

An Athlete's Guide to University Athletics



Everything you need to know
before setting off to University



England Athletics has recognised a need to support young athletes who are making the move in to higher education. This guide aims to support you, to make more informed choices when applying to university and to assist you in the all-important transition to university athletics.

Athletics is thriving in Higher Education with the British Universities and Colleges Track and Field championships due to take place at the Olympic Stadium in May 2012. We hope that this guide helps you to make the most of the exciting opportunities that await you.

Where do you start?

Everyone knows that certain universities such as Loughborough, Birmingham and Bath are strong in athletics but plenty of other universities in England have athletics teams and many offer coaching. Some have tracks on the campus or at their local sports facilities and some have links to local athletics clubs. The key is to do some online research and to check exactly what the university has to offer, both in terms of the course you are interested in and athletics provision.

What should I do before I make the move to university?

The training environment at university may be different to what you have experienced previously. You may find that you have more or fewer opportunities to train, are encouraged to train at a higher intensity, undertake more strength and conditioning training and face stiff competition to make the university teams. To help your transition into university training, there are some important things to discuss with your current coach.

The university I've chosen doesn't have an athletics club or a coach for my event. How can I carry on with athletics?

If your university doesn't have an athletics club you can still continue training and competing in the sport. There will be clubs nearby which are similar to your local club.

Here are a few tips to find a club and coach suitable for your development and participation in the sport:

- ◆ Most athletics clubs will have their **own website** which will provide information on where they are located, when their training nights are and details of their coaches. The website will have contact details for at least one of the club officers, such as the secretary or the

Checklist – do your research...

- ◆ Check out which universities take part in athletics competitions organised by British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) www.bucs.org.uk. These include the BUCS Indoor Athletics Championships, BUCS Cross Country Championships, BUCS Outdoor Athletics Championships, BUCS Marathon Championships (combined with the London Marathon) and BUCS Combined Events Championships. The website gives the results of all the championships from previous years so you can check out which universities are strong in athletics and cross country. Other competitions are arranged locally, such as regional competitions, local university leagues or competing within the external club structure.
- ◆ Ask about athletics provision when you go to the open days. It's possible to carry on with your sport and study for a degree at the same time, but choosing the right university, that offers the course you want and the right facilities for your event and support in terms of coaching and competition is critical.
- ◆ Some universities offer coaching for runners but lack specialised coaching in the field events and hurdles, so do ask the questions before you go, rather than finding out at the fresher's fair that there is little in the way of support or expertise in your chosen event(s).
- ◆ The Complete University Guide (www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk) includes links to each university and gives a summary of their sports facilities. It doesn't list tracks, but you can check what else is available.
- ◆ The Student Room (www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/A-Z_of_Universities) is also an informative website providing details on the range of sports facilities offered at each university. Several university athletics clubs are on Facebook and Twitter.
- ◆ Check out the local club options just in case the university set up doesn't offer what you need.
- ◆ If you are a disabled athlete, it may also be useful to contact the Disability Services Provision department or the Students' Union at the University to discuss any additional needs and to find out more about specific facilities and opportunities available.
- ◆ You may be considering studying abroad such as going to the US, which is becoming more popular with athletes in the UK. If you are considering this, be sure to do your research to ensure that the university offers an appropriate course and that it provides you with good training and competition opportunities.

A very different system for the sport operates in the US, which will impact your studying and sporting experiences. Whilst many athletes thoroughly enjoy their experience, it is not suitable for all. An important aspect to research is how studying at a US university will impact on your eligibility to compete back in the UK.

Some websites that will help you to carry out this research to make well informed choices are listed in the recommended resources section at the end of this document.



chair – contact the club and ask if you can go along to visit and find out more information.

- ◆ Your university may have a **sports development department** – contact them to see if they can give you any contact details for local athletics clubs.
- ◆ Try contacting the local **Athletics Network** or **County Athletics Association** for details of local clubs and coaches near to the university.
- ◆ UKA provides a club search function on their website: www.uka.org.uk/grassroots/search
- ◆ Look on the Run England website if you are looking for a local social running group: www.runengland.org
- ◆ If there is sufficient demand at your university, you may be able to set up a new Run England group. Speak with your Students' Union and find more details on the Run England website.

I've arrived at university, so what's next?

Everybody will have a different experience at university when they arrive but the key is to try and find out as much information as you can to make the most of your experience there. The first few weeks are an ideal time to settle in to new accommodation, socialise with new friends,

explore the training facilities and find out more information about your course. There will be lots of opportunities in the first couple of weeks to become involved with university athletics including:

- ◆ **Fresher's fair** – it is likely that your university will have a fresher's fair which is an opportunity to find out more information about the activities provided by the university and speak with other students involved in those activities. Here you will be able to sign up to the athletics club and find out details about training times, competitions and social events. It can be quite overwhelming to see how many clubs are available – if your interest is athletics; don't be reeled in by another club whose induction sounds more fun!

If your university doesn't have its own athletics club, check to see if any of the local community athletics clubs are at the Fresher's fair.

- ◆ **Fresher's competitions or training sessions** – Some universities will have competitions at the beginning of the year specifically for first year students. Several organise a social run. These are an excellent opportunity to get involved in the sport right from the start.
- ◆ Ask your home coach for a training plan for the first month in case there are no opportunities available at the start.

Checklist – things to discuss with your current coach

- ◆ Would your current coach be willing to visit the university with you prior to attending the university? You may be able to observe or take part in a training session with the university coach if you make contact beforehand.
- ◆ Do you have written records of your previous training that you can take with you to show your university coach? This will help your coach plan appropriate training for you that fits in with your overall development.
- ◆ Does your coach have any recommendations about your training and development over the next 12-24 months which can be shared with your university coach?
- ◆ What do you and your current coach believe your strengths and areas for development are? It is likely that your university coach will want to know this – your current coach may be able to help you see strengths and areas for development that you haven't recognised.
- ◆ Has your current coach observed any particular training methods that have worked well for you or, vice versa, is there anything that your current coach has observed that doesn't work well for you? This information will be important to share with the university coach.
- ◆ If your university doesn't have an athletics club or doesn't have a coach for your event, would your coach be able to help you find an athletics club or coach local to the university?
- ◆ Would your current coach be happy to speak with the university coach by phone to provide a full background of your training and development?
- ◆ Discuss with your current coach whether you intend to re-join the training group during term breaks and what involvement you envisage having with your club in the future. Also discuss how your current coach may be able to support you whilst at university – they may be willing to continue supporting you in a mentoring capacity.
- ◆ Nutrition – do you know how to cook meals which will help you to train well and perform successfully? If you don't, it is worth learning to cook these meals with the assistance of parents or coaches to ensure you eat well. For nutritional information visit: <http://coaching.uka.org.uk/document/eat-and-drink-like-a-champion>



The university athletic club will probably have a section on the university website which will provide information on training times and venues and you may also find contact details for university coaches or club captains who can answer any questions that you have.

What about training loads?

When you start training with a group at university you may find that other athletes are training more often and at a higher intensity than you are used to. There is a risk that, if you try to significantly increase your training load too quickly, it will result in injury. It is likely that other athletes have increased their training load over a long period of time. Discuss with the university coach how you can gradually increase your training load, (with a consideration to what you have done before).

On the other hand, it's also possible that there could be fewer opportunities available to you for training. You may choose to train independently and maintain a long distance relationship with your coach at home. If you do this, consider joining in with some generic training sessions such as circuits if they are available to provide some social training opportunities.

How will the university lifestyle affect my training?

Your lifestyle at university will probably change considerably, especially if you have moved away from home. This will have an impact on your training and your performance in sport so it's a good idea to find out what support your university offers.

Your university may have a **student-athlete lifestyle adviser** who can support you to manage your lifestyle and help you achieve

in both athletics and as a student. Or, they may offer **mentoring support** to help you with a range of topics including; transition into university sport, time management, academic-sport clashes, injury, drug awareness, emotional support and more. Look on the university website or ask your university coach for more information.

Each university will have **Disability Service Provision** which is usually a separate department that coordinates student support in lectures and also with accommodation requirements. Student unions often have a **Welfare & Inclusion Officer** who may also be able to support disabled students with lifestyle considerations.

Tips for managing your training and lifestyle at university:

- ◆ **Consider what you want to achieve**, both academically and in sport, then how you are going to achieve this.
- ◆ **Make a timetable** which shows when you will study, train, have time to socialise and rest. This may change during exam periods.
- ◆ At times it will be more important for you to **focus on your studies** particularly **around exam periods**. Be confident that you can take a defined break from your training to concentrate on exams. This doesn't mean that you have to stop athletics – you can return to training at any point!
- ◆ **Plan your finances**. You may need to pay for transport to training and competitions and pay for training facilities – have you budgeted for this?
- ◆ Consider **what training is appropriate** for you and work together with your coach to plan your programme. If you are joining a new coach, they won't know what works for you as well as you do!

- ◆ **Speak to some older students** about how they have balanced their time between training, studying, socialising and resting.
- ◆ Consider **whether your diet is sufficient** for training and competition. Think about preparing meals in advance so that you eat as soon after training as possible and consider taking it in turns to cook for training partners – this way you get to share the cooking and washing up! It also works out much cheaper!

How can I balance my studies with athletics?

It's not always easy trying to fit everything into your timetable but it can be done. At times you may need to focus more attention on studying and as a result you may have less time to train. If you feel that you may need to take a break from training to concentrate on exams, you can always return to training after your exams. Discuss how you may adapt your training schedule with your coach to enable you to have a defined break from training or a reduced training schedule with a view to returning to training post exams.

What if I need part-time work?

If you think you will need a part-time job whilst at university, try to find jobs that will fit in with your training and studying times. There may be opportunities to coach at local schools that are linked to the university or the local athletics club / network. Your university may have a scheme that helps to train students as sport leaders or coaches and pay for you to coach in local schools. This will also enhance your CV. Try contacting the university sport development team for more information.

What athlete bursaries and scholarships are available?

Some universities offer **athlete bursaries and scholarships** to support you whilst you are studying. Usually the funding from these scholarships can be used towards: free access to sport training facilities, medical support including physiotherapy and massage, strength and conditioning and financial support towards competition costs. Contact the university's sport development department or look on the university website for more information.

UKA are currently working with the **Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS)** to pilot a support package for students who perform at a high level within athletics. TASS is a government backed partnership between talented young athletes, educational institutions and national governing bodies of sport and offers athletes a tailored package of service worth up to £3,500.

TASS will liaise with UKA to determine which athletes will receive support but places are very limited and athletes must be competing at National or International level to be eligible. For more information, visit www.tass.gov.uk

Some clubs may also provide some financial support to assist athletes travel to competitions. Discuss with your club if they can provide this support to enable you to travel back from university to key club competitions. Be creative and think of ways you can support your club through volunteering, coaching or officiating. In return, your club may be able to offer a small bursary or travel to training or competitions.

Other possible sources of athlete's bursaries include: County Sport Partnerships, County Councils and trusts.

Where can I find out more?

- ◆ **British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS)**
www.bucs.org.uk
- ◆ **College Sports Scholarships USA**
www.collegesportsscholarships.com/track-and-field.htm
- ◆ **England Athletics**
www.englandathletics.org
- ◆ **Run England**
www.runengland.org
- ◆ **Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS)**
www.tass.gov.uk
- ◆ **The Complete University Guide**
www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk
- ◆ **The Student Room**
www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/A-Z_of_Universities
- ◆ **Track Bound USA**
www.trackboundusa.co.uk/
- ◆ **Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)**
www.ucas.com
- ◆ **UKA**
www.uka.org.uk
- ◆ **UKA Eat like a Champion**
<http://coaching.uka.org.uk/document/eat-and-drink-like-a-champion>
- ◆ **Universities in the USA**
www.universitiesintheusa.com

Good Luck!

We hope that this guide has provided you with some valuable tips and information in preparation for university. Most importantly, we hope that you make the most of what is available at university to further your study and athletics. Take ownership of finding available opportunities and have fun!

