

Should Students Take Their Cars to University?



For many teenagers, passing their driving test and getting their first car is a defining moment in their lives. Suddenly, they can travel wherever they want (within reason!) and experience a freedom previously unavailable to them.

Shortly after, lots of them embark on the ultimate test of independence and move away from home to university but can they, and should they, take their cars with them?

There are certainly real benefits of having access to such a useful mode of transport. Many students keep their weekend jobs at home, some of which are relevant to their degrees, so having the ability to go back and forth with minimal effort is incredibly convenient. This allows students to gain valuable work experience, as well as earning a bit of extra money to spend on food, textbooks and beer, which is always welcome.

Cars are especially useful for freshers who don't know their new town or city particularly well yet, as they are granted a license to explore and discover new things about the surrounding area that they might not have otherwise found. Relying on public transport in an unknown location can be daunting for first-year students, so having access to a vehicle of their own could allay their concerns and help them settle in more quickly.

Although petrol prices have skyrocketed in recent years and insurance remains expensive for young adults, the cost of buying a car is reasonably low at present. There are budget options for students that can leave the bank balance looking reasonably healthy but, when one factors in the aforementioned extras, as well as tax, MOT and breakdown cover, the entire package starts to seem very pricey indeed.



Start-up and running costs aren't the only concerns either. Many universities don't allow students to park on site or have a very limited number of allocated spaces. Those with mobility issues and members of staff tend to be prioritised in these instances and, when there are greater numbers of parking spaces available, they often command considerable charges. Annual permits are usually reserved for those with proof of employment commitments elsewhere and prices range from around £60 to over £200 for the year.

Universities need to consider the ecological impact of allowing students to bring their own cars, as they obviously don't want to encourage an increase in traffic and pollution levels in their area. Not only does this have a negative effect on the environment, but it also creates a bad perception of the institution and angers local communities because of the excessive number of vehicles.

As a result, universities allocate a substantial budget for providing eco-friendly alternative forms of transport that aid their students and protect the environment. This can range from significant initiatives, like the provision of affordable bus services, to smaller scale projects that encourage more students to cycle or walk to their lectures and seminars. Many universities have recently introduced car hire schemes designed to control congestion and reduce damage to the environment, while companies like Liftshare or goCarShare promote socially-driven car sharing.

We asked a selection of experts on the topic about the advantages and disadvantages of taking their cars to university. This is what they had to say:

"From the students' perspective, many will want to keep their independence. Cars allow them to go home, easily get around a new area and access potential employment. From our perspective, the

fewer cars around and the less traffic we generate the better. We don't want to dictate to students though."

James Brown
Transport & Travel Manager
University of Derby

"We're committed to reducing the carbon footprint of the university. It's important that we encourage alternative forms of transport and this is something we've heavily invested in. For example, we provide free bike locks, inner tubes and puncture repair kits to inspire more of our students to cycle. We're aware that around 15-20% of our students drive to university but, with our desire to reduce our carbon footprint, we now use Facebook and Twitter to communicate other options."

Ian Murdey
Transport Coordinator
De Montfort University

"We accommodate but discourage students from taking their cars. Most of our student accommodation is within walking distance of our teaching campuses and there is very little benefit to students of having a car on campus. Indeed, there are some security risks of having a car remain in the same location day after day. Our campuses are well served by buses that connect our campuses with shopping and leisure facilities. We also have a local car club available to students, which allows them to hire cars for relatively short periods of time when they may need one. We do accept that there are occasions when students may need to have access to a car and so provide some limited car parking."

Christopher Osbeck
Travel Plan Coordinator
University of Aberdeen

"Almost no-one has a car in Oxford, due to the fact that almost all student accommodation falls within the 'park-and-ride' zone, so they'd have nowhere to park. Not to mention that the city centre is walkable from one end to the other and, at worst, student housing is a short cycle ride away."

Nick Hilton
Editor
Cherwell, Oxford University student newspaper

"One of the advantages of students taking their cars to university is having the freedom to go home – they aren't restricted by train timetables. It's also especially helpful if you're doing a degree where you are on placement and have to travel a lot. Having said that, I think for the majority of students the disadvantages would outweigh the advantages. It's not really cost effective and having to pay for insurance, tax, petrol and parking on top of everything isn't ideal."

Sidonie Chaffer-Melly
Editor-in-chief
Concrete, UEA student newspaper

"If you live a fair distance from campus, it's understandable that you'd want to drive, but most people live within ten or fifteen minutes of their universities. There are plenty of disadvantages as well, like expense, lack of parking, and traffic to name a few. Universities have to accept that some people will drive, and there are people who need that availability, so they offer permits. Generally though, the policies are good. They clearly have the environment in mind and promote transport options like public buses and car-shares, which is promising."

Tess Brumwell-Gaze
Debate Editor
Leeds Student newspaper

As you can see, this is a hotly debated topic that universities have various, differing views on. One thing that does remain a constant is the focus upon providing alternative forms of transport. Universities don't want to preach to their students or simply prevent everyone from bringing cars; like the student media representatives we spoke to, they see potential benefits in students owning cars, but they also seek to promote as many environmentally friendly modes of transport as possible.

There is no definite answer to the question this article poses. Students have a wide range of needs and requirements, just as universities do, and the potential benefits and drawbacks are extremely wide-ranging. To conclude, we have summarised the pros and cons of taking cars to university, which we hope potential students will find useful when making their decision.

Advantages:

- Practicality for those with weekend jobs
- Ability to discover local area upon arrival
- Relatively low current cost of purchasing a car
- Convenience and freedom of travel
- Usefulness for degrees with regular work placement commitments
- Reliability, relative to certain forms of public transport

Disadvantages:

- High petrol prices
- Additional costs of tax, MOT, insurance and parking permits
- Limited availability of university parking spaces
- Negative environmental impact
- Subsequent increase in traffic and adverse effect on the local community
- Availability of alternatives like public transport, car hire and lift-sharing programs
- Security risks associated with long-stay parking

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