



## University beckons but are allergy sufferers at a disadvantage?

A-level results day has come and gone - a time of anticipation and excitement for both students and parents as a new chapter awaits. Over 820,000\* young people recently collected their A-level results and many will go on to their university of choice. However, for the estimated 61,000\* university-age students who live with one or more allergies, their exam results are only half of their concerns.

“Places of education are home to a greater number of allergy sufferers than ever before,” says Professor Adam Fox from the National Allergy Strategy Group, an alliance of professional allergy voices from the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Allergy UK, Anaphylaxis UK and the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation. “Our mission is to raise awareness of allergy and to come together as a united front to tackle allergy together with hundreds of experts across the UK. It is vital that students know they are safe and supported as they navigate both their allergy and their education”.

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Improving Allergy Care  
through education, training and research

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A brighter future for people with serious allergies

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For students like Poppy Wintrip, 18, from Cornwall, the NASG mission couldn't be more vital. Poppy was first diagnosed with food allergy at the age of 3 months old. She now lives with multiple severe food allergies. Her journey through education has been one of anxiety and isolation. "Going back into secondary school after lockdown was very difficult. I was very frightened. I wouldn't eat very much because I feared I was going to have a reaction and there was no support from the school".

Poppy's mum, Rachael, continues, "I had to make all of the effort with the primary school. In fact, I taught every member of staff adrenaline auto-injector training because even with the school nurses it wasn't in their remit at all. I'm a nurse so I had the advantage of the knowledge and the confidence to be able to do it but not everyone does".

Poppy feels the psychological impact of allergy is not taken seriously enough. She says, "It only got recognised as an issue when I stopped eating and started losing weight and it became more of a physical issue. I would be up every single night having anxiety attacks because I thought something would happen in my sleep. The anxiety stemmed from the isolation and the fear that everyday things that most people eat pose a life threatening risk to me".

"Allergy amongst young people and students is at an all-time high but there are significant gaps in providing the support they deserve including psychological support", continues Professor Fox.

Dr Claudia Gore, a Consultant in Paediatric Allergy at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, London also thinks that students like Poppy need support during the transition to adult allergy healthcare services and with their move into higher education or the workplace. "At Poppy's age, life is full of different transitions, from school to university or work, from home to living independently, new peers, having to manage health, finance and life independently", says Dr Gore. "Additionally, they leave children's services for adult care. At few other times in life do we have to deal with that many changes at once. Young people need to be prepared and to make sure that they ask the questions they need to ask and not be intimidated. Adult services tend to be more concise, with shorter appointment times focused on more in-depth detail. They have a right to be assessed for reasonable adjustments in education and need to be able to ask for this".

A significant part of the NASG's National Allergy Strategy will focus on education, including raising public awareness as well as producing targeted guidelines for schools





and other educational departments to assist them in managing the healthcare needs of allergic students. Respiratory health research and evidence-based data will be used as a strong foundation to influence future policy around allergy in education as well as highlighting areas of research that need particular focus.

“It is clear that one of the biggest needs for students living with allergy and their parents is to feel heard and to know their allergy is taken seriously”, continues Professor Fox.

“The National Allergy Strategy includes a number of objectives around improving safety for people with allergy in schools and higher education as well as supporting highly targeted education and awareness programmes. This aims to make a real difference to the lives of students in the UK living with allergy”.

Poppy’s mum, Rachael, says, “We’re delighted Poppy has got into the Guildford School of Acting but there's so much more for Poppy to consider than if she didn't have allergies. It’s a time of excitement but also of concern.”

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