



GET ACCOUNT SAVVY

You've probably already got a bank account, but there's no reason to stay loyal if you find a better deal or your needs change.

If it's a big overdraft you're after, Halifax is offering up to £2,750 per year, a great deal if you're able to get the full limit. It's worth checking with all the major banks exactly how much they're willing to offer you though - there's no point signing up for the one with the biggest limit if they're only going to give you half of that.

If it's treebies you're after, NatWest is giving away a five-year young persons railcard with new accounts. Barclays is offering free cinema tickets and Lloyds has a goodies package, which includes cash, music downloads and free YHA membership.

Discounts are commonly offered as part of your student account, but don't be swayed by giveaways at the expense of overdrafts or interest rates - they'll count for a lot more in the long run.

Money matters

We all need it, we've all got less of it than we want. **Joanne Christie** looks at ways to save money when you get to uni...

➤ If you're about to start university, you've probably already taken a good hard look at your finances. Hopefully, you'll have organised your loans and bank account, worked out a budget and planned how you're going to stretch your limited funds over the year.

But even with the best of intentions, you may find yourself struggling to pay for all of life's necessities, let alone have a good time.

The Association of Investment Companies' annual survey into

attitudes towards university debt revealed that both students and parents are still underestimating the true cost of university. According to the study, the average student estimated their debt on leaving university would be around £8,000, while current figures show the average student debt is £13,252.

If you're already realising things cost more than you thought they would, try getting creative with your finances. Even if you're coping fine, reducing your debts as you go along can go a long way to shaving

thousands off your student debt. And it doesn't have to be all about sacrificing the good stuff: being a bit clever when it comes to the basics can save you loads, leaving more in the bank for having fun.

Deck out your digs for free

Particularly with the recent shift towards living an environmentally conscious lifestyle, many people are making more of an effort to recycle and avoid waste - and this can only be good news for students.

Whether you're moving into self-

catered or university accommodation, you're likely to need a few things, and, with a bit of effort, you should be able to avoid buying them.

Freecycle is a good starting point for household items. Freecycle is a global network made up of smaller, community groups. The idea is that people give away things they no longer need instead of taking them to the dump. Once you've signed up to a group, you can either post a message listing items you need, or simply wait for someone to offer them. People give away all sorts of things, from smaller items like kitchen utensils to big pieces of furniture such as beds and sofas. Sometimes you'll even find non-perishable food items and stationery being advertised.

Nia Michou, a criminology student about to begin her third year at Roehampton University, used her local group to get a

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coffee table recently, and says she's recommended Freecycle to lots of other students. "Even if you think that people might not have what you're looking for, just post something on there because I've seen just about everything you can think of on Freecycle."

She says the idea also appeals from an environmental perspective: "You're recycling in a way."

Log on to www.freecycle.org to find a group near you. Also see the 'freebies' section of www.gumtree.com and www.london.craigslist.org.

Forage for food

Food is one of life's necessities, but it is pretty difficult to source for free. Unless, of course, you become a freegan.

Freegans are people who eat food that has been thrown away, usually by large supermarket chains. The movement is essentially a protest at the amount of waste in society, and freegans avoid buying anything, attempting to recycle instead.

The word 'freegan' is made up of the words 'free' and 'vegan', though in practice, not all freegans are vegan. Freeganism originated in America, but has spread all over the world, and many enterprising students in the UK have been known to take part in bin-raiding as a cost-cutting measure.

The best time to go dumpster-diving is towards the end of the week, when some stores shut for



SPEND WHAT YOU'VE GOT

Recent reports state that students who started university last year could expect to graduate with a debt of £17,500 thanks to 'top-up' tuition fees. As students become more exposed to debt, it's time to start being clever with money.

Prepaid cards are a great example of clever spending. By putting a certain amount of money on a prepaid MasterCard such as the IDT Prime Card students can avoid excessive spending – they simply can't spend the money if it isn't there. There's a one-off charge of £3 for the card, and fees on transactions are between 50p and £1, plus there's a 'maintenance fee' of £2 per month for using it. But for peace of mind it's worth it, knowing you can't possibly overspend before you go out means you won't wake up with an empty wallet as well as a hangover. www.idtprime.com

a day, or any day around closing time, when shops will usually throw things away in bulk. Try to take only packaged food. For more information, see www.freegan.info.

If foraging through bins seems too extreme, you can still take some money-saving tips from freegans. For a start, only buy what you can use – wasting food is wasting money, after all. Try shopping at closing time, when stores regularly heavily discount food. If you live near a fruit and vegetable market, consider getting your five-a-day there; prices are usually cheaper, though shelflife is often shorter than fruit and veg bought in a supermarket.

Room for rent

Accommodation is likely to be your biggest weekly expense, with the National Union of Students Accommodation Costs Survey 2006 reporting that the average cost of student accommodation has now risen to £82 per week, with those living in London likely to be paying an even higher figure. But if you can't live at home, there's little you

can do about it right?

If you're really adventurous, you could try squatting. Squatting isn't illegal, although if you enter a building by breaking in, you could find yourself in trouble with the law – that is illegal. For more information, see www.squatter.org.uk.

A more civilised option may be homesharing, a scheme where students live with elderly people and pay reduced rent in exchange for helping out around the house. Typically, you'll be required to commit to around 10 hours' help per week, and will be have to sleep at the property, although each arrangement is individually negotiated. In London, the cost is around £200 per month, however, different areas have different fees. See www.homeshare.org for more.

Housesitting or pet-sitting is another good way of finding free or cheap accommodation. People who are going away for extended periods of time often need someone to look after their pets, gardens or houses. To find a job, watch out for adverts in local papers, or sign up with an agency in your area.