



# Help from above:

**Advice from former  
students on what to  
expect from **Level 2****

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A new academic year is an exciting time, full of new challenges and opportunities. Each year of university is a little bit different – some things get easier, and some things get harder. We know that advancing into a new year group is something people tend to worry about, so we spoke to students at the University of Aberdeen (353 of them!) and asked them what advice they wished they'd received before moving into a new academic year. We hope that this is useful to you and wish you all the best for the new academic year.

# Level 2

## What to look forward to



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*I have a better understanding of the workload required of me and feel I can better plan for this and manage my time.*

– MA (Hons) Primary Education student

Starting level 2 means that you were successful during your first year of university, so you definitely have at least some of the skills you need to continue! Many students reported that life in level 2 was easier - you know your way around the university campus and some of the online tools you can use. You're aware of the expectations around your coursework and you know your social circle and what you like to do!

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*In terms of my personal life, I guess level 2 is a bit easier since I have more friends and so there's more emotional support. I would also say level 2 is easier because I'm just more used to the campus in general and I know what locations I prefer to study in and the way to lectures.*

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– BSc (Hons) Neuroscience with Psychology student

# Reflect on Success



Remember that your successes aren't just academic - you have overcome your first day, your first essay, your first exam, and, for most students, your first time learning from lectures. You might also have moved away from home, discovered new talents in sports or activities or made new friends. It's important to take the time to recognise all the things you've learned since Freshers' Week and start to think about how you can build on that this year.

Self-reflection can be a very useful exercise for setting goals and building confidence. Try using the self-reflection tools on ACHIEVE on MyAberdeen to do this.

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*I think that this year I am already much more focused and determined than I was last year, in the first semester last year my grades were higher than in the second so I feel that that was sort of a good thing for me in a way because I now have greater motivation and I have become significantly better at things like time management. This evidently has positive effects because overall I feel much happier and have a more positive approach to my work.*

– MA (Hons) History student

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*I try to still be socially active within both friend groups and societies but I am better at letting things go and not feeling like I am not doing enough or missing out on things, rather realising I need time for myself and to relax.*

– MA (Hons) Film & Visual Culture and Philosophy student

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# Academic challenges

## What to be aware of

Next, it's time to build on your successes at level 1. Your fellow students say that at level 2 the work is more demanding with greater challenges such as:

- 👁️ **increased word-counts for essays and reports**
- 👁️ **increased preparation for classes**
- 👁️ **a reduced number of contact hours**
- 👁️ **the content of lectures and the material you're reading will become more detailed**
- 👁️ **you will be asked to do more independent research**

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*As we started this year (level 2) I have noticed an increased amount of information delivered in the lectures and there is definitely a lot more detail. We are also going through different topics really fast.*

– BSc (Hons) Genetics student ”



# Academic challenges

## How to prepare

In preparing for these new challenges, make sure that you take advantage of all the support the University makes available to you.

- 🕒 **Make sure you read your course guides and any available assessment guidance.**
- 🕒 **If you're struggling, ask your Personal Tutor or School staff for help!**
- 🕒 **Talk to your peers and students in the levels above you.**
- 🕒 **Find out if your School runs a peer-assisted learning scheme (PAL).**
- 🕒 **Visit the InfoHub (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support>).**
- 🕒 **The Student Learning Service (SLS) <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sls> offers:**
  - > Academic skills workshops
  - > 1-to-1 sessions with Academic Skills Advisors
  - > Online resources to help improve your academic writing <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sls/academicwriting>

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*Really make use of the tutorial/seminar tutors for feedback or advice, because they do help you feel more confident when writing essays/reports/preparing for exams, etc. I would also advise to start the assignment as soon as the topic is given to them, even if it's just start the research for it, to avoid the stress of last minute submissions, which will automatically affect the quality of their work.*

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– MA (Hons) History student

# Skills and training



## What to be aware of

- ▶ The step-up in difficulty and workload means that you need to make sure your organisational skills and time management are up to the job.
- ▶ The expectation that you will have a basic set of IT skills is also going to increase in level 2, in particular, you need know how to use a standard office suite like Microsoft Office, with programs like Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. If you don't think you can create a presentation that is more than a black and white slide or tumble into insecurity when someone asks you to create a spreadsheet in Excel now's the time to start upskilling.

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*Always remember that the longer the studying is left, the more difficult it gets. Missing an hour lecture does not mean an hour catching up, usually it means 1.5h when you do it yourself, if not more. Read ahead, plan, do not fall behind.*

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– Law LLB student

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*Try to read all the course guides and see all the deadlines for the assessments to start working in advance.*

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– MA (Hons) Politics and International Relations student

## How to prepare

- ▶ Help with this can be found in the Toolkit Productivity section (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity>).
- ▶ Try using WorkFlowy to help you break big ideas and tasks into manageable pieces (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/workflowy>)
- ▶ Many level 2 students found a Youtube channel called CrashCourse Study Skills useful, take a look at it here - <https://www.youtube.com/user/crashcourse>
- ▶ Boost your Microsoft Office skills:
  - Excel <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/skills/ms-excel>
  - Word <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/skills/ms-word>
  - Powerpoint <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/skills/ms-powerpoint/>
- ▶ Make full use of the university's Toolkit <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/> to boost your IT skills. Pay attention to the Digital Skills section of the Toolkit for information on any new software you might need to use at level 2.



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*Get into the habit of going to lectures or keeping up to date with recordings. Every day! Do not listen when people tell you to take it easy in the first 2 years because the marks do not count. You will not suddenly become studious in level 3 when the marks do count.*

– MA (Hons) Psychology student

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# Accommodation

Another big change highlighted by many level 2 students was the move from living in student accommodation to private accommodation.

*“The biggest changes have been in the move away from Hillhead and the existing group of friends I have compared to first year. The move away from Hillhead has meant a little more time spent on bills and handling the flat overall. Setting up internet, gas, electricity, and council tax exemptions took up my time for the first few weeks. Socially, 2nd year has been easier to start with an existing group of friends and knowing more about societies. While I do still meet new people, it is not nearly as frequent as first year”*

– MA (Hons) Economics and International Relations student

## What to be aware of

🕒 If you are making the move from student halls to renting a flat with friends, this might be the first time that you have flat mates and living with other people can have advantages and disadvantages.

*“Living in a flat with two other girls is the biggest change compared to level 1, where I've been living in student accommodation. I prefer having my own flat, but this also comes with more responsibilities and work. Socialising has also changed and requires more input now, since one does not live with a lot of people any longer, and one can also enjoy privacy much more now; but you should be careful not to isolate yourself and talk to your friends when you have any problems or concerns... one needs to put more effort in meeting new people, since most people already have their set circle of friends. Becoming a member of a society one likes is the best option to meet like-minded peers.”*

– MA (Hons) student



# Accommodation

## How to prepare

- 🕒 The main advice from level 2 students was to make sure you take the time to read through everything carefully and to organise your gas and electricity, internet (which will take up to a month to set up around September time) and your council tax exemption (<https://online.aberdeencity.gov.uk/Services/CouncilTax/HouseholdDiscount.aspx>).
- 🕒 Make sure that you take the time to talk to your new house mates at the start of year about things like cleaning (you might want to make a rota) and shopping (will you share some food like milk and teabags or is everything to be separate?) – these conversations are much easier to have at the beginning of the year, don't wait until there's a problem!
- 🕒 There is a lot of information available that will help you manage the challenges associated with living in private accommodation and the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) have provided a lot of resources which you can access here - <https://www.ausa.org.uk/ausaadvice/accommodation>.
- 🕒 The library is busy, especially during exam times, but there are rooms in many of the university buildings that you can use - <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/systems/classroom-pcs>. There are also often unused classrooms in MacRobert Building where you can access a computer.
- 🕒 Importantly, try and feel comfortable in your home and truly settle in – it's advised to separate your study and home life – so make sure your bed is your bed and not a substitute desk.



# Getting involved



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*This year I am more involved in the student life. Being a member of an AUSA committee and student society. In first year I was so busy doing what everybody else does (partying) that I forgot what actually mattered to me (volunteering, actively contributing, taking part in sports and events). Now I feel much more like myself having a good time partying some days and working*

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– MA (Hons) student

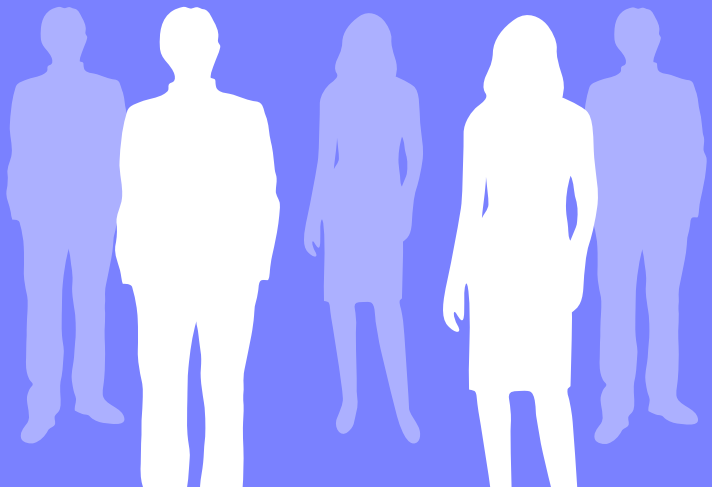
## What to be aware of

- 🕒 The good news is that many level 2 students reported that they now had close friends unlike the beginning of level 1, which could feel lonely at times.
- 🕒 It was also noted though that because friendship groups are often already established by this point, it can be harder to meet new people and make new friends in level 2.

# Getting involved

## How to prepare

- 👁️ If you're lucky enough to have a supportive circle of friends, make sure you value them and use them as support when you need them and as companions in your adventures.
- 👁️ If you feel like your friends won't suffice in helping you stay happy:
  - > get in touch with the Counselling Service <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/services/counselling>
  - > go to the Big White Wall - <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/big-white-wall>
  - > use Headspace <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/headspace> to get started with mindfulness.
- 👁️ The most common advice on how to meet people and make your time at university a good one was to get involved with something that's not studying. The most frequent suggestion was to join societies or sports clubs with many saying that they acted as a family away from home, or even just a nice way to pass the time and be distracted from your studies. You can find a list of all sports clubs <https://www.ausa.org.uk/sports> and all societies <https://www.ausa.org.uk/societies> on the AUSA website.



# Paid work



## What to be aware of

- 👁️ If you need to work for financial reasons, make sure you don't take on more than you can deal with. Between 8 and 16 hours of work a week is manageable, but if you work upwards of 20 hours a week your studies and your physical and mental health will likely start to suffer.

## How to prepare

- 👁️ More advice on finding graduate jobs, internships, and part-time work is available at:
  - > the Careers Service <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/>
  - > AUSA <https://www.ausa.org.uk/ausaadvice/employability/workstudy/>

## Final thought...

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*[...] Study hard and work to the best of your ability. Don't leave assignments and essays until last minute but also make time to socialise and relax. Find a system that works for you and don't change your study techniques if it will result in you performing worse just because you've been encouraged to do so. Be confident and don't be afraid to be yourself around people. Crucially, if you ever feel stressed about the workload, just break it down into manageable segments and take things a step at a time. Also, if you're ever completely overwhelmed or intimidated by something then reach out and seek help from the lecturers or other appropriate members of staff. Always remember that you are here to enjoy your degree so remember to work hard but also have fun with your studies.*

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**BSc (Hons) Biology student**