UCAS Data Signals Shift in University Shopping Habits

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A new report from UCAS - Finding Their Place 2025, reveals that the university preparation season is beginning earlier than ever, with students (and their parents) starting to make key purchases from as early as June.

The findings highlight a critical opportunity for brands to engage meaningfully with student households ahead of the new academic year.

- 63% of students say sticking to a budget is one of their biggest stresses when shopping for university essentials
- 24% feel anxious about living independently for the first time
- 22% are worried about cooking for themselves, and 26% say meal planning is a major source of stress
- 32% of parents are concerned their child won't maintain a healthy diet once they leave home

For brands, this shift marks a golden window to connect early and meaningfully with student households offering support, reassurance, and value as they navigate this major life moment.

Key Findings from the UCAS Report:

- University shopping starts early: 40% of students begin purchasing kitchenware before results day in August, and up to 47% shop early for bedroom essentials like bedding and towels.
- Tech shopping peaks in July: 13% plan to buy laptops, 12% desktop computers, 13% tablets, 11% TVs, and 13% headphones with Amazon a key platform (used by 34% for headphones).
- Parents are heavily involved: Families shop side-by-side in-store, especially for practical and high-value items. Parents often drive utility-focused purchases, while students choose comfort and style-based items.

Top concerns include basic life skills:

- Nearly a quarter of students (24%) said they were feeling anxious about living independently.
- 22% worry about cooking and 26% are daunted by meal planning; basic life skills are a top stressor.
- Budgeting is a major concern for 63% of students, and 43% of parents share the same fear.
- 1 in 3 parents (32%) worry their child won't eat well once they've left home.

Jo Richards, Senior Insight Lead at UCAS explains:

"With budgets under pressure, parents, guardians and students are choosing to shop earlier to help spread the cost of essential tech and study equipment. This isn't just about ticking things off a list before term starts, but managing finances and feeling confident that the items they are investing in will last the length of their course.

"Retailers and brands have a real opportunity here to offer support through clearer guidance, longer promotional windows and smarter payment options. By understanding how families are planning and budgeting ahead of time, brands can not only help ease financial pressure but also build trust and loyalty with student customers at a crucial stage."

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Notes to editors:

Data is sourced from UCAS's Finding Their Place 2025 report, which surveyed students and parents preparing for university in the UK.

For expert commentary or interview opportunities with Jo Richards, Senior Insight Lead at UCAS, please contact rebecca@jbh.co.uk

The full Finding Their Place 2025 report is available here:
https://www.ucas.com/business/brands/new-2025-report-finding-their-place

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