to travel to town
- Finance (3)
- How the University ranks in terms of league tables
- Student support.

APPENDIX 3

Advice to Parents from an American University

This has been anglicised and re-oriented to features that may be commonly found on UK campuses. It is loosely based on advice given to parents by Syracuse University.

THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOUR STUDENT COMES TO CAMPUS

Has your student completed mail registration? They can contact their school or college with questions by phone.

Encourage your student to complete the Shared Reading for their school or college. Better yet...read the book yourself and discuss it with your student before they come to campus. This can help your student to think more critically about what they have read. Reading lists are available on the web.

Shop with your student for basic items they need for living in the halls of residence.

- Students should learn who their roommate is during the first week in August. Encourage them to give their roommate a call to say hello and have a discussion about items each of them are bringing to maximize the space available in the room (for example, it is not necessary to have two microwaves).
- Your student should buy toiletries and something to carry them in (a basket or bucket) when they go to the restroom/shower. Don't forget flip flops/shower shoes!
- Remind your student that they are not moving into a three-bedroom home. It is important to only bring what they need. If you've rented a U-Haul, your student has packed too much. Storage space is limited to what they can fit under their bed.

Review the Welcome booklet for parent/guardian program information and to develop your personalized orientation schedule.

Note that your student can preorder their textbooks through the Bookshop's textbook reservation system. Though textbook preorder is recommended to make the first few days on campus a bit less hectic, students can also purchase books upon arrival.

Encourage your student to review information from Computing and Media Services (CMS) to set-up their username and password.

If your student does not plan to bring a computer to campus, there are plenty of computers available locally.

If your student has a documented disability, please encourage them to contact the Office of Disability Services prior to arriving on campus by phone or e-mail.

Learn more about AlcoholEdu. AlcoholEdu is an online science-based course about alcohol and its effects on the body. Your student must complete Part One of this course between July 19 and August 17.

If you are the parent of a transfer student (coming from another college or university), encourage your student to RSVP for the *New Transfer Student Welcome Breakfast*.

If your student plans to work in locally, remind them to

- Pack a photo ID (such as a driver's license) and their national insurance number or birth certificate as proof of identity.
- Prepare a cv if they don't already have one.
- Begin searching for a job on campus. It is never too early to start!

Make B&B reservations if you plan to attend Parents' Weekend. Parents' Weekend is scheduled for October and accommodation fills up quickly. You will receive detailed information about this event later

Talk to your student about personal safety. Although personal safety seems basic enough, students think they are invincible. Remind them to lock their doors; walk in groups of three or more; tell someone where they are going and when they will return, and how to reach them.

Talk to your student about alcohol and other drugs. It may seem like it is too late to do this, but even students listen to their parents when it comes to this topic. Encourage them to make smart and safe choices.

THINGS TO DO WHEN YOU ARRIVE ON CAMPUS

Try to accompany your student to check into their accommodation. The major task your student should accomplish here is to meet their roommate—it is going to be a long day and they are sure to be tired. Be sure to introduce yourself to your student's roommate.

Leave the rest of the unpacking and room set-up for your student to do over the next few days and take advantage of Orientation programs for parents instead!

Note your student's correct address, phone number, and e-mail address before you leave campus

Attend the Orientation programs specifically designed for parents. These include sessions on academics, living in the residence halls, and letting go.

Register for Parents' Weekend. Computers will be available for online registration. Instructions will be available when you arrive.

Take a campus tour to familiarize yourself with where your student will be living for the next three or four years.

Plan to say goodbye to your student after lunch on Friday. You will miss each other, but Parents' Weekend is just over a month away.

KEEPING AN EYE ON YOUR STUDENT

Schedule a consistent time to communicate via telephone, e-mail, or Text Messaging. Students will be extremely busy when they first arrive on campus, and—at first—having a consistent time that they know you will be able to reach each other is comforting.

Encourage your student to have emergency numbers posted in an easily accessible area.

Know what to do if your student is ill or if you have a family emergency.

- Remind your student to contact their course director via e-mail if at all possible. They should note the length of their absence and a specific reason for the absence.
- Contact the Parents' Office - they can assist you in locating your student on campus, or help you with the emergency notification process.

If you are an "empty nester," get involved. You will certainly miss your student, and while they are at school you may find yourself with more time on your hands than you anticipated. Start a new hobby, volunteer, or take a class yourself. It will help fill some of the void and you might learn something new in the process!

Encourage your student to meet all of their lecturers and to utilize lecturer's office hours. It is a good way for them to make a strong connection to the campus, feel like they belong, and to maintain good academic standing.

If your student mentions that they are feeling uncomfortable with or overwhelmed by the material being covered in a class, tell them to find help as soon as possible. University-level classes are more intense and more in-depth than what they were accustomed to in school. Student support services can help.

If your student is lonely, homesick, or depressed, encourage them to find a support system. This can be as simple as having lunch with their peers or joining a student organization, or finding a job on campus. If this persists, advise your student to make an appointment with student services to talk with someone about their situation.

Though it may seem a bit early to do this, suggest that your student visit the Career Services or the career development office. Many new students are unsure about their future, wondering what they could possibly want to do for the rest of their lives, and not sure how to formulate a plan to discover just what it is that interests them. These departments are fabulous resources and can also assist them as they perfect their cvs and look for relevant jobs or other work experience

If your student is feeling unchallenged, suggest that they find something to challenge them. They could learn more about volunteering opportunities, extra curricular activities, and getting involved in campus based societies

APPENDIX 4

Links to Examples of Web Based Information Directed Specifically at Families

Many Universities provide generic information for applicants both in their prospectus and on their websites. Much of this however appears to have been written with recruitment in mind rather than for the purposes of improving student decision-making. Only 18 of the 167 Higher Education Institutions provide easily located web-based information for family members. Below are listed a sample of the better websites which provide information specifically for families. They were selected because they were easily found either by a direct link indicating interest to parents or families or by entering "parent" or "family" into the site's search engine and provide some generic advice rather than being devoted to recruitment.

Sheffield Hallam

<http://www.shu.ac.uk/guides/parents/index.html>

A site which provides information to families about a wide range of student issues.

De Montford University

<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/study/families/index.jsp>

Has a good site devoted to the needs of families and an excellent booklet. One of the few sites to provide advice to parents related to empty nest syndrome.

University of Reading

http://www.rdg.ac.uk/Student_Recruitment/parents.htm

A well constructed website which welcomes parents and outlines application and financial procedures. It describes aspects of student support services, careers etc.

University of Sussex

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/advice4parents>

A reassuring site for parents which outlines university support in the context of the newly arrived student. The parent's page give links to other generic information including the application timetable, finance, accommodation, student support etc.

University of Birmingham

<http://www.parent.bham.ac.uk/>

A dedicated website which contains much useful information. A good model.