

Starting at university

Key facts and your quick guide to support available through the medium of Welsh whilst at university





We have consulted widely with 6th form and Further Education students and mental health professionals to ensure that the content is relevant, with the guide developed jointly by Bangor University and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. We will continue to update the document and if you have any suggestions for improvements or would like us to add content, please contact us at: myf.cymru@bangor.ac.uk.



Introduction

Preparing for university can provide a rollercoaster of emotions and, understandably, making such big life choices can be daunting. There is the pressure of passing exams, choosing universities and courses, anxiety about meeting new people and making friends, and living away from home for the first time if you plan to relocate. Wales is a small nation, with few universities, even fewer large towns and cities, and tight-knit communities, particularly in the more rural areas. So, if you are planning a move from North to South Wales or vice versa or heading across the border to somewhere else in the UK, it can seem daunting.

To help bridge the gap, myf.cymru has developed this short guide, to cover the basics and provide some useful information to help you prepare before you head off to university. Hopefully, you will find it a useful reference tool once you have started your higher education journey. Promoting mental health and wellbeing is an integral part of this document, providing a focus on resources and services available through the medium of Welsh.

Pob lwc / good luck!



About myf.cymru



The aim of myf.cymru is to improve mental health and wellbeing support for students through the medium of Welsh. We are trying to increase awareness, reduce the stigma around talking about mental health, and encourage access to help among Welsh-speaking students throughout Wales and beyond.

What is available?

Website - myf.cymru

It includes information on various mental health conditions, life at university and real-life stories and content by students.

Sgwrs? podcast

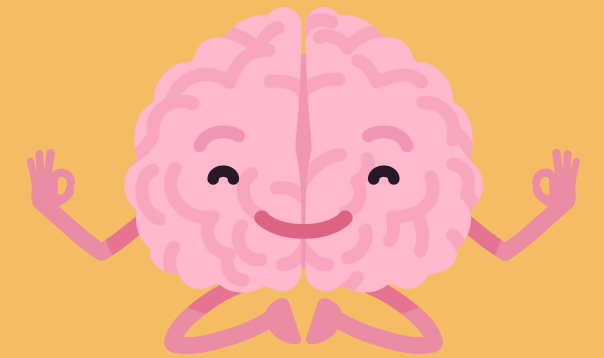
Students from across Wales share their experiences and discuss the important issues relating to their mental health and well-being. All the episodes are available on YouTube and the main streaming platforms.

Moving on App & Sorted App

myf.cymru has worked in partnership with the Moving On In My Recovery programme and the Sorted programme to translate their apps into Welsh. Packed with useful and practical resources to support an individual's recovery journey, the Moving On In My Recovery app can also help anyone navigate the day-to-day challenges of life. The Sorted App aims to boost mood and help individuals develop resilience through positive mental training audio programs. Available on [Apple](#) and [Google](#) app stores.

Social media and other video content

To receive the latest information, follow us on [Instagram](#) and access additional content on [YouTube](#).



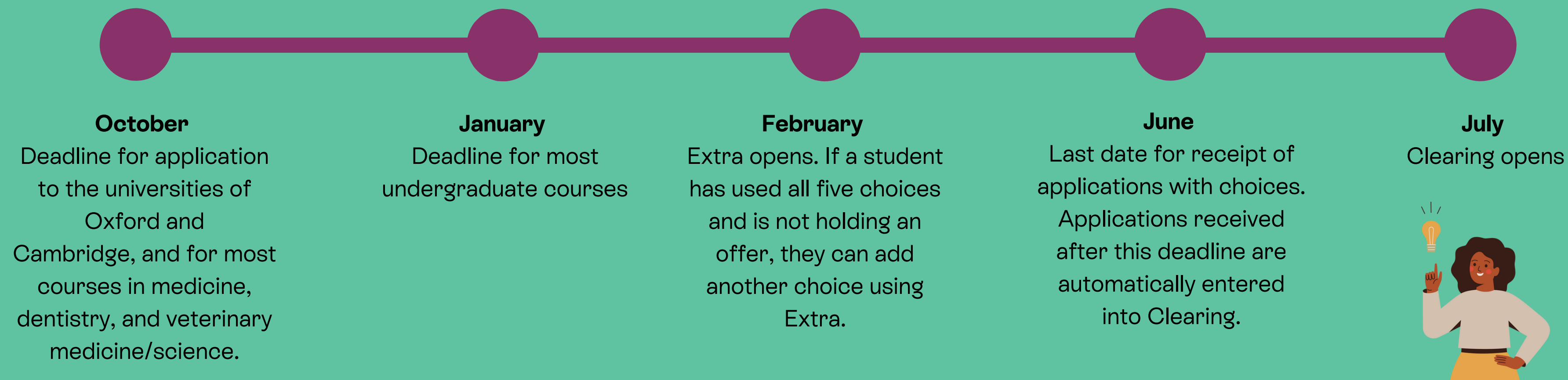


Timeline of key dates

Preparation for university starts 12 months or more before you start your first year. It is worth making the time to attend as many events as you can, and to talk to different people and gather information – including from current students – so you can make an informed choice about which course to study and whether university is for you. Below is some useful information including key dates for the application process.

UCAS Key Dates

These are the months in terms of UCAS key deadlines, but please check their website as these can be subject to change www.ucas.com.



Other key events and dates you need to be aware of:

Student Finance

Applications for Full Time course funding opens in Feb/March. Part Time funding applications open in June. Students should apply as soon as possible when applications open.



UCAS Events

These happen all year round at different locations, here is a list of the events:

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas-events/ucas-discovery>



Open Days

All universities hold open days during the year, you can search for them here.

<https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/open-days/search>



Welfare support at university



Every university has some student welfare provision, be it face-to-face, online or hybrid. Support is usually delivered by Student Services, but some institutions might call it Student Support or Student Wellbeing.

What is available?

- Student support services are well connected to local services such as the NHS, GP surgeries, local branches of national organisations and local charities.
- In addition, student unions might also offer student welfare support on issues such as wellbeing, money matters and housing so it's worth checking out the student union website.

Staying connected is important for your mental health and wellbeing, and the student union can provide information about university clubs and societies, volunteering opportunities as well as community activities that they are involved with.

Our website has information on help available to support your mental health and wellbeing whilst at university and other support by other providers through the medium of Welsh:

<https://myf.cymru/cy/hwb-myf/?tid=Cymorth>



Quick Guide to Support

These might vary slightly depending on the university you wish to attend, but most universities in Wales can provide some or all their support through the medium of Welsh. If you are not offered support in Welsh, don't be afraid to ask. You are not being a nuisance or demanding – some students find it easier speaking in Welsh about issues that are worrying them, especially if Welsh is their first language.

- Online resources – look at the university website. Student support information on most university websites is comprehensive and can help you navigate and access the most appropriate support for you.
- Wellbeing and mental health support – many offer counselling services, access to mental health advisors, and workshops, and can assist with accessing external support such as GP services or other agencies. Also, if you would like to take a break from your studies, it is useful to discuss this with someone else to further explore your options.
- Sexual violence, harassment and hate crime – whilst incidences are rare if you are a victim of unwarranted or inappropriate behaviour, universities take these matters seriously and can provide support. Some universities have dedicated officers who can help, and academic staff who are trained on how to respond to disclosures of sexual harassment and violence.



Quick Guide to Support

- Housing – finding suitable accommodation can be stressful, particularly if you have never rented before. Unsuitable or sub-standard housing can affect your mental health and wellbeing. Universities provide comprehensive support and information to help you along the way including useful checklists, as well as dos and don'ts.
- Disability support – if you feel you may be encountering disability related barriers including Specific Learning Differences, dedicated advisors can help you with reasonable adjustments and accessing suitable support. Further information is available on page x.
- Financial support – with the higher cost of living, money worries are high on the agenda for many students. Worrying unnecessarily about money can also have a detrimental effect on your wellbeing. If you are worried about how you will cope financially, universities have money advisors who can help. Whether it is budgeting advice, accessing additional funds or debt management, sharing your worries, and having support to help you plan can be hugely beneficial.



Support if you are planning to study part or full course through the medium of Welsh.

If you will be studying in Wales and are considering studying some of your course through the medium of Welsh, in addition to the financial support on offer, there is a wealth of study support available through your chosen university and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. It is natural to be apprehensive, especially if you are planning to study a new subject or are worried about your Welsh language skills.

Branch Officer

- Each Welsh university has a branch officer, and they are your go-to if you are studying through the Coleg Cymraeg and need any help or support with your studies. They also arrange several social and academic events throughout the academic year, so it is worth getting in touch. Follow the branch's social media accounts to keep up to date with the latest news.

Cadw Cyswilt

- If you are planning on leaving Wales to study, the Coleg has established a student community with whom they keep in touch with the latest news on grants, job opportunities, events, and work experience.



Support if you are planning to study part or full course through the medium of Welsh.

Language Skills

- The Coleg can help you develop your Welsh language skills where you can gain a certificate to evidence your ability.

Student Life

- There are several opportunities to get involved with various activities including becoming an ambassador and taking part in promotional activities and events at your university.

Porth Resources

- A digital library packed full of Welsh medium learning and information resources to help with your studies:
[Porth](#)

More information can be found on their [website](#), your Head of 6th form or your lecturer/tutor if you are studying in college can also provide further help.



Support for disabled students

Most universities take all possible steps to remove unnecessary barriers to enable full participation by disabled students in all aspects of university life. Many also provide additional support to students with disabilities. It is always worth checking university websites and attending open days so you can see the facilities on offer and talk to staff.

Here are some examples of how universities can support students with disabilities:

- Provide information about disability, including specific learning differences or mental health issues, and the services and support which might be available.
- Offer personal and academic support and guidance.
- Advise on strategies to make studying and everyday tasks more manageable.
- Help you to apply for finance through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) from your local education authority or other funding provider.
- For students not eligible for DSA funding carry out study needs assessments to identify reasonable adjustments (necessary arrangements).
- Provide practical support through mentors, assistants etc.



Support for disabled students

- Assist with the organisation of specific examination requirements.
- Arrange for the provision of BSL interpretation.
- Arrange for additional library provision.
- Arrange for a tailored learning support plan to ensure necessary arrangements (reasonable adjustments) are in place.
- Refer students to other who can help both within and outside university, such as health care professionals.

There is a useful FAQ section on the UCAS website if you have any questions relating to disabilities, learning difficulties or mental illness which covers the application process, managing on campus and financial support:

[UCAS FAQ's - Support for students with disabilities](#)

DSA (Disabled Students Allowance)

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is extra support on top of your other student finances and can be used to pay for study-related costs such as equipment, non-medical help, travel and photocopying and printing.



Support for disabled students

You can apply for DSA to cover some of the extra costs you have because of a mental health problem, long term illness or any other disability. You can get help with the costs of:

- specialist equipment, for example a laptop if you need one because of your disability
- non-medical helpers, for example a person such as a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter or specialist note-taker
- extra travel costs, to attend your course or placement because of your disability
- other disability-related costs of studying, for example having to print additional copies of documents for proof-reading.

What's available

How much support you can get and what you can spend it on depends on your individual needs, not your household income. You do not need to pay Disabled Students' Allowance back.

Before applying

Students should look at the DSA page on the Student Finance Wales website to see if they would be eligible, and get any evidence required (doctor's letters, certificates etc) together in time for their application.



Support for disabled students

Learning Support

If a student struggles with studies, institutions offer a range of Learning Support services to help them succeed. Support can be for a short time only or last as long as the College course, and may be on a one-to-one or group basis. A Personal Tutor can speak to the Learning Support team to find out more about help with specialist equipment and assessments for specific difficulties such as dyslexia.

Disability Facilities and Support

Universities are fully inclusive and provides equal opportunities for everyone can provide dedicated support for learners with visual or hearing impairment, or who need assistance due to mobility.



Guides, Course Reps and Personal Tutors



Universities have different ways that they offer support to students, just before you arrive at university, during your first weeks and throughout your course. Some universities in Wales also have Welsh language student representation. Below is a brief overview – titles and roles may vary depending on the university, so it is worth doing a bit more research to find out more:

Peer Guides / Student Mentors / Peer Mentor

Are senior students who have been trained to provide support to first-year students to settle into university and academic life. They can also help you get to know the campus, local community and provide practical information on basics such as where to do your food shopping to accessing support whilst at uni.

Course or Academic Reps

They are students who have been trained to provide information before you start your course at university, what to expect, coping with the first few weeks of lectures and course structure. Their role is to also represent students from a diverse range of backgrounds including international students, Welsh language, female, and LGBTQ+. They listen to students, gather feedback, and try and influence change within the College / School you will be studying.



Guides, Course Reps and Personal Tutors



Personal Tutors

You will be assigned a personal tutor when you start your course. They support taught students with academic, personal, and professional development during their time at university. They engage students in course activities, provide feedback on performance, and understand different student needs including mental health, and disability, as well as signposting to other services.

It is worth getting to know who your guides and reps are at university, as they may be useful if you need help or information.



Welsh Language at University

Most universities in Wales have some Welsh language student representation either by elected full or part-time Sabbatical Officers or an elected student representative. Some universities have a Welsh student union that sits within the main student union, and its role is to support and represent Welsh speaking students and those who have an interest in Welsh culture and language.

Broadly, the elected officers aim to ensure students who are Welsh speakers and learners have the best academic and social experiences by:

- Supporting and co-ordinate Welsh medium events and activities.
- Identifying the available Welsh medium provisions and look at where they can be improved.
- Creating a supportive community for both fluent Welsh speakers and learners
- Ensuring Welsh language rights are respected.
- Celebrating Welsh history and culture.

Several student-led societies and clubs are available for you to join, depending on your interests. Some universities also have Welsh speaking halls of residence, providing a tight knit home from home community.



Life at University - Elain's Experience



Dear Prospective Freshers

'How are you? Are you eating? Are you making friends? What kind of people share a flat with you? Are you enjoying the course?'

'I'm pretty sure these are the questions you'll hear many times during your first weeks at university, and you'll feel like answering back by saying, '...give me a chance to find my feet!'

That was certainly my experience back in 2020 when I ventured to Aberystwyth University to study Welsh, and who would have thought that three years later I would be welcoming students to Pantycelyn in my capacity as President of the Aberystwyth Welsh Students' Union.



Missing family... and Cadi the dog

I remember feeling insecure during the first few weeks, missing my family, my friends, and more than anyone, Cadi the dog - sorry Mum! But unbeknownst to me most of my fellow students felt the same.

'I think there is a tendency for people to hide what they feel in the first weeks especially, and not to discuss what is bothering them to avoid 'showing weakness', but I soon realised that everyone was in the same boat, and the best way to make friends was to be open and share experiences with others who could relate to me.

Life at University - Elain's Experience



Top Tips

So, what are my top tips for you?

First, make a list of all the events that are to your liking during the first few weeks, whether through the University, the Students' Union, your academic department, or the Welsh Students' Union.



Copyright Elain Gwynedd. Enjoying the Intercollegiate Eisteddfod

I attended several departmental events to familiarise myself with the department and meet my lecturers, for example, a quiz night and a walk around the town, as well as attending UMCA social events, such as the six-man crawl where three students from the third take three freshers on a tour of Aber's pubs.

Life at University - Elain's Experience

Top Tips

Secondly, join lots of societies to meet new people.

Undoubtedly, many of my highlights at university are derived from society events such as Y Ddawns and the Intercollegiate Eisteddfod, Taith Chwe Gwlad and Sŵn, which is a Welsh music night at the university's Union here in Aberystwyth.

You must try a bit of everything during the first few weeks so that you can find the society that interests you.

Also, remember not to feel under any pressure to meet your 'crew' during the first few weeks. People often refer to their college friends as their lifelong friends, which is certainly true, but there is no deadline for this!

Be true to yourself and the right people will become part of your circle of friends. In addition, try organising social evenings for those who share a flat with you. Make the most of the social areas in your halls of residence and organise punch parties, movie nights or board games.



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Life at University - Elain's Experience



Help is available.

Remember also about the wellbeing services available at the Union and the University, and websites such as myf.cymru and meddwl.org. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but rather shows your strength.

For some of you, three years may seem like a long time now, and although it sounds cliché, believe me, these are the best three years of your life and time flies by.

So, make the most of every opportunity that comes your way, enjoy every moment and good luck.

Best wishes,
Elain Gwynedd,
UMCA President and alumna



Useful Websites

www.bangor.ac.uk – Bangor University

www.aber.ac.uk/en/ - Aberystwyth University

www.uwtsd.ac.uk/ - University of Wales Trinity St David

www.colegcymraeg.ac.uk/en/ - for information about studying through the medium of Welsh, support and bursaries.

www.myf.cymru – mental health and wellbeing resources in Welsh

www.ucas.com – the official university and admissions website

