Student Handover Report

Get uni ready with the money lessons, honest advice and handy hacks students wish they'd known before they started – passed on by those who've just been through it.

NatWest

2026

What no one told you about managing money at uni, until now

Two-thirds (66%) of students who received uni advice from their parents say at least some of it was wrong or outdated. Not because parents don't have valuable advice to share, but because student life is changing all the time. So, we're handing the reins to the people who know university life as it is right now.

Built on a survey of 5,000 current UK undergraduates, NatWest has created the Student Handover Report so the next wave of students can arrive feeling more prepared and confident about money management from day one.

Every year, students arrive at university braced for the big costs – rent, tuition, the weekly shop. It's everything else that catches them out. Nearly every student (99%) wishes they'd known more about managing money before they started.

Here's what current students want the next wave to know:

The Costs No One Warns You About

unexpected expenses that crop up in week one

Money & Mates

how to keep your budget and your friendships intact

The Hacks That Actually Work

how savvy students make their money go further

Staying Scam-smart

spotting what's out to catch students

"The one thing I wish someone told me is to start saving immediately, no matter how little."

The costs no one warns you about

It's not rent or tuition that catches you out. It's the social and settling-in costs that quietly add up before you've even realised you're spending

Takeaway

Build a 'first month buffer' to budget for the settling-in phase separately. Include Freshers' events, trying out new clubs and societies, and the social spending that comes with making new friends.

Freshers' events alone cost students an average of £61 in their first month

Add society memberships, the coffee runs, the meals out while you're getting to know people, the 'I'll just try this club' memberships, and the birthday collections that come with building new friendships.

Before you know it, your loan has dipped significantly. Not on essentials, but on the costs that often come with settling into university life.

> **"The biggest thing I'd tell anyone starting uni is don't look at your maintenance loan as one big lump of money.**
>
> **Split it up into a weekly budget from day one. It honestly saves you so much stress later on when all those random costs start popping up."**

Over half (56%) spend at least £50 on unbudgeted items in the first week - evidence that 57% of students' biggest surprise at university is discovering the true cost of everyday life

Students spend an **average of £71** during the first month just on socialising

44% were caught out by how quickly small purchases and subscriptions add up

Navigating money & mates

"I can't afford it"

is a hard thing to say out loud, particularly in an unfamiliar environment surrounded by new faces. But avoiding the conversation costs more than having it. Students who run into problems are usually the ones who say yes to plans they can't afford or say nothing when resentment builds up.

Takeaway

Set financial boundaries early and be honest about them.

Tell your flatmates what you can afford in the first week, not the fourth. It may feel uncomfortable, but it's far less damaging than making excuses or losing friendships over unspoken money tensions. The friendships that last are the ones where everyone knows where they stand financially.

"Don't feel afraid to turn something down if something's out of budget - I promise everyone else is doing the maths too!"

92%

have quietly bailed on a night out over money, with a quarter (23%) having to do this on a regular basis

64%

made up an excuse rather than admit they couldn't afford to go out

55%

say money's put a strain on a friendship

Almost

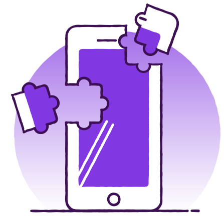
One In Ten

(7%) say they have lost a friendship over the topic of money

The hacks that actually work

Make your money go further

Lean budgets have pushed this generation of students to get resourceful – turning saving, sharing and side-earning into second nature.



"What I should've done was split my money as soon as it came in:
money for rent & essentials in one account, spending money for fun stuff in a separate account."

The best tips, handed down:

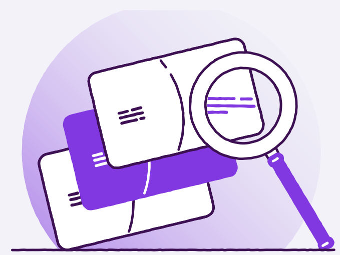
Re-wear and restyle outfits rather than buying new for every night out

46%
split subscriptions to keep the cost down

Do your food shop between 5pm – 8pm when supermarkets mark down 'reduced to clear' items

Sell what you no longer need; clothes, textbooks, furniture

85%
of students have a side hustle on the go: reselling, tutoring, freelancing



75%
have made money back selling things they no longer need

Staying scam smart

Big adventures start here. Help others stay one step ahead of scams by sharing what you've seen.

The best scam warnings often come from a friend who's seen it before. Scams show up in everyday student life, from finding accommodation and jobs to buying tickets or getting a message that appears to be from your bank, University or Student Loans Company. Scammers know what matters to students, and they'll pretend to give it to you.

According to students, the scams they're most likely to warn friends about are **social media scams (35%)**, **fake emails and texts (30%)**, and **ticket or travel scams (25%)**.

69%

have come across scams targeting themselves or other students

Just 27%

feel very confident they could spot a scam

42%

say social media and news are their main sources of scam awareness, ahead of family or friends (30%) and seeing someone they know affected (24%)

Takeaway

Most scams arrive through your phone.

If you get an unexpected call, text, email or DM that pushes you to act fast, send money or share personal information, pause and check it's legit before clicking, replying or paying.

Whether it's a job opportunity, rental ad, payment request or event ticket, take a moment to confirm it's genuine before you act. Check the details, search for independent reviews, or ask someone you trust. A second opinion catches most scams before they cost you anything.

Here's the honest truth

Getting better with money at uni isn't about being perfect with it.

The students who find their feet fastest aren't the ones who spend the least. They're the ones who have worked out what's worth the spend, from the coffee you won't give up, to the night you'll always find money for, and learning as you go.

And the support doesn't stop there.

Whether you're navigating student finance for the first time, figuring out loan repayments, learning how to budget, or simply looking for ways to make your money go further, NatWest offers a range of tools, guidance and support to help students make informed financial decisions throughout their university journey.

"You don't need to have it all figured out on day one – just keep an eye on your money and enjoy it."

Online survey of 5,019 university students in years 1–3 in the UK, conducted by Savanta on behalf of NatWest. The survey was fielded from 24 June to 13 July 2026, with a margin of error of +/-1%. This was supplemented by a series of soundbites from students taking part in the campaign to gather first-hand perspectives and illustrative quotes.