

Post Pandemic: Clearing and More

A Parent's Guide to university entry in 2022, 2023 – and beyond.

Please note it will be helpful to read this article with [Clearing for the Confused](#)

“Should I stay or should I go?” asked The Clash in the early 1980s and it’s a question which is very topical for intending undergraduates now, nearly 40 years later. Are 2022 and 2023 a good time to be starting a degree given the effects of coronavirus on the student experience?

Well, at time of writing (July 2022), the jury’s still out on this one and individual choices may depend on a lot of variables. In time honoured tradition, let’s look at some of these.....

The last few academic years looked very different from their predecessors. Most universities worked hell for leather in an uncertain world on delivering quality in terms of academic, social and pastoral issues. They provided a blend of online and face-to-face lectures and tutorials with an emphasis on keeping learners in discrete bubbles where they were able to mix and mingle with their peers. Also, accommodation arrangements were kept fluid so that students could come and go as necessary without losing out financially.

What about student fees? Less clear cut. Universities, understandably, were and are reluctant to commit to reducing these; equally reasonably, punters and parents want to know that they are getting value for money. It may turn out to be a question of compromises on both sides...

One thing is certain: adaptability will remain pivotal for both staff and students. What was in 2020 and 2021 largely uncharted territory is now more familiar. But some consequences of Coronavirus have been far reaching: hybrid learning (a mix of traditional lectures and tutorials with online learning) is here to stay. The key question for students is how the combination is balanced and managed. They (or you) need to investigate how far each university tries to strike the balance in favour of face-to-face learning, hands on practical sessions and peer interaction, rather than relying on technology.

What does this mean for the upcoming Clearing season when those with disappointing grades or no university place in view scramble to find a suitable course? What opportunities will be up for grabs? Is it worth the bother? Would it be better to wait until next year?

My crystal ball remains cloudy, but all the signs are that it's a bumper year for applications and that most students intend to take up any offers that they meet. This might lead to a head on crash with the universities who now feel that they can afford to be less flexible on grades. This may impact on places available in Clearing,

Naturally, the way is open for those whose marks don't pass muster (or those with good grades who feel they have something more to prove) to re-sit in the autumn. This has all sorts of implications too (cans, worms did I hear you say?). For instance, what will they do for the rest of the year? (Hints and tips below!) Will taking the exam itself produce better results? Would it be best to bite the bullet and go with the grades given?

What about deferral for a year? Again, this comes with all sorts of caveats! Given that the world, and with it gap year opportunities, is opening up again, it could be a winner for those who have **already** secured a place.. But even this will still require negotiating with individual universities and departments. **Don't** try to defer via Clearing which is about filling empty spaces for the coming September. It might backfire. But is a tactical withdrawal (from UCAS) an altogether safer manoeuvre, followed by reapplication for the following autumn? If deferral seems the best bet, think strategically. How will the student spend their time out, given that traditional temporary jobs and placements may still be in short supply and opportunities to travel are likely to be more limited? It isn't all doom and gloom – some sectors are flourishing, and many countries are open to young travellers and seasonal workers, but prepare carefully and err on safety's side.

And I hate to raise an unpleasant truth, but a second, potentially larger and more unpredictable elephant in the room has to be tackled. Will taking time out with no assured place for 2023 mean that you hit a log jam - more applicants for fewer courses? Answers to that will vary according to the popularity and availability of the degree, but ignore the possibility at your peril.

The final word? Do your research, plan ahead, make contingency arrangements and above all, be prepared for all eventualities. Objectivity and adaptability – that's the name of the game!

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