

#IAmFirstGen

Are you the first in your family to attend university?

We are launching a campaign called **#IAmFirstGen** to highlight that anyone can study at university, regardless of their background, and that there are lots of different journeys into higher education.

If you are the first generation in your family to achieve a degree, then we would love to hear about your experiences. Maybe you studied A-levels and then moved away to university? Or stayed at home whilst you studied? Or did the first part of your degree at an FE College? Distance learning? Part time study? Study abroad? Changed courses? Transferred credits to another Uni? Degree apprenticeship?

There are so many pathways to becoming a graduate and the aim of this campaign is to highlight all of the different experience's that university students have. One barrier to young people attending university is often that they don't see themselves as belonging at a university, as they think that there is nobody like them studying at degree level. We are trying to dispel this myth by showcasing different stories from graduates in the form of letters to previous selves.

One way that you can contribute to our **#IAmFirstGen** campaign is by writing a *Letter To Your Previous Self*. These letters will be published via the Future Quest website and promoted on social media so that they reach young people and demonstrate to them that there are lots of different people that attend university, and lots of paths that people can follow. Anyone can belong at a university, regardless of their background, as long as they have the desire and ability to study.

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#IAmFirstGen – Guidance on sharing your story

A key part of **#IAmFirstGen** is about sharing stories. The way we would like to do this is by asking you to write a *letter to your previous self*, when you were still at school. What would you like to tell your previous self? What do wish someone had told you at that age?

We have included some key points you can cover in the letter, as well as an example letter. This is by no means an exact formula. Feel free to change things if you want to!

You can write to yourself at any age – from when you were choosing your GCSEs or up to applying for HE.

- Talk about your time at university:
 - What did you study at university? Did you enjoy it?
 - How did you feel at university? Did you ever feel out of place? Or did coming from a non-traditional HE background not cross your mind?
 - Did you take part in any extracurricular activities such as joining a club or society? Did you complete an internship or do any volunteering?
 - What did you do after university? Did you go straight into a job or did you take a while to find employment?
- Talk about your current job:
 - What is your job title? Can you explain what your work involves?
 - What is your normal day or week like?
 - Have you got any career highlights? Have you achieved things that when you were younger you didn't think that you would be able to achieve?
- Give yourself some advice/encouragement:
 - Think about how you felt when you were still at school studying - what do you wish someone had said to you at this age?
 - What would you tell yourself to get through some of the challenges that you faced when you were studying for your GCSEs and beyond?

Please email your letter to future.quest@uwe.ac.uk so it can be featured in the #IAmFirstGen campaign

EXAMPLE LETTER FROM LIZ

Dear Liz at 18,

So the UCAS form is in and forgotten about. There's a lot going on: shifts at the shop, studying and 2 for 1 cocktails in Corn Street on a Wednesday night – that was an amazing find! Uni is still a world away; to be honest you just didn't want to think about it, did you?!

2 months later and the interview from Plymouth drops on the mat – MELT DOWN! This (or an anagram of) just got real.... Plymouth 123 miles away – never going to happen. You cry, you panic, you know you just aren't ready to leave home. Salvation comes in your offer from UWE a week later. Pass you're A-Levels and life can start.

August comes and BANG, the bottom drops out again. The results aren't good enough, it wasn't meant to be. Still you had the offer of a full time job in the shop – things could be a lot worse. Let's face it you've made friends but you've struggled with college. If you weren't prepared for that then you'd never cope with UWE, would you?

But Louis, your tutor, wasn't giving up that easily, and neither was your mum. Whilst you knew that the offer of a place in London was out of the question (finances just couldn't stretch that far), UWE and your mum came through again. 'Do the foundation year – if you don't like it you can drop out.'

Well that was the making of you wasn't it – who would have thought all you really needed was one more year and a different environment. Turns out you did understand Science after all. Turns out you needed to be in a place where you didn't feel inferior to the rich kids.

Advice: You should never have felt inferior, you got that place at college, but actually the extra year was a really good thing for you – it made you realise just what you could do.

Four years, plenty of studies, a fair few parties, and countless shifts at the shop and you're sitting on stage in Bristol Cathedral. Mum and Dad united for the day to celebrate your success. Walking up the aisle, you spot your Nan (thank god for the extra ticket), she starts crying and that's when you realise just how far you've come.

You move to Bristol University to start your PGCE. First day on placement and a teacher recognises you. He asks where you'd gone to secondary school, when you tell him his response was 'not many of you lot get degrees'. Your determination is fuelled by this.

Advice: Be less polite and ask said teacher what he meant by that. Challenge the stereotype rather than letting it go.



2003 – You’re an NQT, resources you made are taken by the county advisor to give to Heads of Science as ‘Best Practice’. The students you teach are making good progress, they like your lessons. You adore your first tutor group even if they are all Bristol Rovers fans! Two years on and your NQT mentor (now a Head teacher elsewhere) offers you a job. You go to Cheltenham and teach in a deprived area, you make Head of Year, and your pastoral care helps you support kids just like you realise what they are capable of. You spend your summers teaching in Asia and the Caribbean. **Advice: As hard as you try you can’t solve everyone’s problems. You do all you can, but sometimes it just won’t happen.**

Travel agrees with you and a move to Spain seems like a good idea. You arrive at your new school, it’s a private school, the students are lovely but there is no challenge. You get bored and leave after a term. **Advice: Don’t feel like a failure for not staying sometimes things just aren’t meant to be.**

Back in Bristol, and you’re right back to where you started. Leading the science department, that inspired you as an 11 year old. The first piece of post you get is addressed to your old teacher who was the Head of Department that got you work experience in a University Lab and had the belief in you that you sometimes didn’t have in yourself.

Six years on and you get promoted to Assistant Head – and here I am now. I’ve been Head of Phase, Head of Curriculum, and now Head of Personal Development & Wellbeing. The titles may have changed but I’ve always been the widening participation link. The experiences I’ve had myself have helped me to show my students their possible selves. And hopefully help them to believe that it doesn’t matter where we’ve come from, it’s where we are going that counts.

Liz



EXAMPLE LETTER FROM SIAN

Hello Sian at 18,

The last two years of A-levels have been a bit of a whirlwind for you haven't they? There is more of that to come, some of it will be great, some not so great. You will do things you never thought you could and take up opportunities that you had no idea existed.

By now you are writing your personal statement, and in typical Sian style you have started it late and are now frantically trying to pull something together. You insist that you needed to wait for the creative flow, but in reality you are watching lots of TV Waterloo Road and nothing is going to separate you from that. So, you avoid doing it, make an unenthusiastic attempt of putting something together to apply to study Early Years Education at university. It doesn't click, you aren't excited, you are doing this for the sake of it.

About two nights before the UCAS deadline you are gripped by a new idea. Why don't you study Politics? Sure, you only did an A Level in it because you liked Gordon Brown and needed another subject, but you ended up loving it. Your grades weren't great, you were struggling at 6th form, but maybe this would be your chance. You delete your whole personal statement and spend the next day rewriting it, asking a teacher to read through it, redrafting and reshaping. You submit it and wait.

The day before Christmas Eve you get an email - you have an offer to study at your first choice University. Cracking stuff! You spend the next few months with your head in the sand; you forget to do your student finance application, you apply for accommodation at the last minute and keep changing your mind. You have no idea what life will be like at university, after all isn't it just for posh people? And you certainly aren't posh.

Fast forward to September and you start at university. Things are overwhelming. People are confused as to why Gordon Brown is your phone background, admittedly it is a great conversation starter but perhaps a bit strange. People don't often seem to get your sense of humor. Lectures stretch your brain, and you have never met so many posh people in your life. You don't know if you belong here.

In the first few weeks someone asks if you are going to Freshers Fair, and having no idea what this is you say you don't want to join an afterschool club. Turns out this isn't about an afterschool club and people are surprised you don't know what a Student' Union is. You feel a bit out of place but you move on. This won't be the last time you feel like that, it will happen again and again.



You push through your degree, learn and do things you never thought you could. You become massively involved in your Students' Union (the one you thought was an afterschool club) and end up getting elected by a cross campus ballot to be part of the leadership team. Twice. Suddenly, you are representing around 30,000 students and are trying to improve their time at university. You are pushed into meetings with the people that lead the university, and you talk about mental health and wellbeing with them, and discuss student accommodation. You campaign and push for changes. You host an awards night. Yep, you read that right. The girl who had severe anxiety over presenting in front of your class in year 9 stands up and delivers a speech at an awards night. You speak unscripted too. You present awards and celebrate others' achievements. You don't even throw up beforehand or try and run away!

You are so far away from the person you were at 18. You are now 21 and have confidence you never thought you could have. You are in a place that you thought wasn't for people like you. But, guess what? University is for people like you. You have as much right to be here and access these opportunities as anyone else. Yes, sometimes you might feel out of place, but the thing is babes – you are not.

Your individuality, your experiences, and your passion will help to make things happen that others could not make happen. Own it and love it. So, jump on in. I promise you that you are going to love it and you will surprise yourself.

Sian x

