

# Why dropping out of university isn't the end of the world

Apply. Revise. Results. And if all goes well, this big new adventure awaits you. The stages get laid out in front of you like a grocery list for life, each with its own impending deadline. For many, this may seem like the only way ahead, the thought of beginning but later dropping out of university simply out of the question. And so you go with it, selecting your favourite subject – or the one you hate the least. Next step: narrowing down where you want to spend the next three or more years of your life, all in a matter of months or even weeks, depending on when you begin your uni search.

You'll often hear adults say, "It's the best time of your life!" Friends will boast about how amazing and crazy their Fresher's week was, as they religiously update their Snapchat stories. But what most people won't share are the doubts. The stresses that come with starting somewhere new. The worry that perhaps the right choice hasn't been made after all. If you currently find yourself stuck in this dilemma, or are applying to university with the fear of dropping out in mind, then read on for a first-hand account from a proud university dropout.

## It's not all it's cracked up to be

Perhaps it's the city that you're not a fan of. Or maybe the course doesn't quite feel right. It could even be that you just don't feel ready yet, and regret not taking a year out first. Either way, something is off and you're simply not enjoying it. You keep telling yourself you're fine, that it'll get better if you keep riding it out. But at what point do you give in, and admit that something's got to change?

For me, it was a combination of all these factors that led to dropping out. I had been so convinced I wanted to stay in London, but once I actually started the familiarity quickly became dull. I remember walking round King's College's Strand campus, with several others who were excited to be studying in the country's capital. But for me, having lived in London my whole life, it felt a tad too ordinary. Deciding to stay at home at the time to save money probably didn't help either. I managed to stick with it for over two months, before eventually dropping out of university.

## The dangers of having too many expectations

With all new situations and experiences, come expectations. It's your mind's natural way of preparing you for what's to come, and university is no different. Whether you've had an older sibling attend uni before you, or the majority of your expectations come from movies, we all have certain possibilities we hope will happen. Like making a bunch of new friends, for instance, or re-defining yourself in an environment where you can quite literally start from scratch.

Dropping out of university certainly wouldn't be among these hopes. However, at a time when social media allows you to passively keep up to date with others, through posts and stories, it becomes way too easy to compare your expectations with the experiences of others. If you're constantly watching your friends have a good time, while you're sat feeling unhappy during your first few weeks of uni, you naturally end up feeling worse. While it didn't directly lead to my decision to drop out, seeing friends have the experiences I wanted through social media certainly didn't help. But over time, it taught me that while expectations are normal and healthy, they can also be misleading and so should be managed carefully.

## It's okay to change your mind

On a daily basis, we're expected to have our act together. There's this silent pressure to somehow have life figured out on the first try. And even when we're struggling, we sometimes carry on for longer than we'd like. While this perseverance is good, and can help build character, there's nothing wrong with acknowledging that you've reached your limit. It's also important to remember that no one really has all the answers. We're all simply doing our best in the situations we're in.

That being said, it's perfectly okay to change your mind. Dropping out of university, changing careers down the line, or even taking an indefinite career break – these are all choices that many people make, despite this pressure. Admitting that you've made a mistake, or have had a change of heart doesn't have to be a bad thing. If anything, it makes you independent, can develop your maturity, and shows that you are able to take responsibility for your decisions.

## You get more than one second chance

In the same way that we're allowed to change our mind, we get plenty of second chances. Unfortunately, no one really tells you this when you're applying to university. That silent pressure returns, and we all silently feel it. However, what I learned the hard way, through two months of doubt and the uncertainty that came with actually dropping out, is that everything works out just as well the second time around. Sometimes, it can even work out better.

I ended up reapplying during my “unplanned” gap year, this time to universities out of London. I got the place I wanted and, having recently graduated, can safely say that it was all worth it. Though it was incredibly scary at the time, dropping out of university was one of the best decisions I ever made. I could have stayed, hoping that it would eventually get better. And maybe it would have. But if I hadn't taken the risk and dropped out, I wouldn't have seen just how well my second chance could turn out.

## Taking back control of your life

Over the years, I've met people who dropped out, didn't; reapplied, didn't, and they're all doing just fine. I even know a girl who completed a five-year course in medicine, only to decide she didn't want to become a doctor anymore and chose to pursue a degree in history instead at the age of 25. Despite the panic that it can cause at the time, dropping out isn't a decision that haunts you forever. And once you do decide to go for it, it can be the first step in a whole new path. One that isn't set out quite as neatly as the “apply, revise, results” routine you learn in school, but is just as beneficial if not more, and still takes you where you want to go.

I would be a very different person today if I had chosen to stay at King's College. The experience of living on my own the second time around then led to my decision to study, and later volunteer abroad. Hoping to continue down my “dropout” path, I plan to begin teaching abroad in the next few months.

## It really is what you make of it

This applies to dropping out, as much as it does to university. If you find yourself in this position, where you've just left uni and are unsure what to do, take some time to recover or adjust, but then do something! Whether that's applying again like I did, finding work, an apprenticeship, or even travelling,

the time is yours to spend and make the most of. You've been given a unique opportunity. Why not break the taboo that only failures drop out?

Just to be clear, this isn't an article advocating dropping out of university. If you arrive at uni and absolutely love it the first time round, then great! Enjoy and make the most of it. But if you start and find that something doesn't quite feel right, whether it's the course or the campus, then take some time to address these feelings. Don't leave straight away. Like many good things, sometimes it just takes a bit of time. But if you find that you've given it a chance, waited a while and still aren't happy, then it's okay. Drop out, defer your entry, or take a year out just to figure things out. Dropping out of university isn't the end of the world. Ironically, it can be the beginning of something greater.