

Mature Students Guide

If you need all or part of this publication in an accessible format (e.g. in Braille, in larger print or on CD), please contact the Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment Office on 0117 928 8870 or email wp-office@bristol.ac.uk

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Welcome

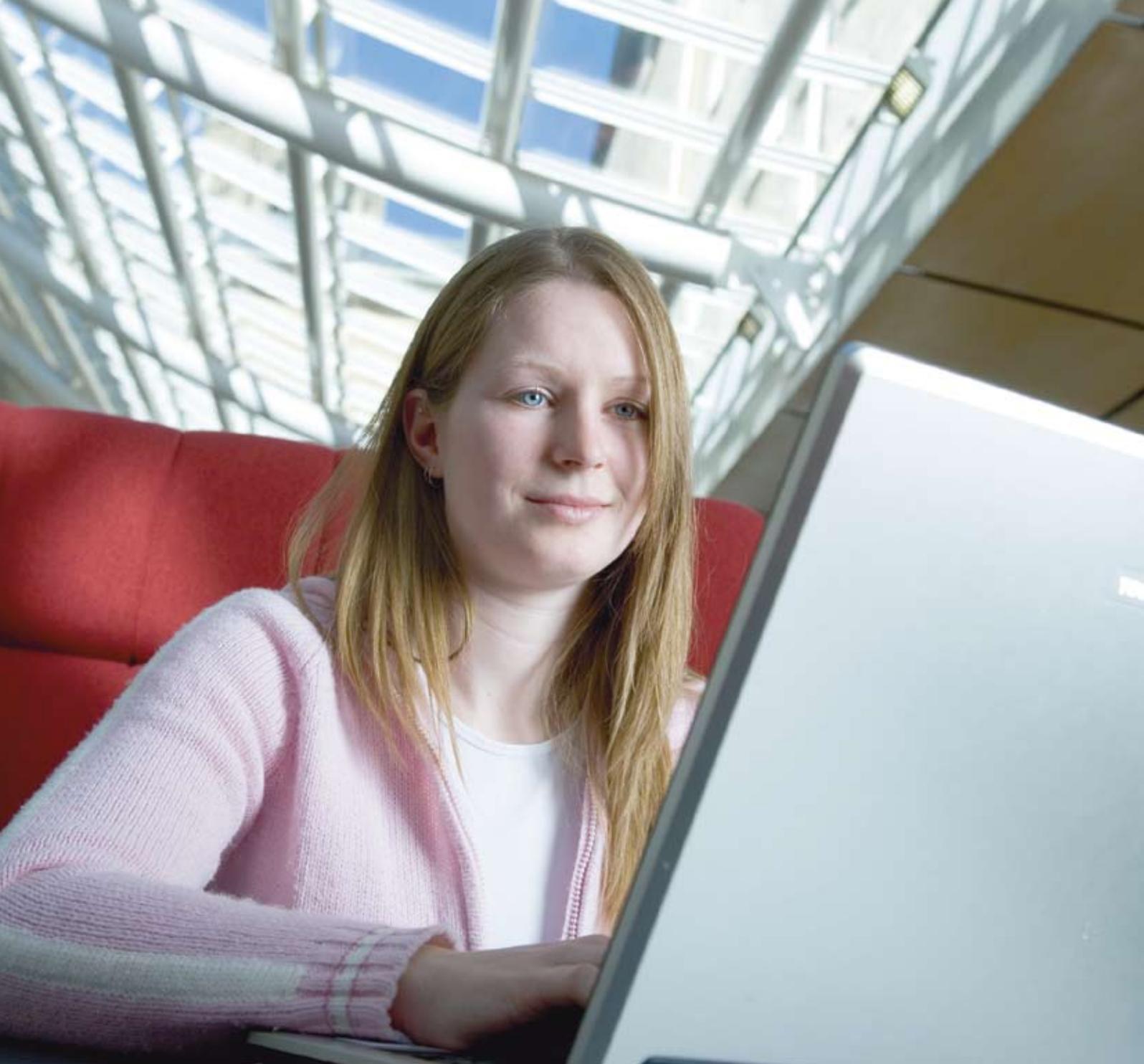
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The University of Bristol welcomes mature students, both full-time and part-time. We value the contribution mature learners make to the University and the important role they play in achieving a more diverse student community. You are considered a mature student if you are aged 21 or over on starting your course. Age is no barrier to undertaking a degree and can be a distinct advantage in the skills, motivation and life experience you bring with you.

This year over 110,000 adults aged 21 and over have applied to higher education. This represents a significant proportion of all applicants and proves that it's never too late to go to university. Mature students often face particular challenges but as one of our recent mature graduates said 'It is really good fun, interesting, stimulating and gives you a future.'

This booklet is intended to provide background information for those thinking of returning to study. It contains guidance on applying and information on entry requirements, support services and life at university. If you are considering applying to the University of Bristol, we hope you find it interesting and that it answers some of your questions. If there is more you want to know, please ask us.



Why choose Bristol?

Wide range of courses

We have over 200 undergraduate degrees to choose from. In addition, the University has a large portfolio of short courses at every level and postgraduate study opportunities in all faculties.

Reputation - Top 10

(The Times Good University Guide).

We have consistently ranked in the top 10 of universities in Great Britain. This rating is based not only on our teaching and research, but on the entire university experience we offer.

Top ratings for research and teaching

Over 95% of subjects received the top grades of 4, 5 and 5* in the last Research Assessment Exercise. You will be taught by leading experts in their fields.

Great opportunities to pursue cultural and sporting interests

The University has excellent sporting facilities including the Centre for Sport, Exercise and Health. We have sports facilities providing for all levels. There is also a wide range of clubs and societies to cater for your interests.

Targeted by employers

The University's employment record for graduates is among the best in Britain. Many major organisations have built up strong links with the University.

Civic campus in the heart of the city

If you want to live and study in a vibrant and diverse city, then Bristol is for you. We are situated right in the heart of the city.

Traditional meets modern

Bristol is an exciting mix of the traditional and the modern. If you want a university that has both cutting edge technology and is steeped in tradition, then Bristol is an excellent choice.



Why choose higher education?

Mature students decide to enter higher education for a range of reasons. For some mature students the decision centres around their career aspirations. They may want to enhance their career prospects in their current occupation. Others will want to strike out in a new direction and a degree will help them to fulfil those ambitions. No matter what degree you decide to do, higher education should improve your career prospects as a degree shows that you can think and work independently.

Many adults come to university because they have always wanted to study a particular subject. For others, the opportunity to prove that they can study and achieve at this level is a significant factor in their choice. There will be many different reasons, but whatever those are, universities welcome mature students and the high levels of motivation and commitment they bring to their studies.

Sarah signed up for a Return to Learn course and she then went on to study for her GCSEs, followed by Access to HE at a local college. Sarah managed all of that plus her degree with four teenage children.

Sarah Rigden
BSc Social Policy

Being a mature student

Approximately 8% of undergraduates at the University are 21 and over. There are mature students in every faculty at the University. In 2005-6, there were approximately 240 first-year mature students out of 3,000 new undergraduates. The Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry has the highest number of mature applicants: over 33% of the total. If you take into account all the learners on lifelong learning programmes and postgraduate courses, you would find that a significant proportion of the University community is 'mature'. There is a great deal of evidence to show that mature learners perform at least as well as their younger counterparts in their degrees.

Mature students are one of our target groups for widening participation. We would like to increase the number of mature students here at Bristol. They provide for a more diverse community and we would like to see that happen. We know that mature students bring many benefits including their life experiences and motivation.

As one of our mature students said recently "I don't know that older necessarily means wiser, but you have more life experiences to draw on. When I imagined being at university, I did think it would be strange to be surrounded by 18 year-olds, but it's not an issue."



Julie has a first degree in an unrelated subject but decided that she would prefer a career in science. She successfully completed the preliminary year and is now studying for the BSc in Chemistry, where she is in her second year.

Julie Stephenson
BSc Chemistry
with a preliminary
year of study



What can I study?

Full-time undergraduate programmes

There is a wide range of degree programmes available at Bristol from Archaeology to Engineering Design to Early Childhood Studies. There are mature students in all faculty areas at the University; eg Arts, Engineering, Medical and Veterinary Sciences, Medicine and Dentistry, Science, Social Sciences and Law. You can get more detailed information from the prospectus, which can be accessed online. Alternatively you can order a print copy by phoning the prospectus hotline or filling in a form online. You can also contact the Access and Mature Students' Adviser who will be happy to discuss courses and entry requirements with you. Contact information can be found on page 21.

Part-time undergraduate degrees

These include Archaeology, Modern Languages, Social Policy and many more. See the Undergraduate Prospectus for details.

Part-time Certificate and Diploma programmes

These programmes cover a range of subjects at undergraduate level, with a few at postgraduate level. They are run at different times of the day but some operate in the evenings and at weekends to fit in with the other commitments which mature students also have to manage. Contact the Centre for Public Engagement or see the Lifelong Learning section of our website. Contact information can be found on page 21.

Foundation degrees

Foundation degrees are vocational higher education qualifications that can often be combined with work. We currently offer a Foundation Degree in Counselling Skills.

Postgraduate taught programmes and research

These are a major part of the University's portfolio of work. Full details of the subjects offered can be found in the University's Postgraduate Prospectus. Many of these programmes can be followed by part-time study and are designed to build upon experience as well as previous formal study.



How to apply

You must first decide what you want to study. You can find out what is available from the Undergraduate Prospectus and from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), which is responsible for the processing of applications for entry to full-time first degree and diploma programmes in the UK higher education system. The UCAS website www.ucas.com can give information on courses and institutions and in addition, it also has a guide for mature students.

Look out for any special abilities a subject requires. Some programmes, mostly in the sciences, engineering and languages, require one or more specific A-levels or the equivalent because the structure of the programme curriculum assumes that all students have attained a particular level of subject-specific knowledge at the point of entry. The University's annual open day or the mature students' open afternoon are good opportunities to find out what a subject really involves. You should also consider whether the programme would equip you for the career you intend.

Preparing for higher education

It is important to be adequately prepared for higher education. If you have been away from study for some time it is worthwhile taking a preparatory course. Any full-time course which involves both studying independently and doing written work should serve the purpose, but it is wise to check with the University.

While you could take A-levels, there are several other possibilities such as Access to Higher Education courses, Open University programmes and University of Bristol part-time Certificate programmes.

In preparing your application, it is important to demonstrate what you have learned in settings other than education. In both voluntary and paid work you will have had to acquire the organisational and time-management skills essential for successful study at university. It is most important to draw these and other skills to the attention of the Admissions Tutor as they will show that you have thought hard about what studying will involve.

What qualifications do I need?

We welcome students with a broad range of experience and qualifications. Although some mature students applying for degrees do have A-levels, we welcome mature students with other qualifications such as Access. Mature applicants may be expected to show evidence of recent academic study. Whatever course you apply to, you will need to demonstrate that you are motivated and committed to degree level study. If you're not sure that your qualifications and/or experience match what we're looking for, then get in touch so that we can discuss it with you.

Access programmes

Access to Higher Education courses are a popular route into university for many mature students. Many local further education colleges offer Access courses. Access courses have been designed with adults in mind. They provide preparation in specific subjects as well as giving you the opportunity to build your confidence and study skills. Details of Access to Higher Education courses provided by further education colleges in the Bristol area are available from Open College Network South West Region (OCNSWR). It is advisable to check the appropriateness of the Access subjects for your chosen degree area. You can check this with the Access and Mature Students' Adviser in Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment. Contact information can be found on page 21.

More general information on departmental admissions can be found in the prospectus. For most courses you will need to achieve 45 level 3 credits on a QAA approved Access course. For further information on Access courses visit the UCAS website, www.ucas.com, The QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) website, www.qaa.ac.uk/access or the new Access website, www.accesstohe.ac.uk

What happens after I apply?

You can track your application online through UCAS apply. Institutions and departments vary in reply timescales so don't worry if someone you know hears from us before you do. You may get an offer without an interview. It does depend on the course but some departments may make decisions on the basis of your application alone. Some departments interview all mature students, whereas other courses such as Medicine interview as part of the selection procedure. Institutions don't see where else you've applied. We only see that you've applied to Bristol. If you get an interview, be sure to prepare. It's important to be able to talk about the subject and why you want to study it. Be sure to read over your personal statement again as you may be asked about something you said during the interview. Be aware of current developments in your field and subject. You would almost certainly be asked in an interview for Medicine, for example, to talk about something in the news which is relevant to the subject. Most importantly, be sure why you want to study the subject.

Can I afford it ?



The University of Bristol is committed to attracting the best students regardless of background and circumstance, and we particularly welcome applications from mature students.

Financing your studies may seem complicated at first, but we've put together some information to make things as clear as possible. We believe a degree from Bristol is a great investment for your future, but it is worth taking the time to find out about the cost of studying and living here. More information is available from the Student Funding Office: www.bristol.ac.uk/prospectus/undergraduate/2008/money-matters.html

The government classifies students as 'independent' at 25 and over unless the student meets another of the government definitions. A full list can be found at www.bristol.ac.uk/prospective/mature

Help from the Government

Tuition fee loans

UK students who are studying for an undergraduate degree for the first time will be eligible to take out a loan to cover the full cost of tuition. The money will be paid directly to the university and you will start repaying it once you are working and earning over £15,000 a year, although you do have the option of paying while you study if you prefer.

Student loans for living expenses

The Government can give UK students a loan to cover living expenses. In 2007 the maximum loan for students outside London was £4,510 a year. This figure does change slightly each year, so it is worth checking the Directgov website, www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance for information about what will be available the year you start university. All students can get 75% of the maximum loan. The remaining 25% is dependent on your household income.

Second degree students

Students who already have an honours degree and are considering studying for a second one will not be eligible for the tuition fee loan, the student loan for expenses or the maintenance grant. The only exception to this is if you are considering a course leading to a professional qualification, eg medical doctor, dentist or veterinary doctor, where you may be eligible for the student loan for living expenses. Your local authority (LA) will be able to give you further information. Contact details are available on the Student Support website: www.studentsupportdirect.co.uk. Second-degree students studying veterinary science will be liable to pay full-cost fees.

Grants

UK students from low-income homes will be eligible for a maintenance grant, which does not need to be paid back. The amount you receive will depend on your

household income. More information may be found at www.bristol.ac.uk/studentfunding

NHS bursaries

If you are studying Audiology you may be eligible for NHS support through a means-tested bursary and help with payment towards your tuition fees. Please visit www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk for more information.

Benefits

Benefit entitlement for students can be a complex issue. Please contact the Student Funding Office for specific advice.

Students with dependants

Students with dependants may be eligible for additional support, such as a Parents' Learning Allowance or an Adult Dependants' Grant. If you pay prescribed childcare you may be eligible for the Childcare Grant to help with these costs. Contact your local authority directly for more information.

Students with caring responsibilities

Here at the University of Bristol we understand that for some students who have caring responsibilities, home circumstances may make it difficult for them to take advantage of learning opportunities – even on a part-time basis. Because of this, a sum of £5,000 per annum from the Brenda Lee-Whiting Fund is committed to provide financial assistance to carers. Applications for this fund should be made in writing to the Student Funding Manager based in the Student Funding Office.

Access to Learning Funds

These funds are available to help students who have genuine financial difficulties and assessment is carried out according to guidelines laid down by the Government. Certain groups, including mature students, are given priority, and all students need to have taken out their full entitlement of student loan for living expenses.

Help from the University

Bursaries and scholarships

The University of Bristol has a generous package of bursaries for students who are from low-income families and for local students. There are also a number of scholarships awarded on the basis of academic excellence and for students with exceptional musical, dramatic or sporting talent.

In addition to the help outlined above, there are some additional smaller bursaries and scholarships available. For more information please visit www.bristol.ac.uk/studentfunding/home_ug/burs_schols

Hardship funds

In addition to Government-provided Access to Learning Funds, the University is putting a significant amount of money into its own hardship funds for students who find themselves in financial difficulties during their studies through no fault of their own. Details are available from the Student Funding Office.

Caring for others

The University Nursery provides full day-care for children from 18 months old and also has a baby unit. Further details are available from the Nursery which is situated at 34 St Michael's Park, Bristol BS2 8BW, tel 0117 927 6077. Student parents have to pay the full fees but assistance towards these and some other expenses may be possible from the University's share of Department for Education and Employment Access funds – enquiries should be made to the Student Funding Office.

Some local schools run after-school activities or holiday playschemes, and there are sometimes playschemes in school holidays run by the Sports Centre which are available to students. A helpful pamphlet about local schools is available from Bristol City Council, The Council House, College Green, Bristol BS1 5TR, tel 0117 922 2639. Details of after-school schemes are available from BAND, tel 0117 954 2128 or 922 6971. The Bristol Children and Young People's Services provide a range of information on childcare at www.bristol-cyps.org.uk as does the Daycare Trust www.daycaretrust.org.uk

There is also a termly lunch for student parents run by the Mature Students' Adviser where you can meet with other parents.

Sethina had already studied for a degree in Social Policy and Sociology, and a Masters in International Development, before she decided to switch career direction and become a doctor. She has two young children and helps run the Mature Medics group in her spare time.

Sethina Edwards
MB ChB Medicine
with pre-med year



Life at the University

Study

One of the main purposes of university education is to develop the capacity for thinking and working independently. You will have to find things out for yourself, and develop and defend your own views.

The methods of teaching and learning vary according to the subject and different programmes will involve very different timetables. With laboratory subjects you would often not be finished until 5 pm and occasionally have lectures between 5 pm and 6 pm. With other subjects there may be lectures at any time between 9 am and 5 pm, but you would be unlucky if many were in the late afternoon. The times of lectures cannot be changed because they are attended by students on different programmes. The times of seminars and tutorials are usually more flexible; most tutors and departments will take account of particular requirements whenever possible.

Most programmes are contained within the 29 weeks of the University terms. However, work will continue well beyond the University terms in the clinical years of a medical programme and some other subjects include fieldwork during vacations. Language programmes necessarily involve periods of study abroad.

In some subjects examinations are the sole basis for the final degree result; in others continuous assessment or assessment of longer essays or written projects is included. Further details of the range of assessment methods used for each programme of study are given in the current edition of the Undergraduate Prospectus.

Life outside study

Much of the time at the University is spent studying, but social and sporting activities as well as student societies are also a part of student life. The Students' Union elects a Mature Students' Officer who represents the interests of mature students. You may also be interested in the national Mature Students' Society. There is a Mature Students' Induction during Freshers' week and a Mature Students' Adviser based in Widening Participation and Student Recruitment.



Student support and accommodation



Student support

We offer a wide range of services and facilities to support you during your time at Bristol. If you need advice or run into any problems you will have the support of the University. Your personal tutor can help and should be kept aware of any particular circumstances that might affect your work. Help can also be obtained from the Union Welfare Office, the Counselling Service and the Students' Health Service.

Student help

This University website www.bristol.ac.uk/studenthelp outlines the support services offered to students. The site provides links and answers to FAQs on all aspects of university life, both academic and personal. There is also a section specifically directed at mature students.

Study skills support

The Student Development Unit in the Students' Union runs free study skills workshops throughout the year to help students boost their academic proficiency. Topics include essay writing, presentations, critical thinking and exam techniques.

Disability including dyslexia

The Access Unit is the first point of contact for most prospective deaf and disabled students. This includes Deaf students, visually impaired students, dyslexic students, students who have used or do use mental health services, and students with unseen impairments such as epilepsy. The Access Unit works closely with academic departments and other support services to enable them to provide appropriate and accessible support for disabled students. For further information please contact +44 (0)117 954 5727 (voice); +44 (0)117 954 5728 (minicom); +44 (0)117 923 8546 (fax) or email: Lin.Reynolds@bristol.ac.uk

University accommodation

The University guarantees to provide accommodation for the first year of study to all new, full-time undergraduate students provided they have firmly accepted their offer of study, apply by the deadline in July and live outside the Bristol area (all BS postcodes excluding BS22-28 and BS39-40). This guarantee applies to mature students as well.

Students who have firmly accepted their offer of study at Bristol will be sent the Accommodation Prospectus and form in April/May. Students can list as their two preferences, any of the residences detailed in the Accommodation Prospectus. Where possible, residences will try to group mature students together.

Student support and accommodation

Further information about all the University residences can be found on the website at www.bris.ac.uk/accom/ugs/uniac.html

Private rented accommodation

Students wishing to live in the private sector can contact the Accommodation Office for information and advice on renting in Bristol. We can also issue passwords to access the Accommodation Office website to view the Property Search and Student Bulletin Board facilities. Staff at the Accommodation Office will also check contracts and give advice on tenant/landlord disputes.

Mature students often take up positions as Hall Tutors, Senior Residents or Student Wardens after their first year here at Bristol. Senior Residents look after the day to day running of the Student Houses and receive subsidised accommodation in return. For more information visit the Accommodation Office website.

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Queens Road
Clifton
Bristol BS8 1LN
t: 0117 954 5740
e: accom-office@bris.ac.uk
www.bris.ac.uk/accom



Kate returned to study by taking an Access to Computing course and A-level Maths. She was offered work experience with IBM during the summer break in her second year and will be starting a full-time job with them in September as a software developer as a result of this experience.

Kate Shepherd
BSc Computer Science

What next?

Open days

The University of Bristol holds a general open day in June. The open day provides a good opportunity to have a look around, meet staff and students and decide if Bristol is for you. Up to date information on open days can be found on our website.

Mature students' afternoon

The University also runs a Mature Student Open Afternoon in early November where you have the opportunity to meet admissions tutors and current mature students, and hear about issues relevant to applying to university as a mature student.

Information sessions

You can book a place on a Mature Students' Information Session. These take place periodically on Wednesday afternoons. They provide an opportunity to tour the campus, meet current mature students and hear about studying at Bristol. Please note: there will not be the opportunity to tour specific departments or meet admissions tutors at these sessions.

Visits to colleges

The Mature Students' Adviser makes visits to talk to adult learners in colleges. If you would like information on these visits or would like to arrange one, please ring 0117 954 5937.

Individual advice

You can gain advice about admissions in several ways: Through the Mature Students' Adviser, the Admissions Office or admissions contacts listed in the prospectus. It is always useful to check if your qualifications meet entry requirements before applying.

Joe took A-levels when he was younger and then went on to study for an Access to Science course. It was whilst at college he made the decision to go to university as a mature student.

Joe Pickles

MSci in Geology with a year in North America



Careers

Mature graduates from Bristol go into a wide variety of jobs. Many employers will value a mature graduate who has relevant previous experience. Employers recognise the importance of transferable skills and the opportunities for mature students are very good. The Careers Service is there to help all students. It will tell you about the whole range of careers open to graduates, help you to make a sensible choice, and enable you to meet possible employers. The service offers workshops on skills and specific careers, hosts presentations by national employers, advertises vacancies for jobs both during and after university and has a drop-in advice service. The Careers Service website has a section for mature students, including useful employment contacts.



Betsy is available to help with any questions you may have about our courses, their entry requirements and support for study. She runs several events for mature students, including information sessions and an open day. Betsy has over 20 years' experience working with adult learners, including many years as an Access Co-ordinator in an FE college.

Betsy Bowerman
Access and Mature
Students' Adviser

Contacts

Mature Students' Adviser

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Undergraduate Admissions Office

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T: +44 (0)117 928 9000
E: ug-admissions@bristol.ac.uk

Centre for Public Engagement

8-10 Berkeley Square
Clifton
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BS8 1HH
T: +44 (0)117 928 7172
w: bristol.ac.uk/cms/cpe/

Accommodation Office

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Queens Road
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BS8 1LN
T: +44 (0)117 954 5740
E: accom-office@bris.ac.uk
w: bris.ac.uk/accom

Student Funding

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Tyndall Avenue
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BS8 1TH
T: +44 (0)117 331 7972
E: student-funding@bristol.ac.uk
w: bristol.ac.uk/studentfunding

Careers Service

11 Priory Road
Bristol
BS8 1TU
T: +44 (0)117 928 8221
E: careers-gen@bris.ac.uk
w: bristol.ac.uk/careers

Students Union Advice Centre

Union Building
Queens Road
Clifton
Bristol
BS8 1LN
w: ubu.org.uk/support/welfare

University Nursery

34 St. Michael's Park
Bristol
BS2 8BW
T: +44 (0)117 927 6077
E: university-nursery@bristol.ac.uk
w: bristol.ac.uk/nursery

Learning



Discovery



Enterprise

