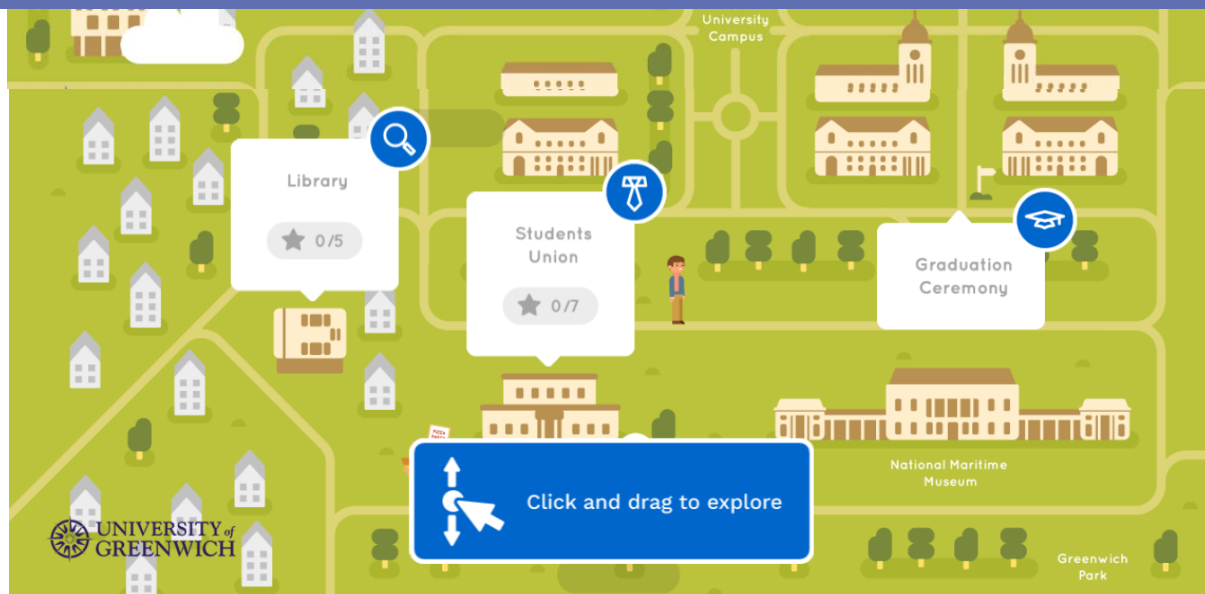




Independent Learner's Toolkit



Teachers' Guide

Suggested Activities

Education Support Unit
University of Greenwich
esu@gre.ac.uk

About this course

The Independent Learners' Toolkit (ILT) is an online course in the form of a virtual campus game. It was developed to raise students' awareness of the importance of independent learning skills and how these link to students' success. The idea of the game is that students are invited to explore the virtual campus and the five areas;

- Halls of Residence
- Student Services
- Lecture Theatre
- Library
- Students' Union

A sixth section, Graduation, is locked until students have gained enough stars from exploring the different parts of the campus. The stars are used to power how far students can fling their mortarboard as a reward for participating in all the activities.

How to use this course

The ILT course is aimed at year 11-13 students, and can be delivered as part of a sixth form induction day, form time and/or enrichment sessions. Ideally students will have access to the course via a PC or an iPad. Students should each have their personal logins which will keep track of their progress on the course. Students could complete the course as individuals in 20-30 minutes, but ideally each section will lead to class discussions around a variety of different aspects linked to university life; busting myths, and aligning expectations.

Each area on the virtual campus represents opportunities for students to develop key transferable skills during the course of their study at university. Moving in and out of the areas, playing the games and earning "stars" all contribute to the notion that students are on a journey as they progress and grow in maturity. The final section "Graduation" represents the culmination of their studies. In this area, students will be able to fling their mortarboards into the sky. The more stars they have collected through their exploration of the campus, the higher they will be able to fling their mortarboards. If students haven't collected sufficient stars, this section remains locked, thus providing an analogy for the whole process of going to university, learning and developing transferable skills and graduating at the end.

If teachers wish to lead the sessions, this guide gives you the Big Ideas for each section of the course/campus and the Big Questions that will lead discussions. Student handouts are provided, and include a pre/post course survey, complete list of the Big Questions and a Next Steps activities sheet.

At the end of the course

At the end of the course, encourage learners to consider what they could do to improve their independent learning skills; perhaps they could undertake a research project; create a list of places to visit and questions to ask at Open Day visits or plan a presentation on "what to expect at university". There are a list of suggested activities to complement each part of university life and we recommend using the HE Application Journey (www.explore.gre.ac.uk) for supporting the UCAS process.

Independent Learner's Toolkit

Section One: The Lecture Theatre

Keywords:

Self-directed study
Communication
Time management

Big Questions:

1. What are the differences between university and school/college learning?
2. How should you consider managing your time at university?
3. What impact would poor attendance and participation have on your university success?
4. What are the differences between the following: lectures, seminars, tutorials and study groups?
5. How can collaborative learning help you to succeed?

Big Ideas:

Going to lectures and the “hands off” culture of teaching will be a new experience for most students. Students will need to learn to be disciplined so that they can make full use of this independence and learning experiences. It is important to allow plenty of time to prepare for lectures and assignments to make the most of the time with the lecturer/academic (who is an expert in the field).

Students can use online resources and lecture notes to catch up on what they have missed, but this can often mean missing out on important insight and discussions covered in the lectures. Asking questions to consolidate learning and address any gaps in knowledge is vital for success within lectures and welcomed by lecturers.

Seminars (small-group discussions with tutors), tutorials (group meetings with an academic to help clarify learning) and study groups (more informal knowledge and research sharing with other students) offer more collaborative ways of approaching assignments. Many courses are assessed through collaborative tasks such as group presentations. Organising group work and meeting deadlines are all important independent learning skills needed for academic success.

Next Steps:

- Research and attend free public twilight lectures at local universities related to studies (<https://www.gre.ac.uk/events/prospective-students>).
- Visit a local university (Taster Day or Open Day) and speak to the lecturers in the subject of interest (www.gre.ac.uk/events).

Section Two: Student Services

Keywords:

Self-reflection
Initiative
Employability

Big Questions:

1. What do you think are the biggest challenges students face at university?
2. How can Student Services help at university?
3. How is asking for help independent and why is it important?
4. What are the top skills employers are looking for? How could you gain these during your time at university?
5. How can you stand out from other job candidates?

Big Ideas:

Students should take initiative and seek help and support at university if it is needed. Research has shown that the majority of students who leave university before completing their studies do so for the following reasons:

- They are experiencing money problems
- They are finding it hard to make new friends
- They have a disability and can't cope with the work
- They've experienced a mishap but didn't know how to get support
- They didn't know how to manage their time and things got on top of them

Student services can provide students with impartial advice, health and wellbeing guidance, sexual health walk-in clinics, careers and financial support.

It is important to make the most of the employability and careers guidance available at university; gain as much relevant work experience, volunteer or take part in an extracurricular activity to build your skills.

Employers are looking for teamwork and communication, planning and organising, commercial awareness, initiative and analysing and investigation skills. There are plenty of ways to gain these whilst at university (see Student's Union section).

Next Steps:

- Research potential careers in different subject areas. List the qualifications and skills needed to get into that area (www.prospects.ac.uk).
- Use the Student Finance Calculator to get an idea of what support is on offer for students (www.gov.uk/student-finance-calculator).
- Research what scholarships, bursaries and grants that are available from different universities (www.thescholarship.org.uk).

Section Three: Halls of Residence

Keywords:

Planning
Time management

Big Questions:

1. What might you have to do when living alone that you don't already do?
2. Why is it important to prioritise work above social activities?
3. What problems might you face when living with new people?
4. How can university help you to express yourself?
5. How can shared living be beneficial to your independence?

Big Ideas:

There are many different aspects of independent living from eating healthily, keeping fit, managing time and budgeting (especially maintenance loan payments!). Students must be aware of their responsibilities; assignments and deadlines should take priority but it is important to socialise and do other activities whilst at university too. Students should get involved and explore new connections, as well as discover who they are. Distractions can be plenty, it is important not to put things off until the last minute. It is a careful balance of managing spending, relationships, time and health and wellbeing.

Next Steps:

- Set goals for the academic year; long, medium and short term and the steps you will need to take to get the intended outcomes.
- Create a timetable to manage current study; factor independent and collaborative study times, and extracurricular activities.
- Research how a university Students' Union can support you and what activities you could get involved in (<https://www.greenwichsu.co.uk/advice/>).
- Look at how improving your academic skills can earn you a scholarship (www.gre.ac.uk/finance/funding-your-studies/scholarships-and-bursaries/great-skills-scholarship).

Section Four: Student's Union

Keywords:

Budgeting

Commercial awareness

Big Questions:

1. Why is it important to take part in clubs and societies?
2. What is a Students' Union? How does it benefit students?
3. What expenses will you have whilst at university? How can you pay for them?
4. How can university prepare you for employment?

Big Ideas:

University provides lots of opportunities for students to participate in activities, sports, clubs and societies. Participating in these activities helps students to develop vital skills that will prevail for life. Soft skills like communication, teamwork, initiative and business acumen are skills that employers look for in their staff.

Independent learners will organise and plan ahead so that they can properly manage their work. Setting and reviewing personal goals regularly is a skill that will help them to improve work and recognise that they need to have a balance between work and play. Independent learners recognise that not everyone has the same skills – they will have some skills that their peers won't have and vice-versa – comparing oneself with others and expecting the same standards every time won't help – instead, a good learner will use everyone's skills to their advantage.

The Students' Union is a democratic organisation run by students for students, they can give assistance with academic, legal and practical problems and give students a means to voice their own views and organise the activities and services they desire. It gives ample employment opportunities; students can get part-time work in the Students' Union, the library, ambassador schemes or can register to volunteer. Most universities allow you to log these hours and gain recognition for all your achievements at the end of your degree.

Managing Money is often difficult for students, loan instalments and part-time work can cover many of the expenses of university, but it is important to budget carefully. Students must consider how to make savings day to day (including looking out for student discounts) in order to survive financially.

Next Steps:

- Research a university Students' Union; find out what activities and societies they have and how they are governed (www.greenwichsu.co.uk).
- Make a budget plan for a month at university; list all your outgoings and think of ways to save money day to day (www.studentcalculator.org).

Section Five: The Library

Keywords:

Academic skills
Evaluation
Research

Big Questions:

1. What are academic skills and who can support you with these at university?
2. What questions should you ask when selecting appropriate sources?
3. Why is it important to have several viewpoints in your writing?

Big Ideas:

Students have to do a lot of independent research, they can get help from expert tutors who will help you improve academic skills in essay-writing, referencing and presenting ideas. There are subject specific librarians who can help find the right resources.

When using a book, article, report, or web site for research, it is important to gauge how reliable the source is; this critical thinking helps students achieve the best results. Students can only develop their own voice and opinions when they begin to use critical thinking skills; independent students ask questions, are open-minded and consider all opinions on the subject.

When selecting and using sources to use you should consider the following:

Retrospective

If you can, always use the most up-to-date edition available to you.

Reliability

Use journals/PhD studies that have been written and reviewed by experts

Plagiarism

Copying somebody else's work to pass it off as your own is an academic offence known as plagiarism. It is okay to refer to someone else's work, but you must give them credit for it.

Wicked-pedia

Wikipedia is an open source tool that can be edited by anyone. Therefore, it may not be reliable. You're better off picking an e-journal offering expert perspectives.

Reputable?

Reports prepared by reputable institutions will refer to primary data or provide an objective analysis of the subject matter. A newspaper article would give a summary of the report which is often swayed by the journalist's subjective view.

Publisher?

Keep your eyes peeled for genuine, university-respected publishing establishments.

Who is the author? What are the author's credentials?

What is the year of publication? Is the source current or out of date for your topic?

Is this a first edition? Later editions indicate a source has been revised and updated.

Is it a university press or a large reputable publisher?

Next Steps:

- Look at the academic skill tips website (www.gre.ac.uk/academicsskills).
- Choose a topic to research and select appropriate sources
- Attend an academic skills workshop at a university (<https://www.gre.ac.uk/for-schools/activities/epqs>)
- Complete a future learn course around EPQ (www.futurelearn.com)

Independent Learners: Survey

An independent learner will:

- Know who to ask for help when they need it.
- Manage their time so that they don't leave things to the last minute.
- Review and set personal goals regularly.
- Study with their friends.
- Is willing to have a go even if they are not 100% sure of the answer.
- Is embarrassed to make mistakes.
- Attend extra revision sessions to prepare for their exams.
- Work on their own all the time.
- Complete assignments without using extra sources of information.
- Start new assignments afresh without worrying too much about feedback from past assignments.
- Complete assignments without discussing their ideas with their teacher.
- Plan their week to ensure they get enough time to eat, sleep and relax.
- Make time to play a sport or do an activity in their free time.
- Compare their marks to their friends and always strive to do better than them.
- Write down everything their teacher says in class.

On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that you understand what skills you will need to have to be a successful university student?
(1 = least confident and 10 = most confident)

Independent Learners: Big Questions

Lecture Theatre

What are the differences between university and school/college learning?
How should you consider managing your time at university?
What impact would poor attendance and participation have on your university success?
What are the differences between the following: lectures, seminars, tutorials and study groups?
How can collaborative learning help you succeed?

Halls of Residence

What might you have to do when living alone that you don't already do?
Why is it important to prioritise work above social activities?
What problems might you face when living with new people?
How can university help you to express yourself?
How can shared living be beneficial to your independence?

Students' Union

Why is it important to take part in clubs and societies?
What is a Students' Union? How does it benefit students?
What expenses will you have whilst at university? How can you pay for them?
How can university prepare you for employment?

Student Services

What do you think are the biggest challenges students face at university?
How can Student Services help at university?
How is asking for help independent and why is it important?
What are the top skills employers are looking for? How could you gain these during your time at university?
How can you stand out from other job candidates?

The Library

What are academic skills and who can support you with these at university?
What questions should you ask when selecting appropriate sources?
Why is it important to have several viewpoints in your writing?

Independent Learners: Next Steps

- Compare university courses and the variations between institutions; think about course content, student satisfaction and employability (www.unistats.gov.uk).
- Research a visit to a local university (Taster Day or Open Day) and write a list of questions to ask the lecturers in your subject of interest (<https://www.gre.ac.uk/events/prospective-students>).
- Research free public lectures at local universities related to your studies. (<https://www.gre.ac.uk/events/prospective-students>).
- Complete section 3 of the HE Application Journey (www.explore.gre.ac.uk) to create the first draft of the Personal Statement.
- Research a university Students' Union; find out what activities and societies they have and how they are governed (www.greenwichsu.co.uk).
- Set goals for the academic year; long, medium and short term and the steps you will need to take to get the intended outcomes.
- Create a timetable to manage current study; factor independent and collaborative study times, and extracurricular activities.
- Research potential careers in different subject areas. List the qualifications and skills needed to get into the area (www.prospects.ac.uk).
- Use the Student Finance Calculator to get an idea of what support is on offer for students (www.gov.uk/student-finance-calculator).
- Make a budget plan for a month at university; list all your outgoings and think of ways to save money day to day (www.studentcalculator.org).
- Research what scholarships, bursaries and grants that are available from different universities (www.thescholarship.org.uk).
- Look at how to improve your academic writing skills (www.gre.ac.uk/academicskills).
- Choose a topic to research and select appropriate sources, annotate the sources with the why reasons why they were selected.
- Attend an academic skills workshop at a university (<https://www.gre.ac.uk/for-schools/activities/epqs>).
- Complete a future learn course around EPQ (www.futurelearn.com).