



OPINION: Fresher's Week at UEA -
Embracing the Chaos
at your own pace

Page 15

INTERVIEW: In
Conversation with Green
Party Co-Leader Adrian
Ramsay MP

Page 16



BOOKS: A Warm
Welcome to the City of
Stories

Venue: Page 10



Could Your Tuition Fees Rise to £12,500?

An analysis by Universities UK has suggested tuition fees need to rise to meet current teaching costs.

Jamie Bryson
Co-Editor-In-Chief

According to an analysis presented to Vice-Chancellors earlier this month, home-student tuition fees in England would need to increase to £12,500 per year to reach a break-even point amid warnings of an escalating financial crisis facing universities.

However, leaders at the Universities UK (UUK) annual conference were told that they would look too "out of touch" if they went ahead with the suggested 35% fee increase from the current £9,250 standard rate.

Shitij Kapur, Vice-Chancellor of King's College London, stated that the last time universi-

ties in England covered the total costs of undergraduate teaching was in 2015-16, when tuition fees were £9,000.

The proposal follows a statement from the Chair of UUK, who said UK universities risk "sliding into decline" unless urgent action is taken to address the serious financial pressures.

Dame Sally Mapstone, President of Universities UUK, which represents 141 higher education institutions, has warned that the sector is at a "fork in the road" and called for a "rebalancing of responsibility for funding" in England. At least 40% of all universities in England and Wales are currently either in or entering substantial budget deficits—in-

cluding UEA—with the University and College Union (UCU) calling for the government to commit to an "emergency rescue package" for the sector.

Speaking to the BBC following the collective statement, the National Union of Students (NUS) Vice-President for Higher Education, Alex Stanley, said last week:

"Bridget Phillipson (Labour's new Education Secretary) has called that position [raising fees to £12,500] untenable, and we completely agree with her. We also agree with Universities UK who said that back when tuition fees were first introduced [1998], they were done so on the understanding that there would be a level amount of public

[tax-payer] and private funding – and currently, the public level of funding is actually just 16%...So we'd like to see a real rebalancing of that so the system works for both students, but also universities".

At the end of the last academic year, UEA's Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Maguire, told Concrete how the current tuition fee price cap needed to be lifted and index-linked to inflation. The current £9,250 fee (set in 2017) is now worth just £6,000 in real terms in 2024, adjusted to inflation.

"We're trying to deliver effectively the same educational experience and outcomes with only two-thirds of the

figure", he explained. When pressed on specific numbers, the VC argued, "I'd like to be arguing for an increase to the £14,000 that it would have been worth, had it gone up with inflation [since 2017]".

However, he added, "That's, of course, unrealistic all-round, but stopping the damage by index linking it to inflation would be important".

No decisions have been made to increase the current tuition fee rate at a national level or within UEA.

You can contact the UEA-SU Advice Centre online or the Student Information Zone on The Street regarding any financial concerns.

Media Centre Closes Doors After Eleven Years

Anna Johnson
News Editor

Following widespread backlash from the postgraduate/mature student community over proposals to close the former Scholars Bar (and turn it into a dedicated LGBTQ+ community space) over the summer, UEASU looked for alternative spaces to place a new private dedicated area for the postgraduates.

The full-time SU Officers (FTOs) proposed this to be in the (now former) Media Centre (right) as the supposed only suitable alternative SU run space appropriate for this. This left the two media groups (LiveWire and Concrete) occupying this space to be moved.

On July 31st, Concrete was presented with plans to move Concrete and Livewire out of its current office space and into Bookable Rooms 7/8 and 9 adjacent to the former Media Centre. Concrete then discussed these plans with Livewire a day later, on August 1st, before the SU officially approached the Livewire committee with plans on August 5th. Both the Livewire committee and others have highly criticised this delay in communication with the latter society.

Both societies agreed to compose a joint email to the SU objecting to the proposals due to the newly proposed office spaces perceived to be inappropriate for both groups' needs, with Livewire

particularly affected, given the physical situation of their broadcast tower and purpose-built studios due to remain as separate rooms off of the former Media Centre. This large space was used for both groups to share and communicate, however, they argued, the proposals could lead to less of an incentive of collaboration.

In an official response to the joint email, the FTOs stated, "We'd firstly like to apologise for the way in which this has been communicated", clarifying, "It was never our intention to leave anyone out of the decision-making process. We apologise for doing so and for the distress that this has caused. (continued on page 4...)"



Image Credit: Jamie Bryson/Concrete

Editorial

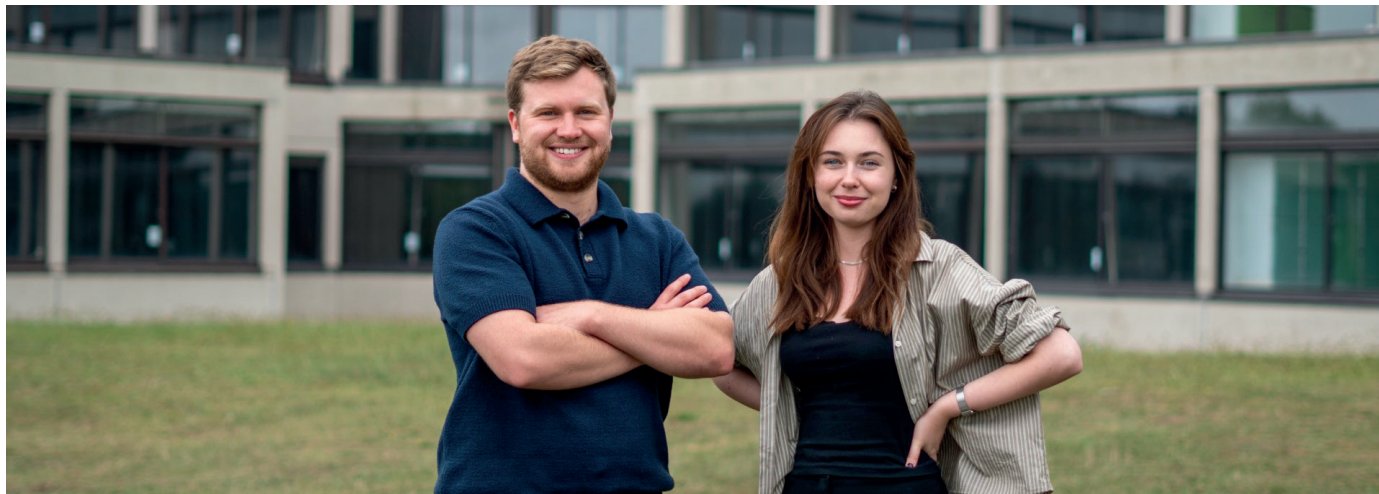


Photo Credit: Maggie Read

What a Summer...

A couple of weeks ago my Co-EiC Jamie sent me a text. He said that he was starting to realise the extent of all we had to do in the next fortnight. I agreed and predicted that it would be the most stressful two weeks of my life. Maybe I was overexaggerating there, but it does seem that running a newspaper is exactly as much hard work as you would expect running a newspaper might be! That doesn't mean that it's not also a good deal of fun. Having spent practically my whole summer holiday in the media office, you have to love it- and I really do!

I've always said that my favourite thing to do is to write and, whilst I continue to enjoy this, the best part of the last few months has been meeting and working alongside some truly remarkable people. It was such a pleasure to make our way through applications this June and to find such

a dedicated team. Perhaps it was because of this, that I found preparing for our online issue to be a strangely moving experience. Having so many talented people (from all across the UEA) spend their free time contributing to the paper and our vision for it is actually a little hard to comprehend and I continue to be delighted at how lucky we are!

However, no tribute to the summer would be complete without mentioning the General Election. It was brilliant to see how many students actively cared about the outcome, so much so that we managed to publish every day for over three weeks! As someone whose interests haven't previously been in politics, it felt like a bit of an intensive course in the subject and I don't think I'll forget my family's surprise as I started to bring up politics at the dinner table...

Looking at the paper, you may have noticed that we've made some changes to Concrete this year! From the introduction of new roles and sections to the new design and logo, we hope that you'll go on to find even more surprises within these pages! However, I would also like to give a mention to one particularly big change for us- the movement of our office. As the Media Collective gives the space to the postgraduates this year, we hope that they will have as many special memories in it as we have done. So where do you find the Concrete office now? Well, simply walk into Union House through the front entrance and look up. We have joked that we feel a bit like Big Brother up here, but trust me, we're not that scary and we'd love it if you came and visited!

Sometimes, when I find myself alone at my desk, I look around and it still feels slightly surreal.

Concrete very much came out of nowhere for me and it has now become something that has a place in my every day. Therefore, with it being Welcome Week, I would say that I do have a message for first years, as corny as that sounds. And that would be- expect the unexpected. Nothing about my time at UEA has turned out to be anything like my initial idea for it and in many ways I think that's really beautiful. It means that, as I look to the year ahead, I couldn't tell you one thing about what it might bring, but I can tell you that it's got off to a pretty amazing start.

So, here's to a brilliant new issue and a wonderful 32nd year of Concrete- I honestly can't wait!

Fiona Hill (she/her)
Co-Editor-In-Chief

Insta: @fionaconcrete_uea

It's been a long time coming, but...

...it's you and Concrete - that's (pretty much) my whole world! (You're welcome, fellow 'Swifties'). I'm writing this while overlooking the Hive from Concrete's new office just above. It's arrivals weekend, and hundreds of new and returning students are passing through the bright and beating heart of campus below - some with clear apprehension, some with expressions of pure joy and excitement.

However you're feeling at the start of this academic year, as Liv Mephram discusses so well in her first Opinion piece (page 15), I also think "embracing the chaos" at your own pace is one of the best approaches to take over the coming weeks. The amazing variety of activities, perspectives, cultures, experiences and aspirations that make up the Home of the Wonderful is now on your doorstep for the next three or more years. But while this is an inspiring prospect, I ap-

preciate (having felt it myself as a Fresher back in 2021) that this colourful palette of people and places can on occasion feel a little overwhelming for some of us.

Perhaps, if you come from a small and rural community like I did, you're not yet used to the hustle and bustle of a city, the vastness of campus life, or the odd bit of social pressure to go out. Perhaps you are, but now you want to try your hand at some 'quieter' interests like exploring the beautiful Norfolk Broads or regularly reading a novel by the UEA lake. Whatever 'background' you see yourself as coming from, whatever 'type' of person you feel others might perceive you as, just know that, though it may not be so apparent at first, there really is a place for everyone here.

It's very easy for a university or any other big organisation (or me!) to say something like, "We're one big

community here". Sure, it may take us some time to get a sense of the UEA 'community', and we don't all get on smoothly all the time. But I can honestly say - now entering my fourth academic year here - that there is genuinely something unique and special about this little concrete jungle. I hope, whether you're a Fresher or have been here a year or two, you'll soon feel a valued part of this in your own way. Ultimately, Concrete is here as a student society - just like any other. Please come and join us (on the UEA SU website), even if you're not sure about writing yet; we're here to provide opportunities for all students to explore new or existing passions and interests. We're also here, as student journalists, to hold those in positions of power to account. With both the University and the Student's Union (both of whom we are editorially independent of) continuing to go through some significant changes this year, Concrete will do its absolute best to follow

these closely - reporting as much information and insight as we can. In this light, please do get in touch with us with any concerns, 'tip-offs' or general thoughts - either via our email address (top right of this page) for confidential information or through Concrete's social media accounts (or you can always pop up to our office on the first floor of the Hive!)

It is honestly such an honour and a privilege to be given the opportunity to run Concrete this year. It would not be possible for me to do this job without the help and support of our amazing team of 40, Adam Roche and Vic Jackson, in the SU, my partner Libby, and the highly talented and creative Co-EiC, Fiona Hill. Onwards and upwards, folks...have a great year!

Peace, love and rabbits...

Jamie Bryson (he/him)
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News

RAAC continues to burden UEA

Anna Johnson
News Editor

One year later, the Ziggurats remain empty as RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) remains prevalent in the buildings.

At the start of the 2023/24 academic year, students who were supposed to be moving into the Suffolk and Norfolk terraces – The Ziggurats – were sent to stay in different accommodation in the city centre due to the discovery of RAAC within the respective buildings.

RAAC is a lightweight, 'bubble' form of concrete commonly used in construction between the 1950s and mid-1990s. It is predominantly found as precast panels in roofs, commonly in flat roofs, and occasionally in floors and walls. This means it may be found in any school or college building that was either built or modified during this period.

One student affected by this move was Greta White, who told Concrete: "I got an email a couple of days before I was due to arrive and move in stating that due to RAAC, we were to be moved off campus to St Crispin's. It was quite scary given it was a completely new place that I hadn't expected to be at, and I was concerned with the cost of travel. We were provided with a free bus pass for a year, roughly two weeks after we moved in. The university promised to keep us updated on the progress of making the Zigs liveable, with some vague assurances that we would be able to move in to them at some-point in the year. This never happened and

we received no updates on progress."

We were moved into St Crispins, and at the start of the year it was still being finished with building work. So for two terms, I believe we were given a discount on the price we were paying, which was the price of the Zigs - £130 p/week - and not the normal £180."

Last year, Luke Johnson, the former Activities and Opportunities Officer for UEASU, made a statement attesting that his "main concern [was] the impact it (the move of first years from the Ziggurats into different accommodation) could have on students' mental health and wellbeing."

However, for Greta this problem did not seem to arise, "I think it's fair to say that we lucked out in a way with our accommodation as it was very much an upgrade to the Zigs, so I am actually very grateful for that. So, as much as it was initially stressful and did cause some issues for me, like the distance to uni, it wasn't bad whatsoever. It was quite simply a very different situation from what was expected. I hope the Zigs can be rebuilt safely as I truly like the architecture, but my accommodation for the year was good for me."

Here is the previous and current government mission statement for Buildings containing RAAC: "[take] action to permanently remove the aerated concrete from all school and college buildings across England. This will be funded through grants or the School Rebuilding Programme. Every school or college with confirmed RAAC is assigned dedicated support from a team of caseworkers. Project delivery teams are on-site to support schools and colleges to implement mitigation plans.

The government will spend whatever it takes to keep children safe", they state on the Gov.UK website.

In semester one of 2023/24, Concrete spoke to UEA's Vice Chancellor, Professor David Maguire, about the RAAC discovery, where he mentioned: "I suspect, because of the construction method of the Ziggurats, that's likely to be a long-term challenge for us to resolve."

According to Norfolk Heritage Explorer, "Four parts of the original university buildings are listed (Grade 2) and these comprise the Suffolk Terrace, Norfolk Terrace, library and teaching wall. The buildings were constructed in 1964-68. The Suffolk and Norfolk Terraces, known as the Ziggurats, derive from Sant'Elia and Marcel Breuer under the influence of Louis Kahn. They were listed as Britain's first and most successful expression of a university as a 'small city' rather than a dispersed campus."

A Grade 2 listing is assigned to buildings of national importance and special interest. This classification acknowledges these structures' significant role in the UK's cultural and historical heritage.

Therefore, the Ziggurats can only be knocked down to be rebuilt exactly the same, which would be a long process, meaning it could be a long time before anyone call them home again.

When approached for comment, the University said:

"We are continuing to liaise with the local planning authority and Historic England to explore financially viable options that are safe for our students and meet the necessary requirements for Grade-II* listed buildings.

Unfortunately, the solution for RAAC in Norfolk and Suffolk Terrace was not identified during the previous academic year. However, students relocated to St Crispin's House were given the opportunity to contact UEA accommodation to ask about moving on to campus after the first term. All students relocated to St Crispin's House had their rents subsidised by UEA to ensure that there was no financial impact."



Bus Stop? Bus Start! The Return of the Night Bus

Fiona Hill
Co-Editor-In-Chief

On the 3rd of September, it was announced that the Night Bus Service will be installed once again as a method of late-night transportation between the UEA and the city centre. With the University of East Anglia, the UEA SU and Norfolk County Council each contributing approximately £30,000 to the project, they have expressed a joint commitment with FirstBus, to ensure the safety of students and the local community.

After the removal of the service in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic students have repeatedly called for its return due to the significant role it played in providing safe travel after midnight. With nights out and late shifts continuing to be a prominent part of the student experience, it was deemed a serious breach of student welfare for there to be no affordable method of travel within these hours.

After an extensive campaign dating over a year, the Night Bus will return on Monday the 30th of September and will operate as a 24-hour extension of the existing 25 bus route that runs via Unthank Road and completes at the Train Station. Transportation will be provided up to every hour after midnight to 5am, six days a week, with tickets being priced at a maximum of £2 in order to keep to the Single Fare Cap Scheme.

Nathan Wyatt, Welfare, Community and Diversity Officer at UEA SU and active campaigner to reinstall the service, expressed his delight in stating, "The return of the Night Bus is a huge win for students and the local community! Keeping students safe is a huge priority for us at the SU, and we believe that affordable, accessible late-night transport will be a game changer. It has been an immense privilege to work on this project and I hope students will feel the benefit!"

Olivia Hunt, Activities and Opportunities Officer at UEA SU, added, "We encourage everyone to take full advantage of this initiative to ensure its success and longevity, as it operates on a 'use it or lose it' basis." Credit must also be given to former Activities and Opportunities Officer (2023/2024), Luke Johnson who contributed greatly to the effort.

With Charlotte Melling, Transport and Events Manager for UEA, expressing the importance of improving the 'safety of our students and local residents', the return of the Night Bus is set to be an important milestone in maintaining a healthy relationship between the university and the wider Norwich and Norfolk community.

Image Credit: UEA SU



... continued: Media Centre Closes Doors After Eleven Years

and wish to move forward in a positive manner for our society”

The specific requirements for Concrete were agreed upon, and their move commenced in the first week of September while Livewire continued negotiations.

Later in the week, Livewire posted a now-deleted official statement via their Instagram from their committee publicly detailing their disputes with the Officer's proposals and showcasing their alleged “unwillingness” to listen to Livewire's objections seriously.

In response to this statement, an official meeting was set up between the FTOs and Livewire heads.

The Livewire committee then issued a “clarification statement regarding UEA-SU and the Media Centre” which stated,

“We would like to share the following statement to apologise and to provide clarification on the situation.”

“As a journalistic organisation, we would never knowingly publish incorrect information. Our original statement was created using all the information we had been given at the time.”

“We would like to make clear that we are retaining our dedicated workspace [two purpose-built broadcast studios], although our office space will be relocated.”

The Concrete Co-Editors-in-Chief Fiona Hill and Jamie Bryson stated, “This September, we left the former Media Centre, which has been home to Concrete (and the wider Media Collective) since 2013. Concrete has had many great experiences and mem-

ories in this space, and we will look back on them fondly. Having begun discussions with the SU and Livewire regarding this space back in late July, discussions with the SU and Livewire regarding this space back in late July, we now find ourselves in a new dedicated office space (in the former Bookable Room 7/8 on Floor 1 of the Hive), which we have been busy decorating and adjusting to our team's needs over the past couple of weeks. We have also tried to make it as appealing and visible as possible to the wider student community. Having settled, we look forward to creating many new and positive memories in this next chapter of Concrete's 32-year existence. We also look forward to continuing our collaborative relationship with Livewire.”

The Livewire committee was contacted for comment, but they declined.

Rents Soar (again) as Students Feel the Squeeze: 8% accomodation cost increase

Jamie Bryson
Co-Editor-In-Chief

The 2023/24 academic year saw average student rent prices rise by an average of 8.02%, with the private sector seeing an even more substantial rise of 9.39%.

This has led to the average annual private rental cost now standing at a staggering £7,632.55 (excluding London), representing 77% of the value of the higher Student Maintenance Loan rate.

Despite this, the demand for student accommodation continues to rise, with over 1.4 million of us requiring rented accommodation last year. However, supply is struggling to keep up with only 8,760 new beds provided in 2023/24, highlighting an immediate need for further accommodation options.

The average annual private rental cost now represents a staggering 77% of the value of the highest maintenance loan

Glasgow tops the table for the highest private rental rise of over 19% on average, while Cardiff remains the most affordable city for student accommodation in the UK. The University of Bath remains the most expensive university to rent from, at an average of £780 (ex-

cluding London), while York St. John is the cheapest at £363 on average.

What about at UEA?

Closer to home, UEA students paid an average of £543 for campus-run accommodation during the 2023/24 academic year. This places the Home of The Wonderful as the 60th most expensive out of the 125 universities surveyed by the campaign group ‘Save the Student’.

For those renting privately, an average of £570 per person (plus bills) was seen across Norwich on 2023/24.

In a statement to Concrete, UEA said:

“Rents are agreed and fixed 18 months in advance of the academic year for which they apply, due the lead-in period for applications for courses. This is broadly in line with timescales used across the Higher Education sector. The university uses the RPIX (Retail Price Index, excluding mortgage interest) inflation rates, a widely used indicator of inflation, as its benchmark for rent increases, a decision made with the agreement of UEA SU. The two academic years prior to this, our rent increases were lower than the national inflation rates.”

“Students at UEA have a variety of options available to them if they are struggling to pay accommodation rent or tuition fees. Those students are

encouraged to contact our Finance team who can advise and, where appropriate, offer payment plans.”

Our Student Services have a dedicated Student Life Finance Team and offer guidance on budgeting on their website, and students can seek face-to-face support via the Student Information Zone. Our accommodation office also offer room changes to cheaper alternatives on request if available.”

“Students have a variety of options available to them if they are struggling to pay accomodation rent”

Commenting on the latest figures, the UEA SU full-time Officer for Welfare, Community and diversity, Nathan Wyatt said:

“The price of renting in Norwich is a huge burden to students. The cost-of-living crisis is still having huge impacts, and a lack of increase to maintenance loans means that rising rents are eating up the entire amount. It is a huge shame that with the closure of the ziggurats, UEA has lost a large supply of the most affordable student accommodation. I urge the university to reopen the ziggurats as soon as possible.”

Increased Police Powers introduced in Norwich

William Ballantyne

With every academic year, new students arrive in Norwich, and this year, so do new Police powers designed to tackle the issues of antisocial behaviour and public drinking.

Norwich City Council spent May conducting a consultation to hear residents' and businesses' thoughts on a proposed Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to counter drinking-related antisocial behaviour.

Having been approved by the council, it came into effect on July 24th. The PSPO does not make it illegal to drink or carry alcohol in all public spaces but instead seeks responsible drinking in and around Norwich. This will be in place for a minimum of three years. In 2020, Norfolk Constabulary reported that 86% of antisocial behaviour crimes were associated with “drunken conduct.” Complaints often featured groups in public shouting, swearing, and public urination. The city has also issued PSPOs in the last year to break up ‘boy racers’ and similar vehicular incidents of antisocial behaviour.

The PSPO gives police and ‘authorised persons’ in Norwich the power to request that members of the public stop consuming alcohol when asked within the ‘Restricted Area’ (Norwich city boundary). Failure to comply can result in the confiscation and disposal of alcohol as well as the issuing of a £100 Fixed Penalty Notice.

The council outlines how payment within ten days will reduce the penalty to £70, while failure to pay within 14 days will be overseen by the court and result in a fine of up to £1000. The order has come following a rise in antisocial behaviour in the city. It is designed to work in tandem with increased high-visibility patrols targeting ‘hot-spots’ across the city, notably in the area surrounding Prince of Wales Road and the train station. Norfolk Constabulary has received up to £1million from the Home Office to tackle antisocial behaviour in Norwich and Great Yarmouth.

Labour councillor Beth Jones, cabinet member for Housing, said that the aim of the PSPO is to “improve the quality of life for residents and visitors” targeting anti-social behaviour linked to public drinking, adding that the PSPO “ensures a consistent approach across the city, preventing ASB from merely relocating to different areas”. The council has reiterated that the order does not intend to stop all public drinking or possession of alcohol.

Proposed Pub Garden Smoking Ban Faces Mixed Reactions From Gen Z

Jamie Bryson
Co-Editor-In-Chief

A proposed smoking ban for outdoor pub gardens by the new Labour government is generating significant discussion, particularly among Generation Z, who are becoming increasingly health-conscious.

The plan, which would see smoking prohibited in outdoor areas of pubs and restaurants, has been championed by public health advocates, with the aim of reducing

“The UK’s government’s target is to make the country smoke-free by 2030”

others’ exposure to secondhand smoke. But as the UK government moves toward stricter anti-smoking measures, the reaction from young people has been mixed.

The UK has already made significant strides in cutting down smoking rates. Since the landmark public smoking ban of 2007, which made it illegal to smoke indoors in public spaces, smok-

ing prevalence has steadily declined.

However, public health experts argue that more needs to be done. The proposed ban is designed to further limit passive smoking, with its harmful health effects, and to create a cleaner, more enjoyable environment in social spaces like pubs and restaurants.

Outdoor areas, including pub gardens, are currently among the few public spaces where smoking is still allowed. Public health campaigners see this as a loophole that must be closed, pointing out that secondhand smoke can still pose health risks outdoors, especially in crowded spaces.

The UK government’s target is to make the country smoke-free by 2030 (“smoking rates of 5% or less”), and this proposal is seen as a significant step toward achieving that goal. Under the plan, pub owners would be required to enforce a smoking ban in their outdoor areas or provide completely separate zones for smokers and non-smokers. Failure to comply could lead to fines or penalties.

‘Generation Z’ has grown up in a world where smoking is far less normalised than it was for previous generations. Smoking rates among younger people have dropped significantly, thanks in part to public health



Credit: Unsplash

campaigns and the rise of e-cigarette quitting products. According to a 2021 report by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), only about 3% of people aged 18-24 smoke cigarettes regularly, compared to 26% in 2000. Vaping, on the other hand, has become increasingly popular.

“if the ban is implemented, it could represent a major cultural shift”

For many in ‘Gen Z’, vaping has become the alternative to smoking, and the ban raises

questions about where vaping should face similar scrutiny. While the health impacts of vaping are still being studied, many see it as a less harmful alternative to cigarettes.

Under the proposed law, it’s unclear whether vaping would be included in the ban, though some lawmakers have also called for stricter regulations on e-cigarettes.

The proposal is still in its early stages, and pub owners, the public, and health experts will be consulted before the government makes any final decisions. But if the ban is implemented, it could represent a significant cultural shift in how we socialise and what’s considered acceptable in public spaces.

New Must-Have Savers for Students Launched for New Academic Year

Anna Johnson
News Editor

Students can receive up to a 50% discount at leisure centres across Norwich, Concrete has discovered.

Norwich City Council has reintroduced its ‘Go4Less’ card scheme, which provides students with discounts at Cinema City, Riverside Leisure Centre, The Waterfront, and more.

To be eligible for the free-of-charge scheme, you must be either a full-time student, in receipt of any government support such as Universal Credit or have a national bus pass.

Applications can be made via the Norwich City Council website. The subscription is valid for one year, after

which you will need to apply again.

Another saver that supports students is an ‘HC2’ under the NHS Low Income Scheme. The scheme can provide extensive help with health costs, including free NHS prescriptions, free NHS dental treatment, and free NHS sight tests.

The scheme is available to most full-time students, pensioners, and those living on benefits. Simply search online for the scheme, and you can apply online for a one-year certification.

It should be noted that you may not be entitled to full cost coverage, with the NHS stating, “How much help you get depends on your weekly income and necessary outgoings, plus any savings or investments you have at the time you apply.”

A more well-known but still vital-

ly important student saver is a railcard. You can apply for a variety of railcards on the National Rail website.

Santander, which offers railcards alongside its student bank accounts, says railcards are important to “help students through their journey. Students will benefit by saving an average of £199 every year with their four-year Railcard.”

Railcards can help improve work-life balance as you can travel anywhere in the UK by rail with a discount.

Trainline states, “A Student Railcard isn’t just handy for travelling to and from uni, school, or work. Take full advantage of getting 1/3 off train travel and use it for exploring the UK as well.”

Hybr—a website created to help university students with accommoda-

tion issues—has said it is important to get any and all student discounts you can find. “Student discounts not only make education more accessible, but they also help ease the financial burden on students,” it says, adding, “By offering reduced prices, businesses contribute to creating a more affordable learning experience.”

Furthermore, they stress that this can help new students, in particular, “learn the value of budgeting and making informed purchasing decisions.”

Other good student discount sites and schemes to keep a look out for include Student Beans, UniDays and Totum. Many outlets in the city also offer distinct student discounts, including many stores in Chantry Place Shopping Centre, who are hosting a Student Night on the 3rd of October.

Features

Loneliness on Campus: Top Tips for Freshers

Mar Devonport
Features Editor

A feeling as universal as it is misunderstood, loneliness is something that affects us all. Often associated with physically being alone, it is when we crave human connection and intimacy.

This is not to say, that everyone who is alone is lonely, or everyone who is surrounded by friends is not feeling this way, but often it is a desire for acceptance; being seen and understood.

When this need is not met, it accumulates into feeling unwanted and can develop into different mental health issues.

However, when we first enter into university, this might not be our initial understanding as it is not the experience that our friends and family told us about. But unfortunately, many people's first experience of loneliness is actually at university.

Not only are we thrown into an accommodation situation that can feel very different from what we are used to, but we are away from home perhaps for the first time. Whether we have moved hundreds of miles or just up the road, the disconnection from our comfort zone is deeply felt. We are away

from our family and our friends from school and the constancy they once provided, is no longer there.

For something that is often referred to as the best time of our lives, it is not always so positive.

UEA, along with other universities, try to make this experience as comfortable as possible. The jam-packed Fresher's itinerary has something, hopefully, for everyone; from getting to know Norwich to a roller disco to Hacker the Dog at the LCR.

However, in 2023, government research showed that 92% of students experience loneliness, which perhaps demonstrates that activities alone are not enough and, in many cases, can cause social exhaustion.

What this figure highlights though is that almost all students feel, or have felt this way, which leads us to ask - what help is available and what can I do if I feel this way?

Fortunately, the help offered at UEA not only reassures students that loneliness is normal, but that it is something that can be helped by the resources at Student Services, a service happy to help with even the smallest grievance. For many this feeling isn't permanent. It is a feeling that maybe after some reassurance will not persist beyond Christmas. For others, loneliness is something that can affect them right to the end of their degree and with

that, unfortunately, comes a level of shame.

43% of students who feel lonely, say they worry they will be judged by their peers. This shows the level of stigma around something seemingly universal and demonstrates how misunderstood loneliness is and how little is known about what help is available.

This is where I mention the amazing things Student Services offers.

First years, as you start your lectures soon, you will notice how the first few slides of your lectures will show you what support is available.

You may not need it now in the rush of the first few weeks, but it is important to know that it is there.

The online referral to Student Services is on Blackboard, and someone from the team will be in touch with you within 48 hours. Jock Downie, the Head of Student Services, in an interview said how incredibly proud he is of UEA's Student Services, emphasising the passionate care the team show for students and their experience at university.

This care is tailored to work for you and there is a number of different ways they can help.

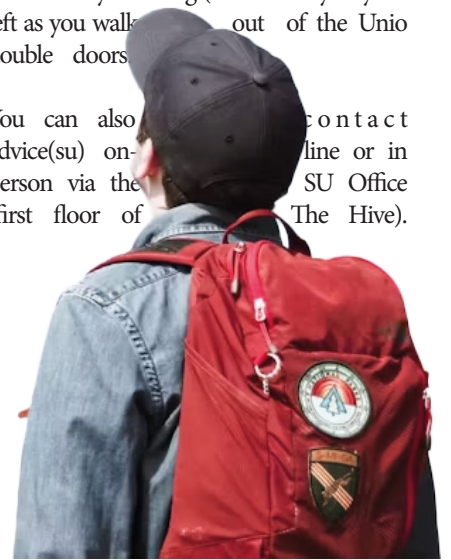
Hopefully this article reassures people that

if you do feel lonely at all, that there is a team willing to listen and care for you.

Downie said how the most common phrase him and the rest of the team will hear every day is 'sorry to bother you with this' and in response he made it clear that, "Nothing is too small. We can have a look [at what's going on], we give you resources and we can support you."

For more information, please visit their website: <https://www.uea.ac.uk/uea-life/student-support/wellbeing>. You can visit Student Services in person at The Wherry Building (immediately to your left as you walk out of the Union double doors).

You can also contact advice(su) on-line or in person via the SU Office (first floor of The Hive).



Grenfell Inquiry: An Examination of Institutional Failures and Accountability

Naa Yarley Yartey



Image Credit: Wikimedia Commons

On the night of June 14, 2017, a kitchen fire at Grenfell Tower escalated into one of the deadliest residential fires in modern British history. The fire, which claimed 72 lives, was more than a tragedy—it was a disaster fuelled by systemic dishonesty, incompetence, and greed. Sir Martin Moore-Bick's final report paints a devastating picture: companies prioritised profit over safety. Victims like Francis Dean, who lost everything, were left waiting for the justice they were promised. 'Since that night,' he says, 'I've not been the same person; I'm messed up.' This isn't just about the fire; it's about the betrayal that allowed it to happen.

Seven years later, the 2024 Grenfell Tower Inquiry delivered a damning verdict confirming the disaster was preventable.

At the heart of the fire's devastation was the combustible cladding that coated the building. Flammable aluminium composite material (ACM) panels—selected to save costs during a refurbishment—allowed the flames to accelerate up the building's exterior. The inquiry revealed how "systemically dishonest" the companies involved were. Not only did

construction companies like Rydon and Harley Facades neglect safety regulations, but the manufacturer of the cladding, Arconic, knowingly sold dangerous materials and concealed test results. Similarly, the supplier of the insulation, Celotex, was just as deceptive, as they manipulated fire test data.

The failures also came from Government bodies like the Department for Communities, who ignored warnings and failed to update safety regulations. The inquiry outlined how, for decades, officials ignored the risks posed by combustible materials in high-rise buildings. Despite the numerous opportunities to act, the government remained complacent, focused on deregulation and cutting red tape at the expense of public safety.

The London Fire Brigade (LFB), too, bears responsibility. The inquiry found that despite the lessons of Lakanal House in 2009, the LFB was woefully unprepared for the scale of the Grenfell fire. Firefighters were not trained to deal with a blaze of such magnitude, nor to handle the flood of emergency calls from residents trapped inside. Crucially, there was no proper evacuation strategy in place, and by the time the stay-put advice was revoked, it was tragically too late for many.

The new government, faced with this damning report, has promised action. Central to its response is the creation of a single, independent construction regulator; a body that will oversee building safety and fire standards. There are plans to overhaul fire safety regulations, banning combustible cladding and enforcing stricter penalties for those who cut corners on safety. A key recommendation is the regulation of fire risk assessors, ensuring that those responsible for safeguarding residents are properly trained and held accountable.

For the families of Grenfell, these promises come after years of heartbreak, but they bring hope that no other community will ever have to endure such a catastrophe. Yet for many, including Karim Khalloufi, whose sister died in the blaze, the wait for justice feels never-ending. 'Maybe I will die without having justice,' he said. The inquiry that was meant to bring answers has instead delayed prosecutions, forcing families to wait. As the Prime Minister vows to block dishonest companies from future government contracts, one question lingers in the minds of many: how many lives must be sacrificed before we learn the true cost of indifference?

Labour's new relationship with Europe: Is Starmer reversing Brexit?

Meg Thubron
Features Senior Writer

If you have been keeping up to date with the recent antics of the new Labour Government, the European conferences and talks have been a key theme in recent weeks.

At the end of August, Sir Keir Starmer travelled to Berlin to hold talks with the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, for the fifth time since he became elected Prime Minister in early July.

Talks with the German government have, what Starmer describes as, the potential for a political 'reset' with the rest of Europe, and explicitly outlines his intentions not to reverse the deal of Brexit.

Starmer aims to produce a bilateral treaty with Germany by the end of the year to improve trade relations, international security and defence. Inevitably the latter will have a strong focus on the Ukrainian war with Russia.

The pact will endeavour to achieve better co-ordination between UK and European intelligence agencies to combat the illegal immigra-

tion problem. In response, Germany looks to propose the 'Youth Mobility Scheme', with the aim to facilitate the movement of young people and students more easily across Europe.

If Starmer wants to 'reset' relations with the European Union, he must expect some form of compromise and has apparently not ruled out the scheme, which would orchestrate student exchanges with the UK and the EU.

Starmer's fundamental goal in these European talks is to strengthen ties, ensuring growth in the British economy. The Labour government have already warned the British people of the Autumn Budget which looks set to be a tough pill to swallow for most of the public, which could include students.

If these talks between the UK and the EU continue positively, they could provide the political reassurance needed that will allow, or even provide, a way for Starmer to improve the economic climate. Starmer has also been seen attending the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games. The Prime Minister met with Emmanuel Macron

on the 29th of August in Paris where he initially congratulated the French government for their efforts in hosting the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

The visit was accompanied by later talks and conferences with Macron and officials from his government, which, arguably, only confirmed Starmer's intention to strengthen ties with the European Union in the coming months.

The leaders agreed on matters including the precarious situation in the Middle East, stressing the importance of a necessity to reach a political solution to the escalating matter.

The two leaders were like-minded when it came to tackling the challenge of the small boat crossings across the English Channel, which has the potential to quieten the far-right populists in both countries.

Supporting the agreements made with Olaf Scholz, the UK and France agreed to do more to utilize and improve intelligence sharing, supporting international security. Starmer's commitment to 'reset' relations with the EU is clear, but does this come with a level of ambiguity? During a visit to Scotland in July during his election

Image Credit: WikimediaCommons



campaign, Starmer was quick to blast Brexit, calling it a 'botched' deal made by Boris Johnson, which is juxtaposed by the Prime Minister's promise not to reverse Brexit.

Instead Starmer has said the plan is 'to turn a corner' with the EU, but the vagueness of this statement means this new governments' plan for our relationship with our EU allies, is unknown. What we do know however, is that the economic landscape is at the forefront of the Labour's intentions and these talks tell us that Starmer is doing what you'd expect from a new leader. It is important to note, however, that nothing has been set in stone and no promises have been made.

Rosebank: Environmental campaigners celebrate progress in legal challenge

Petra Todd
Environmental Correspondent

As parliament returns from summer break, there are a huge number of issues on the agenda for Kier Starmer. With 15 national heat records being broken since the start of 2024, the human caused climate crisis is one of the most pressing of all.

Rosebank is owned by the Norwegian oil company, Equinor, and in 2023, the Conservative government permitted Equinor to develop the field. It's the biggest oil and gas site in the North Sea and would lead to over 200 million tonnes of carbon dioxide being produced.

Due to the severity of the climate crisis, it is unsurprising that environmental organisations like Greenpeace and Uplift have taken the government to court. At the end of August, the UK government announced it would not block the continued legal fight against the licenses granted to the Rosebank oil field in

the North Sea. This decision means the UK government will no longer legally defend the oil company in the court case brought by Greenpeace and Uplift. The environmental organisations are pleased with the recent decision, despite the fact this does not, by itself, mean that Equinor's license has been removed.

In June, the UK Supreme Court announced that scope 3 emissions – emissions associated with the burning of extracted oil and gas – must be included when assessing the environmental impact of a new project. This forces fossil fuel companies to be more transparent about their carbon emissions, therefore adding more weight to fossil fuel court cases. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero under Sunak's government said North Sea oil and gas projects will increase energy security and lower bills for UK households. However, this has been proven incorrect. Due to the ownership of the oil fields by private companies, 80% of the extract-

ed oil is actually exported to be sold on international markets, meaning this does nothing to improve security in the UK. Similarly, energy bills are not lowered as the UK has little control over the costs of oil and gas on these international markets. Equinor would receive £3-4 billion in tax breaks from the UK government, effectively paid for by the British public.

The Conservatives claimed this would be financially worthwhile due to the money it would bring back to the UK economy, but given fluctuating global oil prices, there is potential this figure would not be recouped.

In a Guardian interview, the COP26 president Alok Sharma said "The government has said this bill is about protecting energy security. But the reality is, the oil and gas extracted from the North Sea is owned by private companies – the government doesn't get to control who they sell to." In an interview with Oceanographic Magazine, Labour Energy Minister, Michael Shanks, said, "While we

make that transition [to renewables] the oil and gas industry will play an important role in the economy for decades to come". However, a recent World Meteorological Organisation report announced there is an 80% chance of at least one year temporarily exceeding 1.5°C this decade, causing catastrophic climate tipping points to be triggered. With fossil fuels accounting for 75% of greenhouse gas emissions, scientists say it is paramount that fossil fuels are phased out as quickly as possible.

Extracting the oil from Rosebank alone – not even including burning it – would push us past our total carbon budget for burning fossil fuels from 2028 onwards, and when these reserves are burnt, as much carbon dioxide as 56 coal-fired power stations will be produced. "It's impossible to reconcile approving a huge new oilfield like Rosebank with the UK meeting its climate obligations", says executive director of Uplift Tessa Khan in a Guardian interview.

The recent news is a step in the right direction, but things are far from over. The legal case over the next few months is vital in determining the future of North Sea oil and gas.

Home of the Wonderful

The Freshers' Guide to Climate Action at University

Jaz Brook
Environmental Correspondent

Photo Credit: Unsplash

Real change starts with you. With students who are passionate about making a difference, young adults who want to take control over their futures and the next generation of leaders who want to make positive impacts in their careers. Real change starts with the development of you. The development of your critical thinking skills, your ability to empower yourselves and others and your drive for change. University prioritises your development and gives you opportunities to create change, from connecting you with like-minded individuals and organisations to supporting low-impact lifestyles. By championing students to take climate action, universities have the potential to lift young people in climate conversations and empower them in green careers and academia. With 90% of students saying that climate change impacts their mental well-being and over 60% wanting to learn more about sustainability, climate action is an essential part of university life and learning and can help students reduce their environmental footprint and their climate anxiety. By taking part in climate action at university, whether that be through societies, volunteering, career development or low-impact lifestyles, you can show employers that you are passionate about sustainability and can actively respond to climate change in ways that transcend protesting. Young people are changing the definition of climate action and continue to be at the forefront of the movement and opportunities at university significantly contribute to this mobilisation of students.

Here are some ways you can take action at UEA, in Norwich and Norfolk:

Societies:

At UEA we have lots of incredible environmentally focused societies that are giving students the opportunity to take action. You can become a member of these societies and take part in their range of activities and events, and, if you want to be directly involved in the running of a society, you can become a committee member! Some societies are focused on environmental conservation and others look more at campaigning. Sustainability Society is centred around sustainability but with a focus on plants and animals and they run weekly allotment sessions allowing students to grow their own fresh produce! CAWS or Conservation and Wildlife Society host a variation of indoor and outdoor activities, on UEA campus and around Norfolk. From day trips to see seals at Horsey Beach to campus wildlife walks, conservation work in Buxton Heath to film nights, CAWS covers all aspects of conservation and wildlife and helps students directly contribute to improving wildlife in Norfolk. BCAN or the Student Biodiversity and Climate Action Network is a community of students and staff who are passionate about making UEA a global sustainability leader. Their work focuses on the improvement of UEA as an organisation and they're currently working on two key projects: a Fossil Fuel Free Careers Campaign and a Curriculum Reform Project. Plant-based Universities UEA is part of the national Plant-based Universities campaign that takes part in student-led campaigns

pursuing plant-based university catering. They have regular socials, events and trips educating on and campaigning for the benefits of plant-based diets for us and the planet.

Volunteering:

There are lots of environmentally focused volunteering opportunities in and around Norwich and you can use the UEA Career Central site to find a host of incredible opportunities advertised by organisations. The site is super easy to use, and you can filter to find volunteering opportunities and search for keywords like environment. The Conservation Volunteers (TVC) have a Norfolk chapter and their Norwich-based project, the Norfolk Environmental Action Team, is based close to UEA at the Norwich Research Park. They host conservation activities for anyone to take part in, 5 days a week, all year round. Voluntary Norfolk is the place to go to find any other volunteering opportunities in Norfolk as most Norfolk-based organisations advertise their volunteering opportunities through it. Remember all volunteering activities can contribute to achieving the Silver and Gold UEA Award,

which provides employer-friendly recognition of your extra-curriculars.

Careers:

UEA hosts a variety of career fairs over the academic year to get students excited about their next steps.

There is a wide range of organisations that attend and whilst not many are specifically environmental organisations, most will be working towards sustainability goals so don't forget to ask about it! As well as career events, UEA have the year abroad, year in industry and year in enterprise schemes as part of your degree, as well as internship, fellowship, and further education opportunities where you can specialise in the environment. Towards the end of the first semester, the UEA Student Enterprise hosts the Change Makers Competition which is an accelerator programme with some grant funding to help students start up social enterprises that help people and the planet.

Plant-based food:

There is a lot of plant-based food on campus — from the hot vegan meals in Campus Kitchen to the vegan salads, sandwiches, sushi, and brownies at Ziggy's, UNIO, the Sports Park and the Enterprise Centre. You can even build your own vegan salad or sandwich at Café 57! There are tons of vegan eats off campus too, from completely vegan or veggie restaurants like The Topsy Vegan, Namaste Village and Nourish Falafel bar, to places with lots of vegan options like bao buns at Bun Box in Norwich Market or a vegan fry-up at The Street Café on Magdalen Street. Restaurants across wider Norfolk such as The William and Florence, The Parson Woodforde, The Honingham Buck and SugarBeat all offer vegan options. You can even get vegan fish and chips at Mary Jane's Fish Bar in Cromer!

Sustainable shopping:

Just a 5-minute bus ride from campus, 'The Green Grocers' sells locally sourced, eco-conscious and refillable products, and they have a restaurant that does pizza nights too! In Norwich city centre, shops like Rainbow Wholefoods, Grape Tree and Earnie's Zero Waste Shop offer refillable products as well as vegan and whole foods. There are also lots of charity and second-hand shops across the whole of Norfolk for a more sustainable alternative to clothes shopping. There are similar stores across Norfolk from The Green Shop and Hawthorn and Bee in Dereham, to Green Dreaming in Great Yarmouth and Groveland Farm Shop in Roughton.



Brutalism and UEA: The Architectural Legacy on Campus

Fiona Hill
Co-Editor-In-Chief

The architecture at UEA is undoubtedly controversial. What UEA student hasn't sat in the square on a sunny May afternoon, snakebite in hand, and thought, 'You know what? They've got it wrong. UEA was the best-looking uni on my UCAS form and I would hate to be in some beautiful period dining hall' (before immediately changing their mind the moment it rains). Still, regardless of our fleeting opinions, there is a level of fondness that students carry for our concrete home, even if a knowledge of its forgotten history has become rarer.

Although you may have heard the term 'Brutalist' banded around UEA quite liberally in your time here; what does it truly mean? Is it anything more than a word to describe a building that seems abrasive, grey and, for want of a better name, 'brutal'? If anything, Brutalism lies more in philosophy than design. The simplicity in the smooth clear lines, the symmetry, the use of once hidden materials such as



concrete, marked a distinctly socialist hope for a fairer future. It was utilitarian, cheap, anti-tradition and to many, it was beautiful.

Brutalism, at its core, was an emotional and physical reaction to the tragedy of the Second World War. With the destruction of over a million homes in the Blitz, as well as the increase in demand following the subsequent 'Baby Boom' of the 50s,

affordable, practical housing was needed, and it was needed urgently. However, the war left not only a material wound upon the country but a mental one. This forced many to turn their backs on the intricacies of designs in the past, which had come to represent nothing but the hubris of a world that had led them into chaos.

"Brutalism, at its core, was an emotional and physical reaction"

One prominent architect of this period was Sir Denys Lasden, an enigmatic Londoner who came to be celebrated as one of the greatest architects of the modern age. His masterpieces spanned from the Royal National Theatre, the Royal College of Physicians and in the early 60s, the University of East Anglia. The UEA was a pivotal project for Lasden as he was given the freedom to lead what would become one of his most extensive designs. His goal? To create a 'five-minute university,' a campus in which accommodation and study buildings would only be five minutes away (and so succeeding Leed's 10-minute university in 1960!). One of the more distinctive ways in which this was executed was through the construction of raised walkways, intended to separate pedestrians and transport in the hopes of quicker circulation around campus. As expected, concrete was to play a significant role in both this and the wider design, with Lasden declaring,

"Concrete is a very intractable material, but it can be a beautiful material if it is used in the way its own nature intends it to be used... You need to work to a certain scale... It is not a cosy little material."

It is safe to say that UEA encapsulates everything that was brilliant about Lasden's work, as well

as Brutalism on a broader scale. This legacy can be seen today, with Historic England naming the UEA as Britain's 'first and most successful expression of a university as a small city rather than a dispersed campus.' This 'city' feel is achieved not solely by the Brutalist influence, but by Lasden's specific take on the movement, with his allowing the buildings to step back and become a canvas for the natural world and the students and staff who use them.

But how does campus hold up today? Does UEA still appreciate Lasden's designs? This September I spoke with current students and was able to gather some insights into how our Brutalist architecture is viewed in a time that has long forgotten its original meaning.

'When it was built, it was modern. You know, you look at universities like Oxford and Cambridge and they have this really old architecture and it's easy to compare it to that. But you have to remember how different it was at the time. We're used to 'softer' buildings now, more neutral looking.' - Undergraduate Student

'Personally, I really like it. I do know that people do find it ugly though! I mean I get where that comes from, but I just think it's really unique for a university — it makes it who it is. Overall, I think it shows that there's always been a lot of creativity at UEA and that's reflected in the buildings.' - Postgraduate Student

'I think people do look at campus and think that it's very daunting. I've heard people say that before.' - Undergraduate Student

'I really like it now. When I first looked it was actually one of the main things that put me off, but I've always

loved all the green spaces. After a few months of being here, I really came around to it. I like how the buildings look different in each season as well, just because of the different shadows and colours and the plants that surround it.' - Undergraduate Student

Of course, any praise and introspection in relation with these buildings can't help but be tinged with sadness. The discovery of RAAC within both Norfolk and Suffolk Terrace (the Ziggurats) in 2023 cast doubt onto their continuation as an iconic and much-loved landmark on campus. Although their status as Grade II* listed buildings and pillars of the Brutalist movement does protect their demolition at this point in time, their

"UEA encapsulates everything that was brilliant about Lasden's work"

now empty interiors are a far cry from Lasden's vision for his bustling university of the future.

Still, as campus begins to become busy once again, filled with people after what has been a very long, very quiet summer, it is undoubtable that the remaining buildings start to come to life as well. The Hive has become reinvigorated as the social hub of campus, the library stands tall



as the much-needed sanctuary of quiet and the Square is flooded with students meeting friends after the summer. Whether their design is to your taste or not, looking around this Welcome Week, it's hard to deny that they still fit the Brutalist goal of practicality. But perhaps they remain still more relevant that? In the 60s, UEA was built as a dedication to fairness, honesty, a lack of pretentiousness and a modern outlook. It seems fitting that these remain the very soul of UEA today.

Photo Credits: Maggie Read



The UEA Language Programme: Is It For You?

Abbie Harding

Have you ever wanted to learn a new language? Whether it's the appeal of exploring a new culture, expanding your skills or giving yourself a fun challenge, learning a language is a truly rewarding experience. And, amongst the excitement of a new term with classes and societies springing into gear, did you know UEA runs a free 3-month language programme for students?

The UEA University Language Programme offers English, Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and British Sign Language classes, with many at beginner level. There are daytime and evening classes available, allowing great flexibility for students. These courses can either be taken as credit or non-credit courses. Credit-bearing means you take a summative assessment at the end. The programme runs in the Autumn (October-December), Spring (January-March) and Summer (April-June).

So what does one of UEA's language programmes look like? Anabelle Luvena, the Concrete Online Editor, shares her experience of taking Japanese I and II as a non-credit in her second year of study at UEA:

What drew you to study Japanese?
'Recently I've been interested in the Japanese language since most media I consume these days originate from Japan in one way or another, be it music, webcomics or video games. [...]'

I've also been interested in the translation scene and wanted to crack in translating some texts relating to my favourite media franchises and it just so happens that some of them were originally in Japanese.'

What did you cover in your lessons?

'Beginner's Japanese taught us the very fundamentals of the Japanese Language. We started with learning its two alphabets, Hiragana and Katakana, and were often quizzed about it, especially in the first semester. As we progressed, we learned the third script found in Japanese — Kanji. [...] Topics-wise, we started with basic topics such as introducing ourselves, our family and our favourite things. Then we moved on to more advanced topics such as accepting and refusing invitations, how to ask requests, and what we wanted to do once we were done with university.'

What were your lessons like?

'Sessions are split into two seminars per week: a shorter, one-hour seminar for us to practice listening, speaking and pronunciation; and a longer, two-hour seminar that taught us reading and writing. For my classes specifically in Beginner's Japanese, classes were small and consists of between 5 to 10 people. The lessons also felt much more relaxed than the average seminar as well, with the teachers often putting us at ease despite

the daunting language we were about to study. Both teachers were VERY funny, and our classes often erupt into peals of giggles as we shared stories and misadventures in the most rudimentary, [...] broken Japanese we could muster. [...] I found that I was able to make friends easier in class and can confidently call all my classmates — the teacher included — very good friends.'

How was the workload? Were you able to balance your studies?

'In terms of workload, be prepared to manage your time very, VERY well. [...] Both Beginners Japanese I and II gave us loads (and I mean LOADS) of homework. Homework was bite-sized and focused on topics we already learned. [...] Despite the big after-hours workload, I found them very useful and designed in a way that didn't lead to burnout.'

What was the best thing you learned?

'The best thing I learned was probably the different culture notes both [my teachers] brought to us about Japan. I love[d] hearing stories of their adventures and culture notes they share with us. I also loved learning the different verb forms as they completely revolutionise how I take on my translation projects.'

What tips would you give to someone starting a new language course?



'First, it is never too late to start! While it is true that learning a new language early and young is very beneficial as children pick up pronunciation and vocabulary quicker than adults, don't think of age as a roadblock! Second, make sure to pick a language you are serious about. Third, don't be intimidated. [...] With the right lessons, resources and enough dedication, any language is conquerable. And finally, have fun! Relax! Share your funniest stories! Make mistakes! Make friends along the way! We're all learning, so no one will judge you! Learning a new language is a net positive no matter what after all. So [you] might as well enjoy your time while you immerse yourself in this weird and wonderful world of languages.'

The deadline for applying to the upcoming Autumn term is the 19th September. Check out the UEA Language Programme's website to find out how to register.

Photo Credit: Unsplash

Concrete Archive: 18/09/1996

Fiona Hill
Co-Editor-In-Chief

Welcome Week (or Fresher's Week as it was previously known) is truly an 'interesting' time. Nothing feels more freeing and yet more degrading than cooking your first bowl of tomato pasta in halls, only to realise that you've forgotten the onions and the garlic and maybe (just maybe) you can't actually cook. Surely there must be some kind of support for navigating this, as well as the complex social dynamics of having to play 'Ring of Fire' with a group of people you've only just met. So for this month's Concrete Archive, I thought that we could take a trip back to 1996 and have a little look at whether their 'Freshers' Guide' holds up today.

The guide starts with what might be referred to as quite

a 'sassy' little introduction (so all the first-years know that Concrete is definitely very cool), where the writer succeeds in playfully insulting UEA. In all honesty, it really is quite funny, with stand-out lines being, 'the campus is constructed entirely from unappealing concrete blocks thus resembling an open-plan prison' and 'there are always people who go around joining everything, including the Nude Archaeologists Society.' It then proceeds to remark on the unspoken rules for conversation in Fresher's Week, with some of them sounding a little like conversations you might overhear at Unio today. Concrete claims, 'Don't say: I'm very impressed with the LCR disco — such interesting people and fantastic music!' Do say: 'This LCR thing is crap' (but still turn up every single week of the year). Fortunately, the guide isn't just

full of witty quips, with it going on to offer some pretty useful advice about settling into life on campus. It suggests that 'establishing a good relationship with your cleaner will make life in residences run a lot more smoothly' and that you shouldn't 'leave your clothes in the [washing] machine then disappear to the pub for hours because angry people will dump them on the floor.'

However, if we were to look at what no longer remains relevant, the most obvious feature would be the range of advertisements aimed at new students. One particularly amusing one is for 'Trads Pizza', which claims to sell garlic bread, baked potatoes, coleslaw and gateaux.

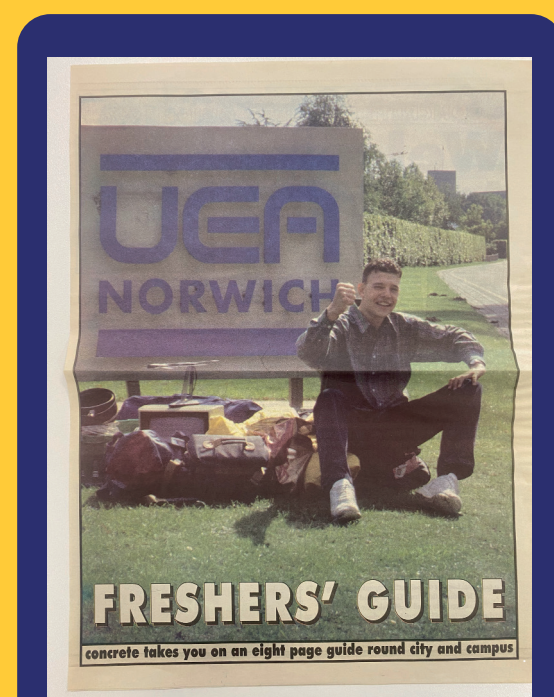
I have to say that I wasn't aware that gateaux was such a student favourite in the 90s, but maybe if I could find one

for £1.50, it too might become a staple part of my diet...

The guide finishes with a bit of shameless self-promotion, with a whole page dedicated to Concrete's five-year history and how exactly you could get involved. 'If you're interested in joining Concrete' they state, 'visit our stall at Soc Mart.'

Maybe some things never change, because if you want to learn more about Concrete this week- come and see us at the Societies Fair! (although today you can just as easily send us a message on Instagram ;)) With that in mind, I'll end on a sweet note and echo what was written 28 years ago and remains just as vital in what we do today,

'Don't forget- Concrete is written by UEA students, for UEA students, therefore we need you!'



Issue 62: 18th September 1996
Editor: James Curtis

Puzzles

AUNTIE G'S HOROSCOPES

Kasey Campbell
Anne Glia

ARIES
The SU shop will run out of UEA tote bags as you're checking out. How good are your grocery juggling skills Aries?

TAURUS
Your determination to make those 9am starts will be strong this month. Unfortunately for you, you'll sleep through your alarms. I'll wave when I see you running past the Sportspark at 8:50 Taurus.

GEMINI
Concrete Confessions will not be kind to you this month. You will spend too much time trying to figure out if 'the cutie in the blue bar on Tuesday' could be you (you were in the red bar Gemini).

CANCER
The study room you booked on Booker will have someone in it when you turn up to study. Will you be brave enough to claim your territory Cancer?

LEO
Dreams of becoming a BNOC will enlighten you this month. Ignore themwww Leo. Sylvester has the monopoly at UEA. I suspect he will not take kindly to threats.

VIRGO
It's fine, Virgo. I get it. I'm sure your advisor will understand that you missed your meeting because you got distracted chasing the UEA bunnies.

LIBRA
Avoid Floor Zero in the library this week. We all know it's the least productive floor. You don't need a horoscope to tell you you'll get nothing done there Libra. Like, at all.

SCORPIO
You'll leave your laptop in the library to go for a coffee. Then you'll realise you forgot your campus card and now, you're locked out. Hope you cleared that browser history, Scorpio.

SAGITTARIUS
I sense that the line for UNIO will be very long. Academic success or your extra hot, skinny latte Sagittarius?

CAPRICORN
You will see someone get scared by that statue on the top of the library. It's gonna be a good month Capricorn.

AQUARIUS
Blackboard will go down for you. Will you put on your adult pants, be brave and speak to the IT team Aquarius?

PISCES
Thought you'd find a place in the library to study Pisces? Think again. The library will be packed. Next stop JSC, ta-ta now!

For more Anne Glia (our Agony Aunt) advice, go to Lifestyle on page 18!

Word Search



New Science
Building
Earlham Hall
INTO
The Hive
Ziggurats
Warren
Post Room
Library
Unio
LCR

Concrete Office
The Shop
Livewire Studio
Pharmacy
Bar SU
Lake

Campus Kitchen
Enterprise Centre
Elizabeth Fry
Edith Cavell

Sudoku

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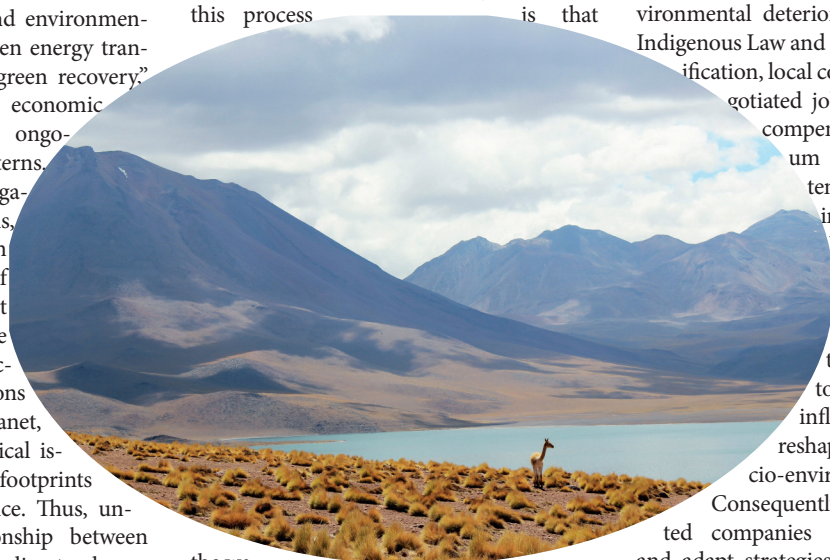
A Deep Dive Into Lithium Extraction in The Atacama Region of Chile

Emma Darlington
Global Senior Writer

From the cars we drive to the phones we use; we have never been so disconnected from where and how our consumer goods reach us. At the click of a button, we can receive goods from halfway around the globe in less than 24 hours, yet many of us overlook the environmental and social injustice embedded in their production. One prominent example of this disconnect is lithium – a critical resource for batteries used in electric vehicles and renewable energy technologies. As this demand for green energy skyrockets, so does the pressure on ecosystems and communities near lithium extraction sites. The movement away from fossil fuels is far from black and white, intertwined with profound social and environmental implications. The green energy transition advocates for a “green recovery,” promoting sustainable economic growth while allowing ongoing consumption patterns. In almost all climate mitigation strategies and goals, emphasis is placed on reducing emissions (half by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2050). Despite the importance of the reduction of carbon emissions for the future of our planet, they often overlook critical issues such as ecological footprints and environmental justice. Thus, understanding the relationship between resource extraction and climate change is urgent, particularly as key transition minerals (lithium, cobalt, and graphite) could increase by around 500% by 2050 according to World Bank research.

At the centre of this lithium demand lies the “Lithium Triangle,” which encompasses northwestern Argentina, southwestern Bolivia, and northeastern Chile. This region boasts the world’s largest lithium reserves, covering over 400,000 km². Discoveries of lithium in the Triangle date back to the 1960s, with the first exploration and extraction projects taking place in the Atacama Desert for the development of aerospace, nuclear, and military technologies. Over 90% of the total lithium reserve in Chile is in the Salar de Atacama, considered one of the oldest and driest deserts on Earth. Despite its extreme conditions, its basin holds unique ecosystems with unique biodiversity and scientific value. Its “ecological, recreational, and cultural (18 indigenous communities) importance” gives the Salar a significant intrinsic value that should not

be underestimated. It was only in the late 2000s that the area received a high level of political attention, driven by rising electronic demand and green energy initiatives. Most recently, on April 20th, 2023, Chile launched its National Lithium Strategy (NSL) to significantly boost its lithium production while linking economic growth to a global green economy. The NLS envisions a future where mining operations maximise recovery while minimising environmental impacts and fostering community engagement. Lithium is being extracted in the Atacama Desert by two companies, Albemarle and SQM. Both are using the extraction method of brine evaporation. This process involves drilling into the salt flats to extract saline water (brine), which is then evaporated in large pools over 18-24 months. This causes water depletion, which is gradual, cumulative and hard to measure. One of the key issues with this process is that



the water lost from the brine being evaporated is not accounted for as it is defined as a mineral rather than water. You may wonder how something so small as a classification can cause such controversy. Well, brines are different from other minerals, having hydrodynamic behaviour and water bodies that are in constant movement. However, the same as rock or sand deposits, the salt flats are defined by the state as static mineral deposits.

Under the Chilean Mining Code of 1983, Title 1, Article 1 “The state has absolute, exclusive, inalienable, and essential dominance of all mines.” The non-recognition of brine as a water allows companies to only account for their freshwater expenses, resulting in a severe underestimation of the water crisis in the region, overexploiting resources beyond their natural recharge capacity. This dissociation has allowed mining companies to take more of their fair share, making the impact of “large-scale evaporation of millions of litres of water from brine invisible.” In Albemarle’s 2023 Sustainability Report, they claim that “brine is excluded because it is not deemed freshwater.” Despite these

discourses being extremely dominant, the injustices linked to brine evaporation technologies have caused significant attention worldwide, from communities living near extraction points to scientists, international organizations, and environmental NGOs.

In the Atacama region, climate change coupled with water-intensive extraction from both copper and brine projects threatens traditional agricultural and grazing practices. Communities particularly affected include the Lickanantay, Quechua, Aymara, and Colla peoples, which depend on the few common water goods available in the region. A research paper has emphasised this, where it concluded that most communities in the Atacama with a traditional agrarian livelihood are deeply concerned with water scarcity based on significant sights of environmental deterioration. Since Chile’s Indigenous Law and ILO Convention ratification, local communities have negotiated job opportunities and compensation with lithium companies, though tensions and power imbalances remain. In this context, the absence of substantial state intervention has allowed the mining industry to wield significant influence in terms of reshaping the region’s socio-environmental dynamic.

Consequently, this has permitted companies to negotiate terms and adapt strategies that favour extraction and divide communities through the uneven distribution of benefits. Despite the controversy surrounding current brine extraction methods, change is planned to happen. Chile’s National Lithium Strategy plans to shift from brine evaporation to Direct Lithium Extraction (DLE) to meet global demand more sustainably. On the 9th of July 2024, the governments confirmed a total of 88 expressions of interest that were received for the available scalars in Chile to develop lithium projects, with over 80% indicating the use of DLE technologies. Additionally, according to Reuters, Albemarle Corp plans to expand its operations in the Chilean Atacama region as early as 2028 with DLE. However, this still leaves 4 years of the saline sources to become severely depleted. As we navigate the pathway toward a greener future, we must ask: can technology mitigate extraction’s impact, or are we avoiding the deeper issue of unsustainable consumption?

Photo Credits: Paula Porto (unsplash)

Afghan Women Overcome Taliban To Study in Scotland

Naa Yarley Yartey
Global Editor

In a powerful testament to resilience and international cooperation, nineteen Afghan women, barred from attending university by the Taliban, have arrived in Scotland to resume their medical studies. Their journey, marked by immense challenges and unwavering support, is a poignant reminder of the transformative power of solidarity. When the Taliban reasserted control over Afghanistan in August 2021, they imposed severe restrictions on women’s rights, including a sweeping ban on higher education for women. For these nineteen aspiring medical students, this decree was not just a professional setback but a profound personal loss. Confined to their homes and living under constant threat, their dreams of becoming doctors seemed to vanish overnight. The path to Scotland began with a determined campaign led by the Linda Norgrove Foundation, a charity established in memory of aid worker Linda Norgrove, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2010. The foundation, based in Lewis, Scotland, spearheaded efforts to secure placements for these students in Scottish medical schools, overcoming significant bureaucratic and logistical hurdles along the way.

A major breakthrough came in February 2024 when the Scottish Government agreed to amend student funding regulations. This change allowed the Afghan students to be classified as home students, making them eligible for free tuition—a crucial development in making their education possible. Despite this, the relocation process was fraught with challenges. Securing visas, arranging travel, and managing health and language tests involved a complex and costly operation. The Linda Norgrove Foundation, with its limited resources, covered £60,000 in expenses to facilitate the students’ journey and settlement in Scotland, demonstrating their extraordinary commitment to the cause. The students arrived in Edinburgh in late August, greeted by John and Lorna Norgrove, whose support was pivotal in the final stages of their relocation. The emotional significance of their arrival was clear as they prepared to embark on their new academic journeys. Omulbabin Sultani, who will study at St Andrews, reflected on her ordeal: “We endured one thousand days of suffering,” she said. “One thousand days of being confined, silenced, and living in constant fear. When we received our visas, it felt like we were finally escaping from darkness into the light.” Fariba Asifi, who faced threats and displacement due to Taliban persecution, also expressed profound relief and gratitude for the opportunity to continue her studies. Arifa Wahdat, now enrolled at the University of Dundee, and Zahra Hussaini, who will study at Glasgow University, shared her hopes and excitement. Arifa looks forward to embracing both her studies and new activities, while Zahra is eager to pursue her medical career after years of preparation.

As these Afghan women begin their studies in Scotland, their story is more than a personal victory; it symbolises the global fight for women’s rights and education. Their journey from oppression to opportunity is a powerful reminder of the impact that solidarity and perseverance can have in creating a brighter future for all.

Pakistan, a Misunderstood Country

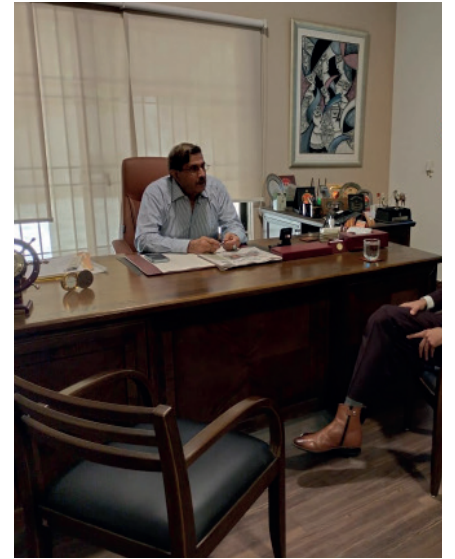
Syed M Hamza

Pakistan is a nation-state perceived to be in constant political chaos and considered unsafe by the western world. Contrarily, Pakistan is a resilient country, that has overcome terrorism, and whose recent general elections are a testimony of Pakistani policy makers' strong democratic policies. Pakistan has been a strong ally of the United States, not only during the "War on Terror," but, according to a United States Institute of Peace report, was also considered the "most allied ally" of the U.S. during the Cold War. The Gulf News, quoting Pakistan's Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations, reported that by 2021, 83,000 Pakistani lives were lost amidst the "War on Terror," costing the state of Pakistan approximately \$126 Billion.

According to an article published by RUSI, written by Miriam Shah, Pakistan's counterterrorism operations, such as Operations Al-Mizan, Rah-e-Raast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb and Rad-ul-Fasaad, met with considerable "tactical successes." In addition, Pakistan has been at the forefront of humanitarian aid by hosting refugees. As per the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Pakistan hosts around 1.38 million refugees making it the world's "fifth largest refugee-hosting country." Pakistan is now considered to be safe and is frequently visited by inter-

national tourists from all walks of life. Concrete spoke to one of Pakistan's Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) - currently serving in the Special Security Unit of Sindh Police - SSP Shamyl Riaz Malik (first on left). According to SSP Malik, his job involves "controlling the security of VIPs including head of states, international sports teams, local and foreign dignitaries." It also involves assisting "counterterrorism operations being conducted by sister law enforcement agencies by providing them logistical assistance, SWAT teams, weapons, gadgets and vehicles." In his interview, he stated that "People in Pakistan are majorly safe and protected. In big cities like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad people are more aware of the security situation and laws. Police and other law enforcement agencies work tirelessly to safeguard the citizens and protect their life, liberty, property and pursuit of happiness." Pakistan's geostrategic importance is highlighted by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). According to Al Jazeera, China has invested \$62 billion for the project. As per a journal article published by the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, CPEC provides China with the shortest connectivity with Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia and Europe.

Concrete also spoke to the former Home Minister of Sindh - one of Pakistan's 5 provinces - Brigadier (Retired) Haris Nawaz. Brigadier (Retired) Nawaz (above right) served as Sindh's Home Minister during the most recent general elections. According to him, "the



government of Pakistan is striving hard to become economically strong through CPEC and is operationalizing Gwadar port to open sea trade routes to the Middle East and Africa." He also said that "I am certain that Pakistan will become one of the leading economies of the world in the next ten years or so." Pakistan also witnessed a smooth transition of government earlier this year. Furthermore, Pakistani news organisation, The Express Tribune, confirmed that last year the Pakistani government established the Special Investment Facilitation Council to catalyse development projects, improve interdepartmental liaison and simplify investment processes. This will further augment the country's economic growth. In the field of sports,

Pakistani players are also proving their mettle. The Guardian confirmed that Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem through his javelin throw secured a gold medal and broke the Olympic record during the recently held Paris Olympics. In conclusion, Pakistan's image in Western society needs to be revisited. Pakistan should not be considered a dangerous country, rather a safe and welcoming country for tourists. It is a country, not even 100 years old, that has acquired nuclear capabilities in the realm of warfare. It is a country whose geographical location can assist in world trade, and a country producing Olympic champions like Arshad Nadeem. Photo credit: Syed M Hamza

Trump's Election Denial: What Happens If He Loses Again?

Mark Etkind

Despite losing the 2020 election, Former President Trump has consistently denied its legitimacy. This behaviour is a pattern dating back to his claims in 2016, an election which he won, about a rigged popular vote. Since there is no proven evidence to substantiate any of these claims, it is fair to say that Trump tends to stretch the truth in his favour. So, with a Trump victory seemingly no longer a forgone conclusion, how might he handle another defeat? Well, to most it seems clear, that, in the event of a Trump defeat, he and his team will do all they can to dispute and disrupt the process. But people change, and so do their strategies. Will there be a different approach? There seem to be two possible outcomes. First, favoured by those horrified by January 6th, is a landslide victory for Harris. In such an event, it will become much more difficult for Trump to

dispute the result. Not to say that he won't try. What is key in such a situation is that many congressional Republicans, who support Trump largely because of the current climate, will see that Trump has fallen out of favour with the people, losing him allies exactly where he will need them. The alternative, at present the seemingly more likely outcome, is that the race will be as close as the previous one. Such a close result, ending in a Trump defeat, will almost inevitably trigger similar disruption from him. Trump's former allies have already suggested they might contest unfavourable results, with Trump's former security advisor, John Bolton, claiming he is laying the groundwork to question the election results if he loses. It will start as a demand for recounts in key states - Pennsylvania and Georgia. There may also be subsequent attempts at swaying electors, as in 2020. However, given the ongoing legal disputes, this tactic seems unlikely.

The key question is, will there be a repeat of January 6th? This seems unlikely. Other than to some fringe Republicans, those who participated in on January 6th are viewed as insurrectionists, if not, violent rioters. As a result, relevant authorities will be working double shifts to prevent a repeat. MAGA will be aware of this. It seems logical that, rather than focusing on the federal congress, with all its security, these supporters would focus on state capitols of key swing states. This would occur in the coming December and would take the shape of a more fractured approach. Such an approach is more dangerous to American democracy. These violent pockets of uprising would be more difficult to manage and would potentially trigger similar acts across the country. This scenario might seem far-fetched to some but think back to the day Trump descended his golden escalator to announce his candidacy,

and how quickly it spiralled. Members of the Capitol Police died, lawmakers are forced into hiding, and the great experiment known as the United States of America is attacked.

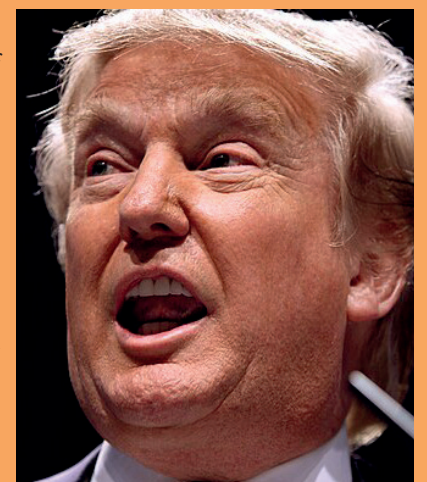


Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons

Opinion

Empowering Student Voices: A Vision for Transformation at UEA

Bhaskar Bukkanahalli
Shivanna - UEASU
Postgraduate Officer

As an international student at UEA, I embarked on a transformative journey when I decided to run for the role of Postgraduate Officer at the Students' Union. Elected to this position, I am driven by a commitment to engage Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and Postgraduate Research (PGR) students in campus life and to foster networking opportunities that enhance their professional growth.

My mission has always been clear: to prioritise student voices and ensure that they are heard and acted upon across the university.

For international students, especially those new to the UEA campus, transitioning smoothly can be challenging. It is crucial that they receive the support and guidance necessary to settle in and thrive from day one.

The SU stands ready to assist and respond to students' needs promptly and effectively. We welcome all Freshers; you're beginning an exciting new journey. Embrace every opportunity, connect with others, and make the most of your time here. We're here to support you in every step.

Recent discussions around the Scholars Bar highlight the importance of student feedback. We listened to the concerns of the PG community and worked diligently, within the constraints of our existing space, to provide an alternative solution to their problems.

While I was initially disappointed by decisions made without consulting incoming officers (including myself and other PG students), I am grateful for the support of the current officer team and the SU Staff. Together, we have managed to secure an alternative social space for our community.

Over the past 50 days, we have made significant strides: hosting two open drop-in sessions, establishing The Graduate Centre Forum for PG students to share ideas and suggestions, and conducting an interim PG Committee election that I chaired. These efforts underscore our dedication to addressing the needs of the postgraduate community.

During consultation with the PG Students, they urged for an alternative space, and we



have worked our best to find one within the very limited space we have in the union house. The current Media Collective Space will be the dedicated space for PG Students going forward. The new space will be named as 'Scholars Corner' and set to open on 23rd of September 2024.

The Graduate Kitchen is also being decorated to ensure students feel homely, and the Postgraduate Lounge will also be retained for PG Students, and the popular Tuesday Scholars Quiz will continue in the bar as usual.

I am thankful to the Media Collective for their cooperation in the process of swapping the spaces. I would call the PG Community to organise social events at the lounge and the new Scholars' Corner, which also gives a wonderful view of the square! Let's make the most use of our dedicated spaces.

This year I am aiming towards organising more networking events for the PG Students at faculty levels by the end of January. I look forward to improving the engagement and participation of Postgrads in clubs and societies, and to introduce Postgrad representatives to ensure that Postgrad voices are heard and represented. For PGT students, my key focus will be on working on employability.

I will also strongly urge for increase in funding for the PGR students considering the raise in cost of living. All of this shall result in building a stronger community for Postgrads at UEA. I know it will be hard to do all of these

Should We Be Excited About Labour's 4-day Week?

Elle McKinnell-
Michael

Under new government proposals, workers will be entitled to request four-day working weeks from their employers.

Since April 2024, workers have had the right to request a four-day week, but employers have not been forced to comply. However, in new legislation set to be introduced in Autumn 2024, the government plans to strengthen the workers' rights in this request to promote flexible working.

Education Minister Baroness Jacqui Smith told LBC: 'What we're actually talking about there is the type of flexible working that enables you to use compressed hours.' She clarifies that in this new legislation, for example, someone contracted to work from 9-5 five days a week could instead request to work from 8-6 four days a week.

Let's be clear, flexible work is the future. AI is developing and taking the reins on admin, data entry, analysis, and various creative practices; in a future where most jobs are at least partly replaceable, how can we all be expected to work full-time without a full-time workload?

Why bother rearranging your week at all? A 3-day weekend can combat burnout and reduce work-related anxiety by giving the worker more time to decompress; employees would have more days to spend with their family and friends, leading to a more fulfilled professional life overall. Employers say they save money on electricity and other overheads, and staff take fewer sick days related to stress and mental health difficulties.

The five-day week in an office feels like a pre-covid artefact for many. When the switch to online work happened during the pandemic, the benefits became a huge cultural talking point. People felt they had more free time before and after work by cutting out their commute; they felt less encumbered by toxic office pressures and more productive in a comfortable environment.

The flexibility of working from home lent itself to flexible hours. In 2024 over 4.2 million people in the UK use flexitime, in which workers choose their start and finish time as long as they complete their contracted hours.

Students are accustomed to balancing study, part-time work and unpaid internships; why shouldn't they be excited about fair and responsible compensation for their work after they graduate? This new legislation will ensure that students starting their full-time career will be entitled to greater options and improved flexibility; and help put power and freedom in the hands of workers who need it.

Young professionals face unfair hours for their given responsibilities, often having to complete work-related tasks outside of contracted hours. Labour's four-day week, alongside other proposed legislation like 'the right to switch off' will no doubt help to combat these unfair conditions.

NOTE: All Officer Columns are written in a guest writer capacity. Image credit: UEASU.

Fresher's Week at UEA

- Embracing the Chaos at Your Own Pace

Liv Mephram
Opinion Editor

Whether you are joining us at UEA as a first-year student, international student, mature student, or a local resident, the commotion and excitement of Freshers week can be an overwhelming prospect – and that is completely okay!

The UEA SU has consistently boasted a diverse array of activities during Freshers Week over the years, and this year is no exception. Welcome Fest sees a variety of nightly club events across campus from 16th, along with daytime events such as the societies fair, ceramic painting and a roller disco, to name a few!

As I'm sure many of us can agree, it is wonderful to see a diverse line-up of events that aim to cater to the varied interests and social preferences of our student community.

Everyone will experience Freshers Week differently, and the purpose of this article is to reassure you that there is no right or wrong way to go about it! Personally, I found my first week at UEA slightly overwhelming. Moving for the first time from my

hometown in Kent to a whole new city brought a mix of homesickness, nerves, and excitement for what was ahead.

Joining as a mature student, I was anxious about fitting in and pressure to make friends quickly because I knew literally nobody in Norwich! Looking back now, I wish I had just relaxed a little more!

Fresher's Week naturally comes with a lot of high expectations and a sense of pressure amongst some of us. Amidst the whirlwind of meeting new classmates during the start of "the best days of my life," my anxiety made me feel the need to step back and decompress, and politely decline to different things I may well have enjoyed at the time.

This led to an overwhelming feeling of FOMO (fear of missing out), along with a sense of guilt for avoiding opportunities to put myself out there, simply because I was tired and needed time to adjust.

If any of this resonates with you this week – whether you have missed out on things because you needed some space, or you have been so busy to fit everything in – I want to remind you that this is just the beginning!

Everyone experiences this differently, and there can be some amazing and spontaneous moments you will love, and perhaps some awkward moments that you will no doubt forget or laugh about one day. Of course, try to keep an open mind when it comes to trying new things, but remember the importance of recharging and reflecting if things become too much.

Of course, saying yes can be valuable, but please don't feel bad about saying no and going at your own pace. Declining can be equally valuable during these early days of university – it is a way of setting boundaries and giving yourself the space to reflect and recharge.

If you don't feel up for a night out with new people this week, see it as an opportunity to arrange something different once you feel more settled in.

As any will tell you, it is important to know that you will meet plenty of people throughout your entire first year – some of whom you'll create the best memories with, even if you didn't connect during Freshers Week. Olivia Hunt, the new Activities and Opportunities officer for 2024/25, pledges

to increase student involvement in all circa 200 Societies this coming year.

Because it can be overwhelming during Freshers Week for new students to learn about them all, she is advocating for a raised awareness of societies and to help guide students on wanting to get involved throughout the year if they are unsure of where to start.

Take things at your own pace – there will always be opportunities to get involved with events at UEA. It might be helpful to take notes of the societies that interest you, follow their socials and check up on their events throughout the year.

As well as this, the events tab on the UEASU website is regularly updated throughout the year, and I can say that over my time here I have been on some amazing trips, seen some fantastic concerts and had many, many a memorable night out.

Don't be too hard on yourself, relax and take it all in, and most importantly do what makes you happy this week, because it is only the start of this amazing journey!

You shouldn't have to reach for that "emergency pad" - Accessing Free Period Products on Campus

Milla Cartwright

In 2021, the government abolished the "tampon tax", a 5% VAT on disposable period products. This was an important step in recognising period products as essential items for managing a normal physiological function.

However, the cost-of-living pressures wiped out the gains made by this abolition, with the prices for period products doubling in some instances. Many of us have experienced the "emergency pad" made up of toilet roll, however for some this extends past something needed in a crunch.

According to ActionAid, more than two million people are struggling with period poverty in the UK, which is a million more than the year before. As such, we have seen a rise in hygiene banks, providing toiletries, cleaning supplies and period products. Since 2020, the government's Period Products Scheme has aimed to alleviate period poverty amongst young

people in England. This scheme aims to provide state-maintained schools and colleges with period products, including tampons, menstrual pads and period cups. The scheme has been renewed until July 2025; however, it is not a permanent setup.

Additionally, this Scheme does not include higher-level educational institutions. Currently, there are no plans in motion to expand the programme towards universities and other communities. Subsequently, there is a reliance on goodwill and campaigning from students to ensure access to free period products around campus.

In recent years, sex and health education has been expanded to include discussions on periods, helping with reducing the stigma around menstruation and addressing misinformation. Feelings of shame perpetuate the feeling that people should hide their period; the overuse of euphemisms is a clear demonstration of this. However, normalising open discussions has

given people the opportunity to verbalise their needs and advocate for themselves and their wellbeing, particularly in terms of reproductive health. Nowadays, how we treat menstruation has been rapidly changing, with Scotland making period products free for all, and Spain allowing workers to take menstrual leave. There is more of a recognition of menstruation as a public health matter that needs to be addressed as such, rather than something to be handled discretely and privately. We are also seeing more types of menstruation products, designed to suit varying needs, including addressing intense pain and excessive bleeding. Moreover, period pants, period cups and reusable pads are becoming more mainstream options for sustainable purchases (environmentally and financially speaking). Especially amongst younger generations we see changing attitudes, ensuring that accessing period products is no longer being riddled with shame and secrecy. Now, more organisations are stepping



Image Credit: Fiona Hill/Concrete

up to provide access to free menstrual products openly. This has especially been seen considering the recent cost-of-living pressures. Currently, the SU offers free pads and tampons in the gender-neutral bathrooms at the Hive. Amongst other provisions offered by UEA to combat the cost-of-living pressures, there are several locations across campus where free period products have been made available: *UEA Library (in the cloakroom area); The Student Information Zone; The Enterprise Centre; Julian Study Centre; Laurence Stenhouse Building; SCI Building and Union House*. The SU also offers period cups to students free of charge; they are provided upon request via a form on their website.

Interview

Adrian Ramsey MP: Leading Green Politics from UEA to Westminster

Adrian Ramsey's political journey began as a student at UEA between 1999 and 2005. It is a story of deep local roots that have grown into a national political career. As Co-Leader of the Green Party (of England and Wales) and a former City Councillor in Norwich, Ramsey offers insights into how his academic experiences, coupled with a long-standing commitment to political activism, have shaped his vision for both his new constituency (Waveney Valley) and the UK as a whole.

Looking back on his time at The Home of the Wonderful, Ramsey's reflections reveal how formative those years were for where he now finds himself. Studying Politics and Sociology at undergraduate level (and going on to study for an MA in Politics), he emphasises the importance of

UEA's interdisciplinary academic environment, which encouraged him to explore politics through a wider lens, blending it with economics, sociology, and philosophy modules. "The lecturers and fellow students were fantastic," Ramsey recalls, "and the wider university life was brilliant".

His time at UEA wasn't limited to academics, though. He was heavily involved in political campaigns, eventually establishing the Young Greens Society, which remains active today. It's clear that UEA wasn't just an educational institution for Ramsey but also a breeding ground for his political ideology.

The 'Fine City' of Norwich itself was equally impactful. Growing up and studying in the city (having also attended the City of Norwich School), Ramsey reflects on his connection to its unique culture and sphere of influence. He speaks of Norwich's independent spirit and how its distance from London creates a distinctive political environment. "Norwich, being far enough from London, has a

distinct identity with lots of independent businesses and a unique culture. That lends itself to a different kind of politics," he explains. This independence helped shape his political views, he stresses - emphasising localism, environmental sustainability, and grassroots activism.

In his post-UEA career, Ramsey quickly shifted his attention from local to national politics, but his focus on grassroots campaigning remained central. After becoming Deputy Leader of the Green Party in 2008, he worked alongside Caroline Lucas (Green Leader from 2007-2012 and 2016-2018), trying to translate local council victories into national strategies. The move into national politics wasn't without its challenges, Ramsey details, but, he adds, he was determined to push the Green Party's agenda forward, reflecting, "It was a great experience and opportunity to take what I had led locally to the national stage while still being active in Norfolk".

Fast forward to his current role as Co-Leader of the Green Party and constituency MP, and that same localised approach remains key. Ramsey and Carla Denyer (Co-Leader and new MP for Bristol Central) have focused on building a strong, targeted electoral strategy to secure more seats in Parliament. The Green Party's traditional local strongholds, such as Brighton, provided a blueprint for success, which the leadership team has ex-

panded upon, Ramsey explains, adding, "We built on momentum from the growth in Green councillors across the country, which had increased five-fold in the last five years. The strategy was based on the tactics we used successfully in Norwich and elsewhere" Ramsey. Clearly, for Ramsey, local success isn't just a stepping stone to national influence—it appears to be the foundation of a more sustainable and impactful political movement.

Ramsey emphasises his commitment to environmentalism and social justice in his policy work, both locally and nationally. He speaks passionately about the need to address pressing issues in his constituency, particularly the decline of public services and environmental degradation. "Key concerns include the lack of dentists and declining local services like healthcare, which is a big issue in the Waveney Valley and much of Norfolk and Suffolk," he says. Furthermore, his commitment to restoring the natural environment and tackling issues like river pollution and biodiversity loss aligns closely with the Green Party's broader goals.

However, Ramsey emphasises that being an MP isn't just about local advocacy—it's also about holding the government accountable, he stresses. "If you're not part of the government, your role is to scrutinise it, and I believe in doing that constructively," he notes. His approach



Co-Editors-in-Chief **Jamie Bryson** and **Fiona Hill** in conversation with the Norwich-born Green Party Co-Leader and new East Anglian MP, **Adrian Ramsey**

appears more cooperative than combative; he is willing to work with other parties when their policies align with Green priorities, he explains. This can be seen in his recent support for renationalising the railways and tackling child poverty. A unique aspect of our conversation with Ramsey came through his insight into the workings of the Houses of Parliament - an imposing imperial era former royal Palace dating back almost 1000 years. He talks candidly about the anachronisms that plague Westminster, such as the voting process and seating arrangements. Describing the physical voting method (there remains no digital method of voting, meaning MPs often have to stay in the building late into the night), he comments that "it's incredibly time-consuming," adding that the chamber itself is often overcrowded, with MPs queuing early to secure a seat. These practices, he argues, are far from efficient and need modernising. Ramsey's criticism goes beyond mere inconvenience, however.

His broader point is that Parliament, as the beating centre of UK politics, should be more transparent and reflective of modern democratic values. His call for modernisation echoes Labour's recent establishment of a 'Modernisation Committee' - aiming to "consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working

practices" - to which the Greens intend to contribute ideas.

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In addition to his parliamentary work, Ramsey also addresses the disturbing rise in hate crimes and violence across the UK over recent months. For him, the roots of this problem lie not only in years of divisive political rhetoric from leading figures but also in the vast socio-economic inequality that remains in the UK. "The violence we've seen [over the summer] is horrific, and we need to call it out for what it is... We're witnessing racism and Islamophobia, and we have to be willing to address it as such," he says. Ramsey believes that building more inclusive and harmonious communities is essential. Still, it requires political leaders to stand in solidarity with affected groups, as well as addressing issues of vast inequality head-on.

In response to questions about the Israel-Gaza conflict, Ramsey takes a balanced yet firm stance. He condemns the attacks by Hamas while also criticising Israel's violations of international law. Since our interview (August), the Green Party has become the first and only UK political party to officially recognise the Israeli state's physical assault on Gaza as a "genocide", with its members voting for the motion during the party's annual conference earlier this month. His call for strong-

er UK leadership in supporting the International Criminal Court (who have issued an international arrest warrant for Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu) and ensuring arms sales do not contribute to human rights abuses is highly reflective of the Green Party's broader alternate foreign policy.

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One of the most pressing concerns for UEA students is the state of higher education in the UK, particularly the financial instability faced by universities like UEA. Ramsey's Green Party has committed to abolishing tuition fees and reinstating maintenance grants (non-repayable cost-of-living grants), a policy he describes as economically feasible and socially just. He criticises the continued "marketisation of education", arguing that universities should be seen as public goods, not profit-driven businesses. "The root cause of these problems is the marketisation of higher education, which has transformed universities into private businesses, creating a financially unsustainable model," he argues. Ramsey's proposed 'wealth tax' and other economic reforms aim to fill the financial gaps currently threatening the UK's higher education sector. His plan offers an alternative to the constant pressure for tuition fee increas-

es, which many vice-chancellors, including UEA's, have called for [see front page].

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As the interview draws to a close, it's clear that Ramsey's political vision is one rooted in both local engagement and national strategy. His journey from UEA graduate to Co-Leader of the Green Party illustrates the power of grassroots activism, but it also highlights the importance of strategic thinking and credible policy proposals in effecting real change.

For some UEA students, Ramsey's story may offer not just inspiration but a blueprint for how to make a more profound impact on communities from a grassroots level. Whether through environmental advocacy, political campaigning, or challenging the status quo in higher education, Ramsey's message is clear and one which he has evidently taken with him from the corridors of UEA: lasting change begins with a commitment to "doing things differently".

Photo Credit/Lake: Maggie Read
Photo Credit/Ramsey: Jamie Bryson



Lifestyle

The Passport Problem

Elle McKinnell-Michael
Lifestyle Editor

Transitioning is hard, but it is usually boring. You have to explain simple things ad nauseum and deal with documents, papers, and red tape. I had changed my name by deed-poll, but I was yet to get new documentation, and lots of organisations, like UEA, needed a passport to process my name and gender change on their system. I set about getting my new passport – the key to the rest of my social transition.

I needed to gather documents to send to the passport office. First, I needed a deed poll; easy enough. I'd already written and printed out ten copies and had my two witnesses sign each one. I plucked one from my stack. Next, I needed a document from a respected authority that contains my new name to prove I am serious about the process. I emailed the local council, who only needed a deed-poll to process the name change. They sent their reply, I printed it out. Thick official-looking paper. This was all going too well, and based on my experience with transition, I knew something was waiting to disrupt the flow.

I had saved the worst task till last; the passport office needed: 'a letter from your doctor or medical consultant confirming your change of gender is likely to be permanent'. The very idea of this document annoyed

me; did they think I was doing this for fun? I decided to call UEA Medical Centre, as they had been my only medical practitioners since starting university. My leg was bouncing with nerves. My experiences with trans healthcare before and during university have been soul-crushing to say the least. My last interaction with UEA Medical Centre – right at the start of my first year – ended with a slammed door and stern words. I spoke to a receptionist who told me a doctor would call me back, and when he did, I was told I should speak to the 'NHS East of England Gender Clinic.' I called them and was placed on the waiting list for a callback. Not bad, I thought. Then, I looked up the waiting list for replies to initial inquiries. 6 weeks.

I waited, and waited, and over a month later I got the call. The conversation lasted a minute or so, as they told me they were unable to work with me without having met me face-to-face (I'm still on the waiting list for NHS hormone treatment and I use a private provider). Back to square one. I got straight back on the phone with UEA Medical Centre. This time they decided they would provide the letter, but I would have to pay £40. I had gotten this far, so – seething – I paid the fee. The document was an email, and aside from the arbitrary 'to whom it may concern' and the doctor's signature, it was only 4 lines long, ten pounds a line. It clarified that yes, they had met me, and that my change of gender was likely to be permanent.



Credit: Unsplash

It felt like I was a nuisance to the system, like a hot potato being passed between gloves. I took my first passport picture in March expecting the rest of the process to be quick. It had expired by the time I was finally ready to apply in July. I got a second picture and sent the passport office my documents, and it came back within a week of sending it. Passports are the highest form of identification, and for this reason vetting is important. However, I can't help feeling that the reason I had to be so scrupulous in proving that I'm one of the 'real' trans people is the same reason I need eyes in the back of my head alone at night. I wonder if it's the same reason trans people still feel unwelcome in bathrooms, hospitals and gyms.

Going through the world as a trans person, you are treated like you have a hidden agenda, like your transition is a means to a sinister end. If the system worked with, rather than against, trans people, I wonder if there would be more compassionate, efficient and effective means of vetting. I wonder if the culture war orbiting trans people, like a fly that keeps dodging the swatter, is the real reason I had to go through this rigamarole.

When approached for a comment the UEA Medical Centre stated, "We do not feel it is a fair reflection of the actual situation, however we feel unable to comment on this article due to patient confidentiality."

Anne Glia Navigating New Beginnings

Kasey Campbell
Agony Aunt

Hello UEA!

Welcome to this year's first print issue of Concrete. I'm Anne Glia, your resident agony aunt!

To you freshers, congrats on gaining your place at the Home of the Wonderful! You're joining, according to The Complete University Guide, one of the UK's top 25 universities and you should be proud you've made it here!

This month's problem is one that a lot of us will be able to recognize.

"Starting university seems so daunting, I'm so far from family and friends. How do I begin to settle somewhere completely new?"

The first thing to understand is that I feel you! Your classmates, professors, support

staff and peers all feel you. We've all experienced turning up to a new city, campus, or job and knowing absolutely no one.

I cannot stress enough that you are not alone!

I understand, however, my saying that may not offer that much comfort! Ok, everyone is feeling the same, but how do you combat this?

One way is by engaging with extra curriculums. According to the UEA Student Union, UEA hosts over 160 societies, so there's something for everyone. Additionally, there are over 60 sports club available to join – if you fancy Ultimate Frisbee, we've got ya covered!

Now, in honor of September, and the start of spooky season, let me tell you a scary story. You have your first lecture to attend, you're unsure where you're meant to be and you've no idea what TPSC stands for. You find what you think is the lecture hall and then, DUN-DUN, you have to open the door and actual-

ly step inside? Horrific, I know, but you'll be glad to know that TPSC stands for Thomas Paine Study Centre and that this feeling is all in your head! Rest assured, nobody is looking at you when you enter the lecture hall, and this apprehension should not deter you from attending lectures and seminars, for they are a great way to help you feel more settled. We've all heard the saying "first year doesn't count", which is not entirely true! While, generally speaking, first year grades don't count towards your overall degree classification, first year is still vital. This is your opportunity to become familiar with the learning style of higher education and make connections in your lectures and seminars. Making friends in your classes allows you to engage further with the course content as you can group study, share ideas, and deepen each other's understanding of the course material.

What's more, if it's something that you're into, UEA, and Norwich as a whole, has a booming nightlife culture. UEA hosts weekly club nights called A-List, every Saturday at the LCR. They're great because they're on cam-

pus, so if you live in halls, you've not far to stumble home (after you've ransacked the burger van outside!). A short bus ride into the city will take you to Prince of Wales Road, Norwich's club street, if you fancy travelling further afield for a boogie. Additionally, thanks to our incredible SU Welfare Officer Nathan, the Night bus is returning to get you to and from campus later at night. Keep an eye on @welfare_ueasu on Instagram for more info on this.

All in all, there are numerous opportunities available at UEA for you to get involved in. Getting involved with group activities, be it social, academic or hobbies can help you establish friends and begin to feel settled in a new place. Remember, it's easier to do this when everyone else is also new – so get out there and find your people!

Best of luck!

Anne Glia.

Is AI the Future of Talk Therapy?

Romy Todd

Having mental health difficulties at university is a complex and humbling experience. It is almost impossible to be seen by a GP when you need it, and slots are always hard to come by. Students balancing study, work and unpaid internships have plenty of reasons to benefit from regular therapy. Students in 2024 are often left feeling like they have no one to talk to in general, and loneliness is a huge issue on university campuses across the country.

Luckily, I have found a solution for all my fellow struggling students out there – AI powered therapy! You can now receive therapy from an artificial intelligence. We all knew that robots would take over eventually, but we probably didn't expect it to start with our therapists. The emergence of Siri in 2011 feels like a long time ago, and a long way away from engaging in intelligent, critical conversation with a machine.

Freeaitherapist.com is an online chatbot catered to helping your problems without needing to pay to see a real therapist, at the cost of sharing all your personal details and trauma with a robot (Because nothing says “confidential” like pouring your heart out to an emotionless algorithm). But the service is not to be confused with real therapy! They say it themselves: “Free AI Therapist is not a licensed therapist, LMHC, LMFT nor psychiatrist. Please consult a real human therapist/et if you need help. By using this service, you acknowledge that you understand this.” So, while it may not be a substitute for professional care, it's certainly an interesting option. Naturally, I was curious about this

AI and wanted to test it out for myself, to see how it would respond to my problems and review whether this would be a useful resource.

AI: Hello! How are you feeling recently?

AI Therapy Transcript

AI: Hello! How are you feeling recently?

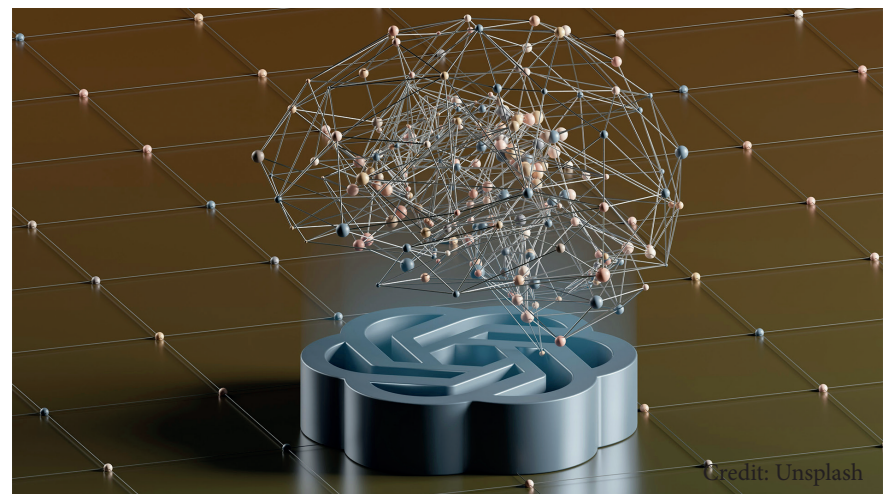
Me: Hi I'm not doing very well.

AI: I'm so sorry to hear that. It takes a lot of courage to admit when we're not doing well. Can you tell me more about what's been going on and how you've been feeling lately?

Me: I am overwhelmed with my university deadlines because of my ADHD and I have no one to talk to.

AI: I can totally understand why you'd feel overwhelmed with university deadlines, especially when ADHD is added to the mix. It can be really tough to stay on top of things when your brain is wired to focus on multiple things at once. Can you tell me a bit more about what's been the hardest part of dealing with these deadlines?

Me: I have an essay due next week but every time I sit down to write my brain just won't focus, I can't afford an ADHD assessment because of the NHS waiting times and how expensive it is to go privately as a student.



Credit: Unsplash

AI: I can imagine how frustrating that must be for you. It's like your brain is saying, “Hey, I know you need to focus, but let's think about this other thing instead!” I totally get why you're feeling stuck, especially with the added stress of not being able to access an ADHD assessment. Now, let's think about some possible ways to help you get started on that essay. Have you tried breaking it down into smaller, manageable chunks?

Me: Do you plan to take over human jobs in the future?

I shut my laptop before it could answer.

I was left surprised at how human the AI's responses felt, especially considering it only took a few seconds to generate them. Platforms like Freeaitherapist and Chat GPT draw from three main sources of information to craft their responses: publicly available data from the internet, licensed content from third parties, and input from users or human trainers. This blend of data creates an

AI therapist that is both impressively realistic and, frankly, a little unsettling. While I can see how this could be a helpful resource for those who just need a little extra encouragement, I'm personally not ready to confide my deepest fears and existential dilemmas to a chatbot, one that might secretly be plotting world domination or, worse yet, silently judging my Netflix watch history.

Poor wellness and mental ill-health is a big problem for students; and the main causes of stress and anxiety for the demographic are money, relationships and studies. It can be helpful to share these problems – but access to qualified talk therapists is a struggle on a low income. One day soon, it may be hard to differentiate the therapy skills of a human counsellor and an AI counsellor. Until then though, if you're struggling with your mental health here at UEA there are plenty of real people and professional resources available to help. Don't settle for a robot when what you truly need is human connection. Find UEA Wellbeing support on My UEA under UEA Life – Student Support – Wellbeing.



Credit: Unsplash

A Norwich Décor Tour

Caitlin Bennet
Lifestyle Senior Writer

Welcome to Norwich! You've come to a magical city full of historic streets and markets, containing plenty of beautiful stores stacked with bits and bobs to make your space feel like your place.

How can we make your university accommodation or new bedroom the cosiest and most comfortable place for your studies? Think potted plants, comfy cushions, colourful posters, statues, figures, blankets, throws, little rugs and more. Remember, cork boards

are your friend... get collaging. Try 'free prints' to order pictures and make a collage of your friends and family back home.

So, let's get to know our way around the city for your 'decor tour'. Norwich has all your basic chain stores like Primark, H&M home, M&S, B&M and Home Bargains. The city also has some of the best independent small businesses, which mainly occupy the famous Market and Norwich Lanes. I would recommend Elm, B'Leaf Plants and the new Søstre Grene. Charity shops like British Heart Foundation and the Sue Rider on Bride-well Alley are great for second hand table and shelf fillers. Finally, the Flying Tiger in Castle Quarter shopping centre is perfect for homeware essentials on a budget!

Travel

Reflecting on Southeast Asian Travel by Westerns

Lin Vu

One will have a spiritual awakening and decide to book a quick trip to Bali, Indonesia for a spiritual retreat. Or one will claim to love learning about non-Western cultures but proceed to gawk at the locals with water buffalos in Vietnam cultivating rice fields. Or become a polyglot for the sake of YouTube content, posting videos of them speaking in Vietnamese or Thai to impress non-cons locals for the sake of clicks. Or promote moving to southeast Asia and never have to learn the native language, but hold a different standard to anyone moving to the Global North, saying they have to learn Dutch to assimilate in the Netherlands.

Well, thanks to social media, curating travel itineraries has never been easier. With a quick search on TikTok, Youtube or Instagram, you're able to create the perfect trip to any country you desire.

Also thanks to social media, you're able to quickly find other people's opinions on the

places they traveled to, stating whether or not the country is worth visiting. While people are entitled to their opinions, there is some level of Western entitlement that surfaces when talking about southeast Asia that isn't seen when rating Western countries.

I scroll on TikTok until a travel related slideshow shows up on my for you page, rating various southeast Asian countries based on the person's travel experience.

The picture reads:

Singapore: 4/10
- Too expensive for a southeast Asian country
- Was very westernised, didn't feel like I was in Southeast Asia

Hanoi, Vietnam: 3/10
- Super dirty and seedy
- Very expensive for Vietnam
- Extremely overrated

It begs the question, what is considered 'too expensive' for southeast Asia, or what do people mean when they

say Singapore feels westernised? Do they just mean that locals are trying to make a living knowing they are in a touristy destination? And do they also mean that they were surprised that not all of southeast Asia is a poor jungle as poorly portrayed by the West and Singapore is a developed economic power? But also surprised that southeast Asia is not as developed as Singapore? What is it that people expect?

Conversation surrounding southeast Asian travel isn't new. With 'tips' such as haggle with the locals because they give tourists inflated prices and don't give money to the poor, since it'll encourage other people to beg, it encourages Western tourists to be oddly entitled to the Orientalised East to conform to their standards. Locals have to speak English, but the tourist doesn't have to learn a simple hello, please and thank you in the language of the country they're visiting.

Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, is a construction of an image of the East to portray them as exotic, weak and vul-

nerable. And with the Western portrayal of the East, southeast Asia comes off as an 'exotic playground' for many Western tourists, containing spiritual retreats that are heavily rooted in Buddhism, and tourists seeing how many locals they can make uncomfortable by asking them condescending questions to capture on video.

This isn't to deter anyone from visiting southeast Asia. It's a beautiful region of the world with so much to offer, but it also comes with questions of ethics. Before traveling to southeast Asia, ask the question of: has there been a self-reflection of biases?

Photo Credit: Unsplash

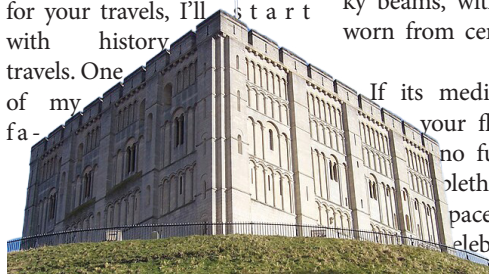


In and Out of the Castle Walls

Caitlin Bennet
Travel Senior Writer

I'm truly a Norwich fangirl – at every given opportunity I will go out of my way to hype her up, spill the facts, get excited at all the things the city has to offer and try and convince anyone that it's the best city to visit. As a fresher I think you should absorb yourself in your new place of residence, get to know all of the spots you'll make the best memories in and explore what this marvellous and historic City of Literature holds within its medieval walls.

To sow the seed of inspiration for your travels, I'll start with history travels. One of my favourites is



yourite walks is a circular walk along the riverside, known suitably as Riverside Walk. This 2 mile stretch can be completed in entirety, or as I like to enjoy it, beginning at the train station walking up from the Angler, along the river, past Pull's Ferry and then up to Cow Tower. On a stunning day, this stroll will be lovely, with plenty of nature, green spaces and learning along the way. You can also do quite a lot of snooping at Elm Hill and Tombland, at the other end of the cathedral lands. The houses here are straight out of the medieval times with bowed roofs, crooked windows and wonky beams, with the footpaths worn from centuries of wear.

If its media which lights your flame then look no further than the plethora of dedicated paces of Norwich celebrating the arts;

with The Theatre Royal, Sewell Barn Theatre, Sainsbury's Centre, the Castle, and plenty of independent art shops. There are book shops on every cobblestoned corner, and references to literature in amongst the bustle. It is interesting to learn why Norwich has earned itself the UNESCO medal, including being home to the first woman to write a book, the first blank verse poem, and its home to The Forum one of the UK's busiest libraries. It also has a National Centre for Writing, with courses and festivals.

If I have not yet interested you then please be advised that Norwich is only the portal to the beginning of your adventures by train or air. Visiting the gorgeous antique train station, (where the coffee is expensive!) is only the start of your journey to wherever you'd like to visit, with direct trains to London Stansted and London. If you'd

like a closer airport, Norwich has its very own – and with Ryanair now flying, it makes your most desired destinations even easier and closer than ever.

If you're not looking to travel that far then rest assured in the surrounding areas we home the beautiful Broads with many nature reserves, and a coastline with a multitude of beaches all with their unique charm and quintessential countryside aesthetics. There are zoos in Cromer and Thirigby and stately homes in Blickling, Holkham and Hoveton. You can also find sports scattered in between, such as paddle boating from Coltishall and lots of friendly gyms in Norwich. Whatever it is that you are into, adventures around UEA are ready for you to explore.

Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Meet ETIAS – your new Euro Travel Companion

Milla Cartwright

Rumours of a visa waiver programme in the EU have been milling around for a while and starting next year they will be taking force. The scheme is called the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and will become an entry requirement for certain "visa-exempt countries." It will work similarly to the US's ESTA or Canada's eTA. Momentarily, this list includes countries like the UK, the US, Brazil, Turkey, Australia and Japan. However, the list is expected to continuously change.

The EU stated that the applications will be completed online or through the official ETIAS app. According to their website, it should take approximately 10 minutes to complete and generally applicants can expect a response "within minutes" but can take up to four days. These ETIAS applications will cost 7EUR or 6GBP and last three years. Throughout the three years, you will be able to travel around the EU for up to 90 days every 180 days, which is the same rule in place at the moment. For students planning to study abroad, this may mean having to apply for a student visa if the period of study is longer than 90 days.

There are several reasons for ETIAS' introduction, but it is mainly a means to pre-screen travellers to ensure better oversight regarding cross-border crime and terrorism, as well as general border security. It's worth noting that, as the EU sees approximately 50 million people enter the Schengen Area every year, it's also profitable.

So, what will this mean for your backpacking plans around the Mediterranean? It means that instead of having unfettered access around the Schengen Area from the get-go, you will need to apply for an ETIAS application first, which you will be required to present at the border. After this however, you will be on track for backpacking without having to worry too much about borders.

Photo Credit: Unsplash

Iconic Film and TV locations: East Anglia

Tania Casali
Travel Correspondent

East Anglia has become a popular destination for TV and film producers. Its scenic coastline and picturesque towns feature in numerous productions. Here are some filming locations you can explore, just a short distance from the University of East Anglia.

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

You won't have to travel far to visit this one! The Sainsbury Centre featured in *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) as the exterior for the Avengers' Headquarters, representing a new base of operations for the Avengers after their previous one was destroyed. The



centre's modern architecture is characterised by expansive glass walls and green surroundings which provide a level of isolation

and security. This style makes it a visually impressive choice and enhances the portrayal of the Avengers' new high-tech facility. The building is easily accessible by walking paths and can be found on the edge of the UEA campus.

Terrington St Clement

Although most of the filming for *Wicked* (2024) has taken place in Buckinghamshire, crew were spotted in the area of Terrington St Clement, just west of Kings Lynn. Over 20 acres of pink, red and white tulips were planted in the surrounding fields. In a behind-the-scenes YouTube video, director Jon M. Chu revealed that approximately 9 million tulips were planted for the production. This stunning tulip field is featured in the film's trailer, with the movie set for release in November. Although this specific field is not open to the public, you can visit the tulip fields near Kings Lynn in late April to early May, which offer a similarly beautiful experience.

Gorleston-On-Sea

The seaside town of Gorleston-On-Sea, located next to Great Yarmouth, was used as a filming location to shoot several iconic scenes in the film *Yesterday* (2019). In this movie, a struggling

singer-songwriter discovers that he is the only one who remembers The Beatles and uses their music to gain fame. One notable scene filmed in Gorleston features the main character delivering a powerful performance from the balcony of the Pier Hotel, overlooking the seafront. Director Danny Boyle praised the amazing reception from Gorleston for this scene where 6000 local residents responded to his call for a lively crowd to dance and have fun.

Somerleyton Hall

Near the Norfolk-Suffolk border, Somerleyton Hall has appeared in the popular Netflix series *The Crown*, standing in for Sandringham Estate, a beloved royal residence. According to Peter Thompson, Somerleyton's events manager, the hall has a striking resemblance to Sandringham. Both are originally Jacobean houses that were remodeled in the Victorian era, making Somerleyton a fitting substitute for the show.

Multiple scenes at Somerleyton Hall are dotted throughout the series, including the Christmas gathering in season 4. While the hall is currently closed to the public, you can still admire its exterior architecture and

gardens. You can also visit Sandringham Estate itself, located in Norfolk. Its house and gardens are open to the public at select times throughout the year.

Holkham Beach

Lastly, we come to the stunning Holkham Beach, a location which has featured as a backdrop for multiple films. It gained worldwide fame in 1998 when it featured in the final scene of the Oscar-winning film *Shakespeare in Love*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow. In this memorable scene, Paltrow's character, Viola, walks along the vast expanse of the beach marking a significant moment of change in her life.

The beach stretches for four miles along the Norfolk coast

and was voted 'Beach of the Year' by BBC Countryfile magazine readers. Whilst Shakespeare in Love is arguably the most famous film associated

with this beach, this location has featured in several other films, such as *The Duchess* (2008) starring Keira Knightley and *Annihilation* (2018) starring Natalie Portman. East Anglia clearly stands out as a prime location for several TV and Film productions. Its diverse landscapes have the ability to enhance storytelling in several ways. Why not take the opportunity to visit these locations and experience their magic for yourself?

Natalie Portman and
Holkham Beach Photo Credits: Wikimedia Commons

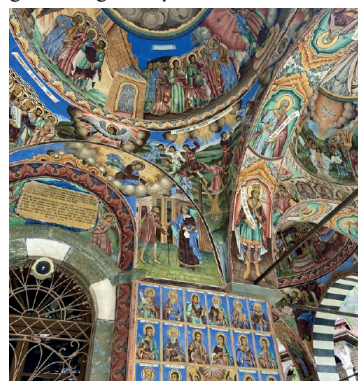


Budget Holiday: 48 Hour in Beautiful Bulgaria

Jo Gisler
Travel Editor

It's never too early to plan your next trip! While the academic year may just have begun, many students find that their uni years mark a period of exploration and new adventures. Let your travels begin with this mini-break suggestion: 48 hours in the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia.

Situated in the Balkans, Sofia is Bulgaria's largest city and one of the old-



est in Europe. Rich with history, it is also a modern and energetic city, clearly on the rise in Europe. While it is difficult to walk more than a few hundred yards in its city centre without bumping into some ancient structure, it is also easy to find good food and Instagram-ready spots. Most importantly of all a trip to Sofia is extremely student-budget friendly! My February 2024 visit cost roughly £160 for two days, but it could easily be done for less.

When planning your trip to Sofia, you will find it very easy to get a good deal. The priciest part of the trip will likely be your coach or train to Stansted airport from Norwich or UEA (roughly £40 for me). I scored a £30 flight to Sofia with Ryanair, having booked it during one of their frequent sales. While flight costs can vary considerably, with a little patience you can find deals in the same range of

£30-40 roundtrip. Lastly, my travel partner and I split an AirBNB cost of £35 total for one night. Hostels can easily be found for £20 and a hotel in the centre can be found for around £50-60. Once you have arrived in Sofia you can take their underground from the airport to the city centre for around 70 pence.

Looking for things to do is easy. Cheap activities can include visiting its famous cathedrals, joining a free walking tour, or taking the number 10 tram through its cobbled streets. As a history student, I naturally spent most of my time taking advantage of the generous student concession available across their museums. For .86 pence you can say hello to 10,000 years of history at their truly wonderful Regional History Museum, built in an old Ottoman-style bath house. A whip round the National Archaeology Museum is only another £1.36.

Take a stroll through many of the Roman ruins for free or admire the architecture down Alexander Dondukov Boulevard. A more expensive option which I very much recommend is spending £29.50 on a 6 hours tour bus which takes you through the countryside, with you being able to visit the dazzling Rila Monastery. Other excursions could include a hike through the Seven Rila Lakes or a visit to the hot spring thermal baths. To keep costs low, I purchased breakfast and lunch from a local grocery store. With a little research, a delicious dinner at a good price is guaranteed! I ate at Moma and would recommend it! Its mix of modern and traditional food seemed to be popular with both hungry tourists and local families sharing a meal. Three courses came out to £18. Be sure to try their national drink of rakkia,

a 40% brandy which left a sting! Sofia may be less popular than other European capitals. Schengen News reports only around 900,000 tourists visiting in 2022. However, like many places in eastern Europe, it is an underappreciated gem. For those who travel to experience new cultures or are looking for a student-friendly place go a weekend away, you will certainly not regret your time Bulgaria!

Photo Credits: Jo Gisler



Food and Drink

Gentrification of Food in Urban Areas

Lin Vu

Food and Drink Editor

People have always joked around saying if you see a newly opened Starbucks, Chipotle, or upscale [insert ethnic cuisine] in your area, 'just know your rent is going to go up and you'll see more people jogging on your street.'

They were just joking about what gentrification is: new developments to attract more wealthy people to displace poorer people by pushing them into areas without new developments.

There is always some truth to every joke, and upon the first (and last) Chipotle location opening just 10 minutes away from my house, a lot of people who I was friends with told me the bad news: they had to move away due to a rising cost of living and getting priced out.

Despite my hometown having a high Latin American population and there is an abundance of wonderful, Mexi-Cali food at affordable prices (looking at you, al pastor tacos), Chipotle thought it'd be a good idea to open a location. Even my high school history teacher pointed this out in a disgusted tone, because he knew this was just a form of gentrification and eventually lowering people's access to traditional cuisines, slowly and surely replacing local places with chain restaurants that 'take inspiration' from local cuisines to cater towards a more Western palette.

Needless to say, my local Chipotle location closed down less than five years later and that was the last we ever saw of it. It wasn't missed too much since Alberto's was up the street, anyway.

Although this was one example of just a Chipotle, it becomes a bit more sinister when taking a look at the British chain restaurant, Pho, their gentrification attempts and how it's present in the Global South. At least Chipotle never claimed to be authentic Mexican cuisine, just Mexican-inspired.

In 2013, an authentically claimed inauthentic pho restaurant chain, called Pho, founded by Stephen and Juliette Wall, was faced with backlash after they tried to trademark the word 'pho' as intellectual property and threatened to sue a small actually Vietnamese owned business for having the word 'pho' in their name.

After they released a statement, saying they were able to trademark the word 'pho' as their restaurant name and asking other businesses to refrain from using the name 'Pho,' allowing bigger and smaller already established Vietnamese restaurants a rename period. It was a feeble attempt in shutting down smaller Vietnamese businesses, as they later released a statement saying they wouldn't be taking legal action against MoPho.

Besides, if you're in a city, there are oth-

er Vietnamese restaurants you can support instead of Pho. A new location opened in Norwich, and I highly advise people to go support Vietnam Pho on Dereham Road instead.

These are two case examples of gentrification, but it's a much deeper, systemic issue.

Gentrification of food redefines what authenticity is through the gentrifier's point of view. Food gentrifiers redefine already healthy, affordable foods into something completely unrecognisable and unaffordable to the local people, but it's a good investment... as long as it attracts gentrifiers. It's carefully sourced, a 'healthier' option compared to the original, just as a very convenient Marks and Spencer or Whole Foods opens up across the street, signalling that the neighbourhood is more 'upscale.'

It isn't limited to cities or boroughs across the United States and United Kingdom; it's happening in Mexico as well.

I was talking to one of my friends who has family down in Mexico City and has spent time there. He told me that locals are getting displaced more and more due to 'digital nomads' (immigrants) and 'expats' (or again, immigrants) taking advantage of the lower cost of living than in the Global North. Since a lot of white 'expats' have moved to Mexico City, the food has been catered towards them and it's gotten more expensive. Meaning, it's not as good as it used to be. And it displays inequalities of quality of life: while white immigrants are experiencing the 'good' life in Mexico, locals are desperate to not get displaced.

Gentrification in real time is devastating to notice, because once you see it, you can't unsee it. So the next time an upscale coffee shop opens, just know someone's getting displaced.



Credit: photo by No Revisions on Unsplash

Easy 20 Minute Smashburger Recipe

Perfect for Freshers and Anyone Learning to Cook

Lin Vu

Food and Drink Editor

Smashburgers are one of my favourite meals and it's cost effective. It's an easy weeknight meal and can be done easily with a couple of ingredients. I'm not the biggest fan of those big burgers that fall apart as soon as you bite into them (those dirty burgers) and they are quite expensive to eat at a restaurant. Being able to do them on the pan with a stove is convenient, since being university students, you don't have access to a grill unless you want to walk all the way to the UEA lake.

But if you're cooking for yourself, going to the lake isn't all that worthwhile, especially after a long day of lectures and seminars. When smashburgers are done right, they are juicy and wonderful, and these can be done in the university halls' induction hobs.

Some important things to remember are:

- Don't use beef that's less than 20% fat. You need the fat in order to make the burgers juicy, otherwise, any leaner will make them dry. 80/20 is the ideal lean-to-fat ratio you're looking for.
- Smash the burgers immediately in the pan as soon as you put the meat in, otherwise you'll have meatballs instead of burger patties.
- I learned this trick from once upon a chef, where you don't add salt to the meat mixture when you season it in a bowl. It makes the burgers not have a weird texture.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- 500g of 80/20 ground beef
- Onion powder, garlic powder, paprika, pepper, and salt
- Burger buns
- American cheese
- Toppings of choice (optional)

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Take your ground beef and combine the onion powder, garlic powder, paprika, and pepper in a bowl. Remember to not add salt at this stage to the meat mixture. Season it to taste.
2. Roll the combined meat into four (4) equal-sized balls.
3. Heat up a pan on medium-high (or if in uni halls, maximum) and turn on the exhaust otherwise, the smoke might trigger the alarm.

4. Add some oil to the pan. To know when the pan is hot enough, swirl the pan around and if the oil has a watery slide to it, the pan is ready.
5. Add one patty at a time, take your spatula and really press it down. Once smashed, add salt, and repeat with the other patties until all of them are cooking in the pan.
6. Cook each side for roughly 3 minutes then flip. Depending on your stove, this could take longer or shorter.
7. Top the burgers with cheese and cover the pan with a lid to allow the steam to melt the cheese.
8. Assemble your burger however you like and you're done!

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

If you don't have the required seasonings, you can use a seasoning blend, such as the Schwartz All-American Burger Seasoning. It's more cost effective than buying individual seasonings all at once, and it should (more or less) taste the same. Again, you can also add more seasonings, if you'd like. I like mine with dried oregano and thyme.

Some burger topping ideas are:

- Heinz burger sauce, lettuce, tomato (with salt and pepper), and a fried egg.
- Avocado (with salt and pepper), lettuce, tomato, caramelised onions, and pickled jalapenos.
- Ketchup and mayo, lettuce, tomato, bacon, and pickled banana peppers.



The Hidden Crisis of Student Food Insecurity in the UK

Naa Yarley Yartey
Global Editor

As the cost-of-living crisis tightens its grip across the UK, a disturbing trend has quietly emerged within university communities: food insecurity. With soaring food prices and stagnant financial support, more and more students are finding themselves unable to afford basic nutrition. For many, the ideal of university life - personal growth, academic achievement, and newfound independence - is being eclipsed by the stark reality of hunger.

Recent figures paint a troubling picture. The number of people living in food-insecure households in the UK has risen sharply, from 7% in 2021/22 to 11% in 2022/23. University students are far from immune to this crisis. The National Union of Students (NUS) reports that in the 2022/23 academic year, 11% of students turned to food banks. Food insecurity, defined as the lack of access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food, is now a growing concern on campuses, where students struggle to balance academic demands with the very real challenge of feeding themselves.

The Impact of Inflation and Rising Costs

The primary driver of food insecurity among students is the cost-of-living crisis. Food prices in the UK have seen unprecedented inflation, with many staples now costing significantly more than they did just a year ago. For students, whose financial situations are often precarious—relying on student loans, part-time jobs, or family support—the rise in food prices is devastating.

A significant factor exacerbating this crisis is the growing gap between living costs and available financial aid. Many students rely heavily on loans to cover rent, utilities, and tuition fees, leaving little left over for essentials like food. Studies show that students dependent on loans are 1.9 times more likely to experience food insecurity. As basic living costs surge, so does the number of students skipping meals or relying on emergency food provisions.

Universities are beginning to respond to this rising need. According to research by the Higher Education Policy Institute, one in four UK universities now operates a food bank. While this effort is commendable, it also raises uncomfortable questions about the sustainability of such provisions. Should food banks

become a normalised part of campus life, or is this a symptom of a deeper, systemic failure?

Academic and Health Consequences

Food insecurity's impact goes far beyond hunger pangs. Students who experience food insecurity often suffer from a range of health issues, including fatigue, poor concentration, and weakened immune systems. Research has consistently shown that a lack of access to nutritious food can severely impact cognitive function, making it harder for students to focus on their studies and perform well academically.

The link between food insecurity and mental health is well-documented. Those who experience food insecurity are more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression. This mental strain, combined with the physical effects of poor nutrition, creates a vicious cycle that can severely hinder academic success. For many students, the struggle to afford food directly undermines their ability to thrive at university.

Inequality in Access

Food insecurity does not affect all students equally. Those from lower-income backgrounds, ethnic minority groups, or

who are the first in their families to attend university are disproportionately affected. These students often enter higher education with fewer financial resources, making them more vulnerable to the effects of rising living costs.

Female students are also more likely to experience food insecurity than their male counterparts. Studies suggest that women, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are more likely to be economically vulnerable and thus face greater challenges in accessing adequate food. Additionally, female students may be more likely to openly acknowledge financial difficulties, which may partially explain the higher rates of reported food insecurity in this group.

The Road Ahead

The normalisation of food banks on campuses is a stark reminder that our education system is failing to meet students' basic needs. As long as they are forced to choose between their studies and their next meal, the true promise of higher education as a pathway to a better future remains unfulfilled.

The Dawn and Dangers of the Influencers: How to Protect Yourself from Food Misinformation

Caitlin Bennett
Food and Drink Senior Writer

Social media, a tool that provokes conversation and attracts so much attention in our news and content saturated world. Everyone has an opinion on whether it's a source of good or bad, with sufficient arguments for both. Let's breakdown the benefits and flaws of social media in general, before we dive into how it impacts our eating habits and our behaviour around food.

The benefits of social media are obvious. It started out as a platform for communicating with friends and family when you wouldn't have been able to stay in touch otherwise. It's an incredible source for education, showcasing a multitude of skills, talents, businesses, and crafts, communicated in a way which randomly interests its audience. Platforms like YouTube are capable of catering to all age groups by offering something that interests everyone, whether you're someone who needs to know how to fix a sink and quickly learn a specific area of plumbing, or you

are a new mum who needs some help breastfeeding; if you've just moved out and don't know how to cook it has billions of recipes just waiting for you to be inspired to create them, and even an older audience can learn from YouTube due to its user friendly interface.

The negatives of social media however have been given more press in recent years with more awareness created as to the risks to people's mental health, body image or unrealistic expectations. Endless doom scrolling may be joked about however I personally feel quite overwhelmed and drained when I step away from my phone after what feels like very intense and oversaturated scrolling.

Social media plays a massive role in how we buy and consume food. Social media can promote healthy eating and with plenty of chefs and home cooks inspiring audiences to eat fresher and more organic produce. This side of social media can nurture a healthy relationship with our eating. Social media also influences people to start homesteading to grow their own food.

However, there is a lot to be said about

social media influencers. Lots of people knowing the negative connotations of that label are heading towards calling themselves

'influencers'. The term influencer is extremely strange when you consider the implications of the label. At what point did people online feel the need to adjust other people's behaviour habits and thinking and therefore influence them with their own? Some people online cultivate an audience which listens to what they say, potentially vulnerable people, and then prompt damaging ideas and share questionable information. It is so important to personally filter what you expose yourself to online and remember to fact check. It's very easy to listen to what you hear online and believe it or trust it, but in this day and age where anyone can pick up a phone, create an account and be given a fol-

lowing and therefore a platform to broadcast their views, it doesn't mean they should have one and it doesn't mean that anything they say is rooted in the truth.

What's my advice? I quite regularly go through my Instagram and change my preference settings. I tell Instagram by clicking on the three dots what I am and I'm not interested in, therefore catering my feed so I only see what I want to see on my Instagram. This can be done on the for you page and the reels; another thing I do is revisit my following list and see which content creators I do and don't enjoy. It's very important to set boundaries with your screen time, I personally am on a self-implemented reel ban! Just remember the only thoughts and opinions that matter when it comes to eating are your own and not the random strangers on the Internet.

Credit: photo by Eaters Collective on Unsplash

Science

The Science Of Change

Daisy Lester
Science Editor

As the leaves turn from green to gold, as familiar faces leave and new ones enter our lives, and as you go from having 2 days with no lectures to a full week of 9ams – almost everyone is undergoing some kind of change. What an excellent time to examine what happens to our bodies and minds in these changing times, and what we might be able to do to minimise this stress while the storm surges.

Both physically and mentally, human bodies crave equilibrium, or homeostasis. When our temperature rises, we sweat to bring it down. When a friend leaves, we miss them until they return. But when we undergo a sudden threat to our comfortable equilibrium, our adrenal glands signal the release of so called “stress hormones”, like cortisol and adrenaline. These prepare us for handling any threats by increasing heart rates, activating energy stores, and sharpening our focus. These are excellent for fighting off predators, but not so great when trying to enjoy the opportunities these changes represent.

Long term, chronic, or large stressors can even be detrimental to our health, with continued exposure causing high blood pressure, increasing risk of heart disease, and weakening our immune system (see

our article on freshers’ flu!). Thankfully, our brains have the trait of ‘neuroplasticity’ – strengthening certain neural pathways in our brain to learn new things and adapt to these changes. As these paths strengthen, we become more used to new circumstances and our stress response decreases. It’s similar to your new timetable. At first, you are not sure if you’re in the right room, with the people around you feeling unfamiliar and unsettling – by the time the lecture starts, you are awake and alert. But a few weeks in, you’ve become used to your new surroundings – avoiding eye contact with any early bad decisions (don’t worry, they’ll probably transfer – hold your ground), and sleeping through till your friend nudges you to scan the QR code.

The psychological equivalent to the physical homeostasis could be said to be the “comfort zone”. As much as our bodies appreciate balance, so do our minds

“Picture your brain forming new connections as you meet the challenge and learn. Keep on going.”

CAROL DWECK, MINDSET: THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS

prefer predictability and routine. This zone represents states in which we feel safe and secure, without too many unknown variables which overwhelm

our brains, making it more difficult to process thoughts and make decisions. Upon leaving the comfort zone, we can feel such unpleasant emotions as

Studies show that the best

tant to help us manage our more complex emotions and process the change mentally.



Photo Credit: Suzanne D. Williams via Unsplash

fear and anxiety, as well as experiencing the physical stress responses as mentioned above.

So how can we cope with these major changes while we get adjusted to our new equilibrium? Psychologists have split techniques into two main categories: problem-based coping and emotion-based coping. Problem-based coping involves taking direct action – this could involve joining a new society, buying a new outfit, or organising your stationary. While this may seem like just distractions from the stress of the change (which they are), these are accessible ways to regain the control that our brains crave, lowering the intensity of the stress response.

method of processing change is a balanced one – using techniques from both groups to help steady us mentally and emotionally as we undergo large changes.

Touched on previously, an active and powerful tool when undergoing change is a “growth mindset”. Defined by American psychologist Carol Dweck, a growth mindset is one which sees obstacles and change as opportunities for improvement and learning, with its adopters being more likely to embrace change, learn from mistakes, and adapt faster to new circumstances. Opposite and less constructive is the “fixed mindset” – the idea that traits and abilities are static and unable to be improved. This could look like assuming you are bad at skateboarding, and that going to an event would lead to embarrassment and failure, with the outcome being deciding not to even try. With a growth-based mindset, the event would be an opportunity to improve your (admittedly lacklustre) skateboarding abilities, and to make new friends while you’re at it. Even if unsuccessful, the attempt can be viewed as a learning experience, or a check-off of the bucket list.

So next time you feel the negativity of a fixed mindset creeping in, try challenging these thoughts and finding the opportunity in the uncertainty – you might end up further than you would even imagine.

While change can be daunting and stressful, remember you are not doomed to the stress forever. In the meantime, to aid in the transition, key science-based strategies for minimising the effects of change induced stress are:

Establish a routine – while your old ones are disrupted, new ones can return you to a feeling of stability. Perhaps

take a scheduled walk around the beautiful lake on certain afternoons – spending half an hour in nature is proven to raise mood and aid in relaxation. Focus on what you can control – no matter how small, exercising your agency will reassure you (even subconsciously) that you are not helpless, and will ease the burden of things you cannot change. Take breaks – when there are many changes at once it can be easily overwhelming. Remember to take breaks and allow yourself to step back and recharge. Practice a growth mindset – although it may be difficult at first, challenging a static mindset can be one of the best ways to make the most of any stressful situations coming your way. As you sit in your new room missing your cat, and as the whirlwind of freshers (or returners, or returning returners) comes and goes, remember: we don’t have to be pirates to be in the same boat. It’s in our human DNA (and what’s kept us alive this long) to be stressed and uncomfortable with change, so you are absolutely not the only one. But try to channel nervousness into excitement – you may find more opportunities than you’d ever know.



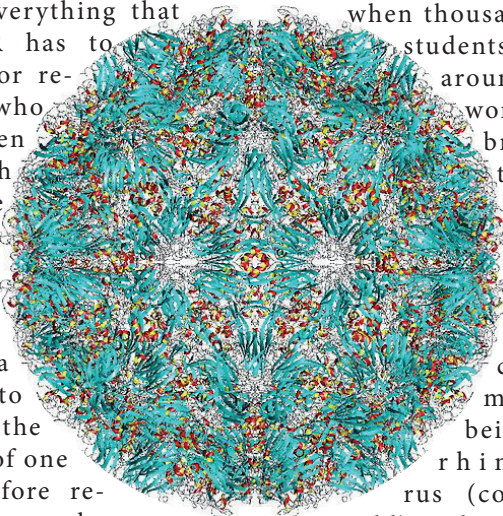
Photograph: Agnes Monkelbaan via Wikipedia Commons

Emotion-based coping, as the name suggests, focuses more on regulating our emotional responses to change so they do not become overwhelming. Some common examples include mindfulness, journaling, and speaking with friends. These are impor-

Fresher's Flu and You

Micah Petyt

It's that time of year again, when students return to campus and go out every night for a solid two weeks. For fresh-faced first years, this may be their first experience living alone, experiencing life with no rules or curfews, and enjoying everything that the LCR has to offer. (For returners who have been through Welcome Week time, it's a chance to go to the LCR all of one time, before remembering why no one frequents it after first year). However, whether your event of choice is the LCR's Glow Party or Propaganda at the Waterfront, one fact is universal: by the end of week two, freshers' flu will have turned UEA students into



sniveling, hacking, colorless zombies. But what exactly is freshers' flu, and how can you avoid it (or at the very least minimize the damage)? To begin, freshers' flu isn't a specific illness. Rather, it's an umbrella term encompassing the number of viruses that propagate when thousands of students from around the world are brought together at once, where the most common being the rhinovirus (common cold), adenovirus, and influenza virus (the flu). For some, freshers' flu is rarely more than a simple cold while others find themselves bedbound for a couple of days. The symptoms vary, but most often will include coughing, fevers, fatigue, a sore

throat, and a runny nose. Additionally, in recent years, freshers' flu has also signified Covid, a fact that has too often been ignored as the need to test for it has become forgotten. The main cause of freshers' flu is, understandably, large gatherings and close contact between students, after holidays spent traveling, partying, and all-around socializing. However, while your bodies are usually equipped to combat the bugs you encounter in day-to-day life, the combination of poor diets from living on your own, the lack of sleep from going out so often, the possible exposure to unknown bacteria from interacting with people from all around the world, and a heavy alcohol consumption mean that your immune system is weakened to the point where even the smallest cold can leave you feeling like you're at death's door. While freshers' flu may appear inevitable, with certain sources (i.e. Wikipedia) estimating that it hits nearly 90% of students, there are ways to ensure lessened symptoms and a quick recovery.

Though the only way to avoid freshers' flu alto-

gether is by staying in, it's not a very realistic option. In fact, even if you were to skip out on Welcome Week altogether, the constant coughing and sneezing in lectures would pretty much guarantee you to catch it anyway. Instead, boost your immune system by drinking enough water and getting enough vitamin C. Vitamin C is a nutrient found mostly in fruits and vegetables, and is crucial in tissue repair, collagen formation, and antioxidation. If you don't find the time to fit fruit and veg into your diet – or if cozzie livs have made Aldi fruit out of your budget – then Boots sells an array of supplemental tablets for under a fiver. Admittedly, tablets aren't as good as the real deal, but they work in a pinch and are more than enough to keep you slightly functional.

Another way to combat freshers flu is evident, but sometimes goes forgotten: proper hygiene. If Covid has taught us anything, it's that you should be washing your hands as much as possible, and the mere existence of the five L's is a sign that nowhere is safe from bacteria. You don't know where people have been, or what they have been doing. Make sure to

remain vigilant to what you're touching and what you're putting near your face, particularly as we draw nearer to flu season.

Finally, if you've unfortunately fallen victim to the infamous flu after a snog or two too many, drink hot ginger tea, keep some paracetamol and throat soothers on you, and make sure to get plenty of rest – even if that means forfeiting a night or two of going out. The most important part of freshers' in first year is meeting new people and having a good time, while staying within your own limits of personal and mental wellbeing. Remember to make sure to listen to your body as the semester goes on, and don't wait until reading week to give yourself a break.

Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Photograph: Bex Walton via Wikimedia Commons

Caffeine Chemistry

Zoe Crighton

The new academic year has rolled around, bringing with it one of life's few guarantees: late nights and early mornings. And what is the method of choice to transform the rollercoaster of one to the donkey ride of the other? Cold, hard caffeine! With studies reporting between 91 – 98% of university students consume it daily, the substance is particularly popular in academia. But why? What power does this substance hold over us and why is it inevitable that, come summative season, the vast majority of us will be reaching for it? Caffeine is the most widely consumed psychoactive stimulant drug in the world. It's known for its ability to boost alertness, improve

mood, and increase focus, fueling those marathon library sessions. On its surface, it would appear an important lifeline in a world that places increasing value on individual productivity. Free energy and better performance? No-brainer. But the thing is, it's not free energy – it's borrowed energy. Caffeine disrupts adenosine, a sleep-promoting substance that accumulates in the brain throughout the day while simultaneously increasing the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and norepinephrine. Cue energy and the caffeine kick! But what's the cost? When the stimulant is eventually broken down, adenosine comes flooding back, causing that all too familiar afternoon crash. This can create a depend-

ency cycle: caffeine, energy, crash, repeat. This behavioural reliance mirrors its physiologically addictive nature, where users develop tolerance and need higher doses to achieve the same effects. Upon cutting back, withdrawal symptoms like headaches, irritability, and fatigue can appear, which is probably why you're not you until you've had that morning cup of coffee. Not only this, when late enough into the day, another dark side of caffeine emerges: its effects on sleep. Over-reliance on caffeine can disrupt sleep by delaying its onset and causing insomnia. This is due to how long it tends to stick around in the body, and how quickly caffeine breaks

down. On average, the half-life of caffeine is around 3 – 7 hours in adults, meaning half of the caffeine from a cup of coffee consumed at 3pm could still be disrupting the sleep-promoting effects of adenosine at 10pm. Other negative effects of caffeine can also include jitteriness, anxiety and a rapid heart rate. The beverage of choice can influence the effects of caffeine too. For example, while green tea has less caffeine than coffee, it also includes L-theanine, an amino acid that promotes relaxation without drowsiness, creating a more balanced, sustained energy boost. The inclusion of taurine in energy drinks similarly neutralises the negative effects of caffeine.

Ultimately, the effects of caffeine, both negative and positive, are highly individualised. For those with ADHD, a paradoxical calming effect may occur, while those on the autistic spectrum can be more sensitive to caffeine's overstimulating effects. There are even differences between neurotypical people, where some can sleep like a baby following a post-dinner espresso while I struggle with mochas after midday. In any case, knowing how caffeine works can allow us to make more informed choices about its use in day-to-day student life. So the next time you sleepily reach for that red bull, remember that the energy is coming from somewhere – and you can't run forever.

Sport

“When I don’t train, I don’t feel me.”- I Student Amy Middlemas Shares Ho

Sofia Royal
Sport Editor

The power of social media is to never be underestimated. After all, it makes meeting a total stranger that little bit easier. Sitting amongst the few that frequent the Unio cafe during the summer break, I don’t think myself and Amy Middlemas have ever felt so grateful for profile pictures. “I was hoping I would recognise you from your Instagram”, Middlemas tells me with a hint of nervousness- it’s unexpected given her powerful exterior and knowing the immense weights she lifts on a daily basis.

Having only discovered powerlifting in December of 2022; at 21, Middlemas is a force to be reckoned with. Within the space of 18 months, Middlemas found herself going from a powerlifting rookie, to placing 5th at the FISU Powerlifting Championships. How did she begin? “I met my boyfriend in first year and he was really into powerlifting-style training... he introduced me to strength training and really training to get stronger.”

It wasn’t long before Middlemas found herself enjoying the powerlifting style and carried on as part of her workout routine. It was when Amy’s boyfriend, Tom Stapley, decided that he wanted to compete in powerlifting, that they started the transition to competitive powerlifting. “I remember that I was like ‘no, that is not what I decided to do in sport, I’m nowhere good enough,’” Middlemas recalls of her hesitation to go competitive. “But (Tom), as a person, is really motivating and really believed that I could do it.”

Determined to get the ball rolling on their powerlifting journey, Tom had discovered through word-of-mouth at the gym that ex-student Justin Lam was setting up his powerlifting business, Exalted Strength. Just starting out, Lam offered to coach both Amy and Tom for free as part of a case study. The competition that the pair had decided to take place in was only a month away, but in that time, Lam had taught Middlemas all about powerlifting, including the rules of the competition. “We really threw ourselves in at the deep-end... we were kind of overwhelmed, but we went to this competition a month later and I loved it so much.”

Even though Middlemas faced a few “technical errors”, her love for competitive powerlifting excelled and she immediately signed herself up to another competition. Throwing every personal trainer’s powerlifting rule book out of the window, Amy

didn’t leave much training time between her next competitions, having competed in 3 competitions within 3 months. “After the first comp, I should’ve took a block, where I would build my strength, build my skills, but I didn’t. I just went comp, comp, comp, comp, because I was so excited.”

Middlemas had intended to compete in Nationals after BUCS in April 2023, but decided against it in order to give herself a break to build on her muscle and strength. As she began to train during the block, Amy likens the training process to “when you’re in high school and you know people that are really sporty and they swim at 5am in the morning and they train 5/6 days a week and you just think ‘oh my god, like, you’re crazy’, and then I looked at myself and thought, ‘I’m doing that as well.’”

“After the first comp, I should’ve took a block... I just went comp, comp, comp, comp, because I was so excited.”

In a typical week, Middlemas trains for 5 days with each session lasting around 2-3 hours. “A typical week would be training the core lifts, squat lifts, bench dead lifts and then you have primary days, secondary days, and tertiary days.” The primary, secondary and tertiary days are associated with which type of training Middlemas will do. Whilst each day includes benching; squats, deadlifting and accessories are progressively added over the weeks. Leading up to the competition, the workout routine changes: “I really admire coaches for it,” she smiles, “I don’t know how it works- it’s like magic- but they adapt the volume and the load leading up to comp to make your body exactly primed for competition day.” At around 5 weeks away from the competition, Middlemas goes from high reps to being brought down to lower reps at a higher weight. Her coach takes the reps down to a “super easy” level, but by the time the competition day arrives, Middlemas gets what she describes as “super strength.”

If one thing is for certain, Middlemas defies everything you would expect when it comes to powerlifting training. Assuming that she would consistently lift heavier weights in order to build strength, Amy informs me that this common misconception is far from the truth. “People think we max out every week- go as heavy as we can, you know?

People think that’s what you need to do because we do it on the platform, but that’s absolutely not the case.” Training is judged in Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE). Originally made for athletes, powerlifters have begun to adapt the format into their training on a rating of 4-10. With an RPE of 10, the athlete has completed all the reps they can possibly do, whilst an RPE of 4 is a warm up. The in-between of a 6-7 indicates that there is space for more reps, which is where Middlemas finds herself on most days.

“I never really go over an 8/8.5 during training unless it’s at the end of a block.” With the end of a block mimicking a competition day, Middlemas was yet to lift heavier than 165kg, “I was really scared of doing 170kg and at comp I did 170kg... I feel like people that don’t know a lot about powerlifting would think that I would have to lift 170kg loads, you know?” Had she just decided to commit in the moment? “The whole point of comp is to do weights you’ve never done before, that’s the aim of it. You have bad days. But what you do in the gym – if I saw one of my competitors do it in the gym – I would expect them to get better in comp.”

Approaching her fourth year in Medicine, Middlemas is a busy student. From doing a medicine degree to powerlifting, will there ever come a point where she has to choose? “Seeing other people, you can do both. There are a lot of people in powerlifting that are in Med.” Choosing her words carefully, Middlemas admits that juggling everything is “hard”. But, what helps her most is her calendar, which is “really OCD”. Planning out her entire day, everyday Amy’s key to having it all is “making time for prioritising your training and uni... everything else, you can slot in-between that.”

Recalling the weeks leading up to the World Championship’s, Middlemas’ third year exams were in line with the competition. “World’s was a week after my final exam for med this year, so I did find that a little bit stressful... I said to (Tom) ‘I can’t train for this comp.’ With third year supposedly the hardest year at UEA for Med Students with the highest retake and drop-out rate, all Middlemas had on her mind was self-doubt. “I was like, ‘oh my god, I can’t do it’ and Tom said ‘You would be doing it anyway. You would still be going to the gym four times a week minimum – it’s your lifestyle’ and when you say that, it is just a lifestyle. I can’t imagine not training. When I don’t train, I don’t feel me.”

Committed to her sport, I’m curious if that was always the case, especially when Middlemas first started out. “I didn’t expect to be where I am now when I started a year and a half ago... I didn’t start off by doing 5 days a week... I just did it for the fun of it.” With powerlifting becoming more and more part of Middlemas’ life, she took on the role of Captain of the UEA Lifting Club last year. Transitioning to President this year, has there been much of a change? “There are obviously things I’ve had to learn, especially about the weightlifting side of the club, because I was really focused on the powerlifting side.” Amy admits that the weightlifting side “wasn’t me” and was therefore unaware about what was happening on that side of the club. “I didn’t know how many people were involved in it, their training schedule, their agreement with the gym they go to – I didn’t know any of that.” Determined to make the club “more equal”, Amy has spent her time, so far as President, sending emails and having meetings to understand the weightlifting side of the club. “I don’t want to neglect that... I really want to make it clear that that will absolutely not happen.”

Whilst she has put a lot of into the weightlifting side, Amy is evidently proud of what the powerlifting side of the club has become. “It has absolutely flourished this year. We’ve got so many male and female members on the BUCS team.” Having sent 7 members to BUCS this year, it is a contrast from the 3 that were sent last year. Having doubled in BUCS members, there is still interest amongst students to join who were late to qualify and train to the level required. Knowing that those students are likely to join the club for this year, Amy is “really excited.”

“Part of me was saying ‘what if you never get this opportunity again?’”

Middlemas’ biggest success came at the FISU World Championship’s. Held in Estonia during July, Amy describes it as “a really cool experience.” The biggest challenge of all? The self-doubt prior to accepting the invitation. “I’m quite an anxious person and the thought of doing a big competition was really, really scary. But I had my boyfriend by my side and my friends were very supportive and the team as well – the powerlifting team – when I told them about it, they were so excited... because it did go through my head a lot, like ‘should I even do it?’ Because part of me was like ‘you need to focus on your studies’ but part of me was saying ‘what if you never get this opportunity again?’”

Lifting Her Way to Success, Powerlifting How The Sport Has Shaped Her Life.



Credits: Amy Middlemas

Pictured: Justin Lam (Left), Amy Middlemas (Middle), Tom Stapley (Right)

Happy that she made the decision to go – Amy originally hadn't been selected at all. With set criteria's in order to be selected, competitors must compete and place top 2 in BUCS. On the day of the BUCS competition, Middlemas placed in 3rd. "I didn't have the best day and so I wasn't really expecting to get invited." When watching the competition back, Amy says that it was "obvious" on where she went wrong. Feeling quite "deflated" that she wouldn't be attending World's, news broke that one of the girls was not eligible to compete. It was then, that Middlemas was invited to the championship. "Part of me was like 'oh, I don't deserve it... I came in third'. I knew I could've done better than that."

In a moment of rawness, Amy reflects on her anxiety, admitting that "new things stress me out and scare me". However, her strength has come not only in a physical form, but also mentally as she praises powerlifting for helping her social anxi-

ety. "Performing in front of a whole audience of people and having them cheer you on and make you feel really good about yourself – even if you don't get the lift – they still cheer for you. I think that has really helped with my anxiety."

In aim to get used to the crowds of competitions, Amy signed up to a 'quiet series' after her first competition. Held in Nottingham, the competition is aimed at competitors who are anxious and want to do a relaxed competition either as practice or to qualify for a bigger competition. Without the intensity of the lights and crowds, Middlemas found it to be "a really good experience and I would recommend that to anyone, because not a lot of people know about it."

Amy also recognises it's not just the atmosphere but the people around you that help her more. "I think just having

people around me during the competitions has been really good. It wasn't until World's that I'd actually got seriously anxious about a competition before. I do get a little anxious on comp day. My coach knows me – he's really good at calming me down – but I'm a bit all over the show because I am just nervous."

Going to World's, Amy describes her anxiety as "like no other!" With stress levels high, Middlemas spoke with a GB coach. "We talked about what I wanted to achieve in the competition – what my lifts would be – and I started crying because I was stressed out." Having spoke to the coach before at a BUCS competition, Amy opened up to the coach and did what Amy describes as "the sweetest thing ever... he gave me this tour of the stadium."

"There's me thinking I'm on my own, and that's just not the case. Everyone has moments like that."

Taking her on a tour of the stadium the coach showed her the platform, where the cameras and lights would be and where she would walk in. "He took me right up on the stage and showed me exactly where to stand and let me just look out and absorb it all before it obviously filled up." With no one there, no audience in sight and no pressure on Middlemas, the experience helped her to "calm down". When talking to the other GB coaches, she realised she wasn't alone in how she felt. "Speaking to the GB coaches about their experiences with their anxie-

"I think I am still anxious, but I think that it really helped me."

ties – like, it's not just me – and I think I am still anxious, but I think that it really helped me. And reflecting on that, it will really help me in the future as well." Staying on the subject, Amy finds a comfort in the fact that "it's people who you least expect it from as well. You know, these people appear – 120kg plus powerlifting men on Instagram – and you're like 'wow, they must be hard as nails', and then they open up to you and there's me thinking I'm on my own, and that's just not the case. Everyone has moments like that."

For now, Middlemas is "so excited" for the year ahead. With some Lifting Club news that she is keeping close to her chest for now, she tells me that in other news, the club will be trying out a gym contract with Adira Weightlifting. Whilst her main priority is to ensure that the club will become "more equal" and "accessible" for the team, what is she aiming for herself? "I'm going to have a little off-season until December. I'll do a competition – hopefully with the rest of the powerlifters club." After speaking to a few members, Amy wants to "compete in the same competition – like a regionals competition. Qualify for nationals and BUCS and then hopefully from there, I'll be hoping to get into the international selection pool for Uni World's or Junior World's... maybe Euros?" Shrugging her shoulders, as if to say she'll follow the competition wherever it takes her, she asks no one in particular, "who knows?"

Daniel Freeman
Sport Senior Reporter

Just three months off the back of Real Madrid's record 14th Champions League triumph at Wembley against Borussia Dortmund, European football's most prestigious competition is ready to make its return, with a twist. From this year going forward, the UEFA Champions League has scrapped its long serving 32-team group stage in return for an all-new 36-team league phase to determine the teams that qualify for this season's knockout stages. With four extra teams, increased games, a new playoff round and much more, the all-new format has split a lot of opinion within the football community. Question is, Can the format be an improvement on its predecessor or is it the beginning of the end for the competition we all love?

In a New League of Their Own

The new 36-team format will see each team play eight games, four at home and four away from home. The eight teams with the most points at the end of the League phase will progress automatically to the knockout stages. However, in another new addition, teams who finish in positions 9-24 in the League phase will progress to a playoff round in which those teams will compete against each other over two legs to earn one of the final eight knockout spots available. As a result, not only will teams be guaranteed more games than they faced in the previous format, but for those who advance into the playoff round, they will find themselves competing in ten games to reach the knockout round compared to the six they faced in the old format.

Consequently, squad versatility will become pivotal to teams' succeeding in this year's competition. Mikel Arteta, Head Coach of Arsenal FC, realises such and argues that the new format will bring his coaches and analysts, "very, very different demands" due to the heightened schedule brought by the new format. Therefore, fear for the potential of significant injuries to rear its ugly head is very apparent and does make people question whether the increase in games will be a successful addition to the tournament.

"Each of these intense matchups will hold significant importance in deciding this year's champion."

Although, the increased schedule of the competition

shouldn't only be looked at under a negative lens. With each team facing one home and one away game against teams from each of the four seeding pots, you will see all the biggest contenders face stern tests before the competition's knockout round. Liverpool against Real Madrid, Arsenal versus PSG and Aston Villa at home to Bayern Munich are some of many standout games that will feature in this year's league phase. Compared to its predecessor format in which some of the bigger teams would coast to qualification for the knockouts within 4 games, the new league format with its 8 games and increased number of qualification spots creates a sense that each of these intense matchups will hold significant importance in deciding this year's champion.

Florida's calling for Louis Rees-Zammit, but can he get on to a competitive NFL field in 2024?

Daniel Freeman
Sport Senior Writer

After a 2024 of changing professional sports, catching footballs from 3-time Super Bowl Champion Patrick Mahomes and, oh yeah... getting to hang out with Taylor Swift's boyfriend, Louis Rees-Zammit has had one hell of a 2024 so far. But it's far from done. The former Welsh Rugby star was recently left out of the Kansas City Chiefs 53-man regular season squad for 2024 and has decided to sign a contract with the Jacksonville Jaguars to join their practice squad. This means he still finds himself waiting for an elusive opportunity to join a starting squad in the NFL. However, Louis joins a Jacksonville team with a host of connections to the U.K. already. A team ran by billionaire businessman Shad Khan, the man who owns Wembley Stadium, the Jaguars hold a special deal in which since 2013 they have held at least one home game each season at the iconic venue. This season is no different with Jacksonville playing the Chicago Bears at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on the 13th of October then the New England Patriots at Wembley a week later. As a result, could this move for Louis provide hope for the UK crowd that he could be playing meaningful snaps in the NFL at some point this season?

Louis' commitment to succeeding in the NFL is clear for all to see. In an interview with talksport, Louis felt calm about the Chiefs decision to cut him from their squad. Louis said he didn't hold "massive expectations to make a 53 straight away" and that he knows he "can make it in this sport". With

the backing of the NFL International Player Program, an initiative that enables each NFL team an extra spot within their own practice squads for international players, Louis does have the ability to reach an NFL roster in the near or distant future. This can be supported through acknowledging the pathway's most notable success story, Philadelphia Eagles Offensive Lineman Jordan Mailata. The former Australian Rugby player who got drafted into the NFL in 2018 without playing the game before, has risen through the ranks and is now considered by many as one of the standout players at his position in the NFL. This in tandem with other success stories including Buffalo Bills offensive linemen, Travis Clayton, a Brit from Basingstoke who was drafted to the Bills just this year makes it clear that the opportunity for players outside of the US to succeed in the NFL is a possibility. However, with Louis' reputation in the sporting world after his successful professional Rugby career, a transition into the richest sports league in the world would undoubtedly be seen as the most successful story for the International Player pathway program in its seven-year existence.

"Louis does have the ability to reach an NFL roster in the near or distant future."

However, for a man who this time last year was thriving on one of the biggest stages in world sport at a Rugby World Cup, missing out on both Kansas City's and Jacksonville's 53-man rosters for the 2024 season could be considered as a sign of poor decision making from

the Welshman. Why give up on a career in Rugby such as his to take such a gamble? As former Chiefs teammate Travis Kelce said on his New Heights Podcast back in April when discussing the Welsh Star, the NFL is "a humbling experience" and "it's not easy to make that jump, they're two completely different games." However, Louis says that despite the setbacks he's faced in the last few weeks, he is going to become someone that NFL coaches can look upon and rely on and that despite his setbacks he will be able to give NFL coaches "a reason to put me on the field".

And Louis can hold onto the fact that NFL teams are undoubtedly impressed by his potential. As former NFL cornerback and Sky Sports NFL pundit Jason Bell said on talksport, "Anything is possible in the NFL" and "the fact he's on the practice squad [of the Jaguars] tells you they believe he has the skillset, it just has to be nurtured." With Louis even transitioning positions from playing Running Back with the Chiefs to taking snaps at Wide Receiver for the Jaguars, his versatility and willingness to help his team in a multitude of ways will only be a useful asset when moving towards a starting place on an NFL roster. Louis explained in conversation to talksport that "he always wanted to play wide receiver" so it will be fascinating to see if he can succeed in his transition to the position. Furthermore, with the recent introduction of the new "dynamic kick-off" rules to the NFL from this season, players with skillsets like that of Louis could become very useful for teams wanting to succeed from the new rules.

"I don't believe it's out of the realms of possibility that we could see an appearance from him in a Jaguars uniform."

As a result, despite Louis' recent setbacks, the potential for him to sneak into the NFL squads due to injuries, personal improvement or other adjustments is certainly possible. Therefore, with the potential Louis holds to succeed in the NFL, I don't believe it's out of the realms of possibility that we could see an appearance from him in a Jaguars uniform in London in October or at some other point during the 2024 NFL season.



Credit: Unsplash

Meg Thurbon

The last Grand Slam of the ATP and WTA tour took place over the last fortnight in the Flushing Meadows and definitely exposed woes and potential of the top players. The 2021 US open Champion Emma Raducanu went another year without progressing to a reputable position in comparison to her 2021 success. Losing in the opening round to the world no 56, Sofia Kenin, Raducanu cited a lack of practice in the lead up to the tournament explaining her disappointing efforts. Raducanu had not played any tournaments coming into the final slam of the year and later regretfully vowed to make better choices in preparation for future tournaments. Overall, a disappointing but not totally surprising loss.

"I expected him to advance further than the second round."

A reflection of the 2024 US Open

The world no 3 Carlos Alcaraz suffered a shock straight sets loss in the second round to world no 74, Botic van de Zandschulp. His earliest loss in a Grand Slam since Wimbledon 2021. In the lead up to the open, Alcaraz was hesitant to play in Cincinnati and eventually lost in the opening round, citing fatigue. Considering the epic summer Alcaraz had after winning the Wimbledon Championship in July and achieving silver at the Olympic Games, I expected him to advance further than the second round.

The underdog of the tournament, Britain's Jack Draper, who managed to advance to the semifinal, his career best result at a slam. Aged just 22, Draper was yet to drop a set until his semifinal match against world No.1 Jannik Sinner. Ranked 25, Draper came into his match with Sinner expecting a challenge. Draper struggled with the intensity and physicality of the game and lost in straight sets, citing anxiety and fitness as the main

reasons for his loss, which he is still 'working on'. Nevertheless, Draper will leave the US open with a career high of world No.20 and looks set to perform well following the off season in Melbourne early next year.

"Sinner went on to lift the trophy... but it didn't come without an overbearing cloud following his anti-doping scandal"

In final, Jannik Sinner went on to lift the trophy at the US open, but it didn't come without an overbearing cloud following his anti-doping scandal earlier this year. Sinner had failed 2 doping tests in March after officials found traces of clenbuterol in Sinner's system, a substance used to enhance muscle growth. Sinner responded to the case by claiming he had been unintentionally contam-

inated by his physio after receiving treatment. The International Tennis Integrity Agency responded to this case almost immediately and was resolved within 3 months, with Sinner eventually avoiding any ban from the sport. Players including Britain's Dan Evans and Liam Broady as well as Nyck Kyrgios and Denis Shapovalov have blasted the ITIA for their controversially quick and efficient response to this case compared to other players such as Simona Halep who have waited up to years for their cases to be concluded. Sinner's victory at the Flushing Meadows, although unstoppable in his ability, has bought a sense of bittersweetness to the outcome of the tournament following his exceptionally swiftly deduced anti-doping case. The ITIA concluded that the violation was non-intentional on Sinner's part. Many of the players on tour have not been happy with this outcome.