

A Degree and Me

Applying to Higher Education:
A Step-by-Step Guide

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A DEGREE AND ME

Are you considering study at university level - i.e. **HIGHER EDUCATION** - as an option?
If so, this guide is for you, no matter what stage you are at in school or college.

Going to university or college is an exciting experience. However, the application process can be confusing, with so much information available and so many decisions to make.

This guide provides information about what to expect and how you can best prepare for each stage of the application process, from choosing a course to applying for student finance.

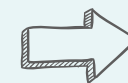
To ensure the information we have provided is both useful and correct, we've interviewed:



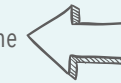
- representatives from UCAS and the Student Loans Company
- teachers and staff at schools, universities and colleges
- students who have gone through, or are getting ready to go through, the application process themselves.



Knowing about each stage of the process and what you should be doing will put you in the best possible position when applying for your course, helping you to avoid any pitfalls. 😊



Use this guide as a starting point for your own research. Be sure to follow the signposts included - there to direct you to further, important information.



WHAT TO DO AND WHEN TO DO IT: A SUMMARY

Visit www.opendays.com to search for events near you, or access university and college websites for more information.



See page 26 for information about applying online

YEAR 11

- Visit local colleges and sixth forms to find out where you'd like to go next.
- Consider whether you'd like to go to university or college, and the type of higher education course in which you're interested.
- Different university and college courses require you to have studied certain subjects and obtained specific qualifications. They'll probably also have different entry requirements. Find out about these before deciding what to study in sixth form or college.
- Find out about any local events related to a subject or career in which you are interested. Many colleges and universities run careers fairs and subject-specific events which you can sign up to and are free of charge.

• See pages 8 - 17 of this guide

YEAR 12

- Start preparing to apply for higher education during the first year of sixth form or college.
- Find out about the application process (visit www.ucas.com and speak to your school or college).
- Research courses and institutions of interest and their entry requirements.
- Find out about and attend as many open days as you can.
- Sign up for pre-university courses and summer schools.
- Get some relevant work experience or volunteer if necessary.
- Ensure you have enough evidence of interest in the subject to discuss in your personal statement.
- Begin your draft personal statement.

See pages 30 - 31 for personal statement advice.

YEAR 13

- You should begin your application at the beginning of your final year of school or college.
- Register via www.ucas.com.
- Identify any deadlines. (Remember, your school or college may have a much earlier deadline than UCAS. Ensure that you know exactly when this is).
- Speak to the person providing your reference. Tell them about the course you're applying to and your reasons for doing so.
- Complete and submit your application in good time.
- Monitor your application online via UCAS. Respond to requests for further information, calls to interview and offers.
- Attend visit days offered by your chosen institution.
- Apply for student finance early.
- If needed, apply for student accommodation early.

'Applying for student finance', pages 48 - 51

To find out about what happens after submission, see pages 36-45

WHAT IS HIGHER EDUCATION AND WHY SHOULD I STUDY AT THIS LEVEL?

What is HE?

Once you have completed your Level 3 qualifications you may wish to progress to higher education (also referred to as HE). Level 3 qualifications include A-levels, BTEC Extended Diplomas and Access to HE courses. Any formal qualification after this, at Level 4 or above, is described as higher education.

Why sign up for HE?

There are various benefits to gaining a higher education qualification. These include access to a wider range of career opportunities and professions, as well as the chance to study a subject you love in a dynamic environment, with like-minded students and experts in your area of interest.

To really get an idea of the benefits of HE, turn over and read what students who have recently gained a degree level qualification have to say about it.

Higher education qualifications are provided by universities and colleges nationwide. They include:

- ▶ Bachelor degrees
- ▶ Foundation degrees
- ▶ Higher and degree apprenticeships
- ▶ Higher national certificates
- ▶ Higher national diplomas

new ideas



"I loved being introduced to areas of my subject I'd never considered before. It was exciting to be in an environment where tutors, lecturers and students all shared new ideas and discoveries we had made in our research."

clubs, societies, activities, personal development



"University has so much on offer for students, and many opportunities for self-development. Not only do you have everything there to help you do well in your subject, there are clubs, societies and activities you can sign up for also – for free! While studying, I also learnt to climb and speak Italian."



The work placement offered as part of my course meant I could build relevant practical skills which would help me when applying for a job in the future.

work-based learning

friends worldwide

"Because people came to study at my university from so many places, I finished my degree with friends from all over the world."



Before I started university, I felt as if an honours degree would be the highest point of achievement for me. But uni has introduced me to so many pathways I can take after graduation - options I hadn't known about before.



"I was the first person in my family to go to university, and I'm so glad I did. Before I did, my younger brother and sister hadn't ever considered university as an option. Now, they're asking how long it is until they can go."

Be inspired and inspiring

"Now that I have a degree, so many more career opportunities are open to me. Some employers run programmes especially for graduates, called graduate schemes. I've just applied for one at an organisation based in London."

widen your career opportunities

Access to a profession



"I've always wanted to be a teacher. Without my degree, I would never have been able to fulfil that ambition."

"Being in such a supportive environment has allowed me to have confidence in my own ability. I now want to progress even further, and achieve more than I have already."

Build confidence, achieve and progress

"I got to study for a year abroad as part of my course, which meant I was able to live in Valencia, Spain, for a year, and experience a new culture and way of life."



study for a year abroad

AN INSIGHT INTO HE

We interviewed three undergraduate students to find out why they chose to study their subject, and what higher education at university or college is like.



Nathan

University student

Politics and International Relations BA (Hons)

2nd Year



Emma

University student

English Literature BA (Hons)

3rd Year



Susannah

College student

HND Public Services

2nd Year

Why did you decide to study your subject?

N: I've always had an interest in politics which started when watching the news when I was younger. It's something that I'd be interested in as a future career. I think that politics influences everyone; everyone has some sort of interaction with politics.

E: I honestly didn't believe I'd ever get into university, but decided to take a chance and apply for English Literature because I have a genuine passion for the subject and was intrigued to learn more.

S: Because it is relevant to everyday life and gives a greater understanding of politics, legislations and global affairs.

What are you most enjoying about your course?

N: That you can study what you enjoy and choose modules related to your interests. I'm currently doing a module which explores the European Union and we're looking at Brexit which is something I'm really interested in.

E: Making unique discoveries about texts, using the research skills, and contextual knowledge I've gained on this course. I've enjoyed studying topics that aren't offered at a lower level of study, like Old English texts.

S: The wide variety of topics covered; I feel that I learn new things every day. I find looking into the policies behind teaching very interesting.

What are you least enjoying about your course?

N: I'm not as fond of the exam element. I prefer coursework and essays because you get more time to look at something in depth and really consider what you're saying.

E: That I can't study all of the modules on offer!

S: There are no aspects that I don't enjoy. It's challenging and hard work, but that's to be expected.

What kinds of things do you do on or outside of campus when you're not studying?

N: I play badminton twice a week with the badminton society at the university. I go out for a couple of drinks with my mates – that kind of thing.

E: I work for the Outreach Team as a student ambassador, building aspirations in young people through organising inspiring events. I also currently volunteer as a teaching assistant in a primary school.

S: I'm a Guide Leader and part-time Children's Activities Assistant. I also attend ballet once a week, and try to see friends and family as much as I can.

What is most challenging about university or college life?

N: I think it's managing your time, especially when you're coming towards deadlines with lots of essays coming up. This, on top of your weekly reading, can become a bit of a struggle, especially if you have work commitments. I've overcome this by thinking about how I can use my time more effectively – managing it so that I can fit everything in.

E: The numerous essays due around Christmas and Easter and not being able to spend as much time with friends and loved ones.

S: Balancing all aspects of life and many deadlines at one time!

What would you like to do after your course?

N: I'm not entirely sure. There's a possibility I'd like to work for an international organisation like the United Nations. Because politics isn't specifically vocational it keeps lots of options open to me afterwards.

E: I'd like a career in teaching, so I can help to inspire others with the great works of literature.

S: I want to do a degree top-up year and gain a BA (Hons) Public Service Management.

What is your favourite thing about studying at your university or college?

N: I really like the fact that everything's here – that you can just go to your seminar and then the library. I have friends who go to a city university and have to go to the other side of the city to get to a lecture. I like the fact that everything here is in one place.

E: Being amongst like-minded people. It's also inspiring to be taught by published academics.

S: The adult environment and freedom. The more you put in the better you will do. It's all in your hands.

What advice would you give to students applying for college or university, who are unsure as to whether it will be right for them?

N: I had that feeling – what helped me was going along to open days and speaking to students there. That's the best port of call because they were in our boat two or three years ago, or last year. If you've got a question they're the best people to speak to.

E: If they're worried about leaving home or failure but want to study a subject they're passionate about, they should seize the opportunity. I would say, go to as many open days as possible, so they can meet current tutors and students and speak about any worries they have. There is so much support available for students, so make the most of it!

S: Ask current students, they are likely to give a realistic view of what studying at that college or university is really like.

WHAT DOES THE EXPERIENCE OF HE HAVE TO OFFER?

Seminars/practical classes

- Seminars are similar to classes you might have at school or college, but on a smaller scale.
- They provide an opportunity to discuss course topics and any set reading.
- Seminars enable you to develop your knowledge in a more interactive way than a lecture, and in a smaller group.
- Art and technology courses tend to have more practical classes, i.e. art-based activities in studios. Science-based courses may also incorporate lab time.



Lectures

- A lecture is an educational talk delivered by an academic member of staff.
- Lectures focus on a set topic or aspect of your course subject.
- They are less interactive than seminars and are usually delivered to a large number of students at once.



Tutorials



- Students are usually offered tutorials when working on an assignment, or just after completing one.
- These offer a chance to meet with your tutor on a one-to-one basis and gain advice and guidance about your work.

Independent study time

- This is time in which students are able to pursue their specific subject interests outside of course contact hours.
- It is a requirement of all HE courses, although the amount expected of students varies between courses.
- Students' independent study time is supported with a variety of university or college resources, including access to the library and online journals.

Work placements or study year abroad

- Some courses offer work placements in a relevant industry as part of the course, or a year's study abroad in another university.
- The location of either a placement or study year abroad will depend on the course you are studying.



The Students' Union

- An organisation run by and for students.
- Students' Unions organise societies and different sporting events.
- They provide student support and advice.
- Unions often run newspapers for which students can write, or a radio station or TV channel in need of student presenters.
- They provide a variety of recreational spaces for students on campus, e.g. bars and music venues.

Research your institution's Students' Union to see the kinds of opportunities on offer which will enrich your experience as an undergraduate.

Societies

- Societies are organisations set up by and for students who share a common interest.
- They cater for a wide variety of student hobbies, likes and interests, from salsa to pizza making, drama to baseball, hip hop to creative writing.
- If your university doesn't have a society that relates to one of your interests, then you are usually able to set up your own.



Go to fresher fairs during your first week to sign up to any societies in which you might be interested.



TOP TIP

- Outside of university life, make the most of the discounts available to students. These include: discounted travel prices; theatre, cinema and festival tickets; and money off at your favourite retailers, sports centres and supermarkets.
- For a small fee, students can apply for an NUS card and access a wide range of discounts throughout their time in HE. For further details, visit www.nus.org.uk/en/nus-extra/about-the-card



Student support

Universities and colleges offer a broad range of student support which can usually be accessed via The Students' Union. Services include counselling, academic support, careers services, accommodation support, disability services, support for additional learning requirements, support tailored for students with experience of care and those with caring responsibilities of their own. These services are usually free of charge.

Sport

- A wide range of sports and activities are offered by many HE institutions.
- Often institutions cater for students with previous sporting experience as well as for those wanting to try something new.
- Many universities offer competitive sports, enabling students to compete against other institutions nationwide.

Employment and volunteering opportunities



- Most institutions offer careers or employment services.
- Universities and colleges often advertise job and volunteering opportunities available in the local area or on campus.
- If you're interested in working on campus, look for jobs in your institution's cafés and shops or consider applying for a role as a student ambassador.

Student ambassadors work with a variety of people from schools and communities local to their university. Their role is to encourage and inspire learners to consider progression to higher education. Most universities run student ambassador schemes and offer flexible, paid working hours.

UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE?

Before applying for a higher education course, you need to decide whether studying at a **university** or at **college** will be best for you. Some students don't realise that they can study higher education courses in colleges as well as at universities.



UNIVERSITY HE

Both academic and vocational subjects are taught, although universities tend to be more traditionally academic.

Some courses offer work placements and opportunities to study for a year abroad.

BA/BSc/BEng degree programmes typically run for around three years or more.

Students can study part-time, although this means the course will take longer to complete.

Universities tend to offer less contact time and more independent study time.

A wide range of courses are available at universities nationally.

Courses have specific entry requirements that you must be able to meet to be accepted to study on them. These vary between institutions.

Some universities offer foundation programmes for students who have been unable to meet the entry requirements of a specific course. These can allow you to gain access to a degree programme the following year.

Tuition fees are usually higher than those applicable to HE college courses.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Many colleges run higher education courses and offer students the opportunity to earn a university-level qualification. While some students may be suited to studying at a university, others may feel that college higher education is more applicable to them.



COLLEGE HE

Courses tend to be more work-based or industry specific than academic.

Most courses allow you to combine study with work-based learning.

You can opt to complete a degree level qualification in various stages, rather than commit to a three-year programme.

Colleges offer flexible learning times: students can study part-time or sign up for evening classes.

Colleges offer more contact time and less independent study time.

Courses are usually tailored to local priorities and work requirements within the local area.

Courses usually have lower entry requirements than those needed by universities.

If you've missed out on any necessary qualifications, colleges offer programmes which can help you to obtain the qualifications needed to progress to study at university level.

Tuition fees are usually less than those applicable to university courses.

AVAILABLE HE QUALIFICATIONS AT COLLEGES

Higher National Certificate (HNC)

- One-year course.
- Roughly equivalent to Year 1 of a Bachelor's degree (or Level 4).
- Tends to be part-time.
- Can lead to 2nd year/Level 5 entry onto an HND

Higher National Diploma (HND)

- Two-year course.
- Roughly equivalent to Years 1 and 2 of a Bachelor's degree (or Level 4 and 5).
- Provides students with the option to complete a final 'top-up' year to achieve a full Bachelor's degree with honours, in partnership with a university often based locally.
- Often includes some work experience in a relevant job.
- Tends to be studied full-time.

Top-up degree

- One-year course.
- Level 6.
- Usually completed after students have gained a Foundation degree or an HND award.
- Allows students to achieve a full Bachelor's degree with honours.
- Usually completed in partnership with a local university.

Foundation degree

- Two-year course.
- Roughly equivalent to Years 1 and 2 of a university Bachelor's degree (or Level 4 and 5).
- Provides students with the option to complete a final 'top-up' year to achieve a full honours degree, in partnership with a local university.
- Tends to include a substantial work placement.
- Can be studied full or part-time.



Entry requirements are often lower for Foundation degrees, HNDs and HNCs. This is because the student begins study at a lower level than on a university degree.

Higher apprenticeship

- Takes one to five years to complete, depending on the qualification which students are working towards.
- Provides an opportunity to earn a higher education qualification, e.g. NVQ Level 4, HND or Foundation degree.
- Combines on-the-job learning with classroom based study.
- Students spend the majority of their time in an industry-based setting, working as a paid employee.
- Can lead to further academic qualifications, such as an Bachelor's degree.
- Find and apply for a higher apprenticeship here: www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch

Higher apprenticeship programmes tend to be delivered by colleges, although some universities also offer them.

See pages 16 and 17 for further information about qualifications and levels

AVAILABLE HE QUALIFICATIONS AT UNIVERSITIES

Bachelor's degree (BA, BSc, MB, BEng)

- A three- or four-year course of academic study.
- Enables students to achieve a Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc), Bachelor of Engineering, or Bachelor of Medicine (BM) qualification.
- Can include a year in trade or abroad
- Can usually be studied full- or part-time.
- Can lead to postgraduate study.
- Also known as an undergraduate degree.



Master's degree

- For students who have completed a Bachelor's degree and wish to pursue their subject further.
- A one- or two-year course.
- Can be studied full- or part-time.
- Can lead to a PhD.
- Also known as a postgraduate degree.

Degree apprenticeship

- Similar to a higher apprenticeship but provides an opportunity to gain a full Bachelor's (Level 6) or Master's degree (Level 7).
- Takes three to six years to complete, depending on course level.
- Combines working with university and part-time study.
- Apprentices are employed throughout the programme. They gain a full degree while earning a salary and without paying student fees.
- Search and apply for a degree apprenticeship here: www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch, or use UCAS' Career Finder tool.

Degree apprenticeships are new, so there are a limited number of vacancies available. For further information see: www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/apprenticeships-uk/degree-and-professional-apprenticeships

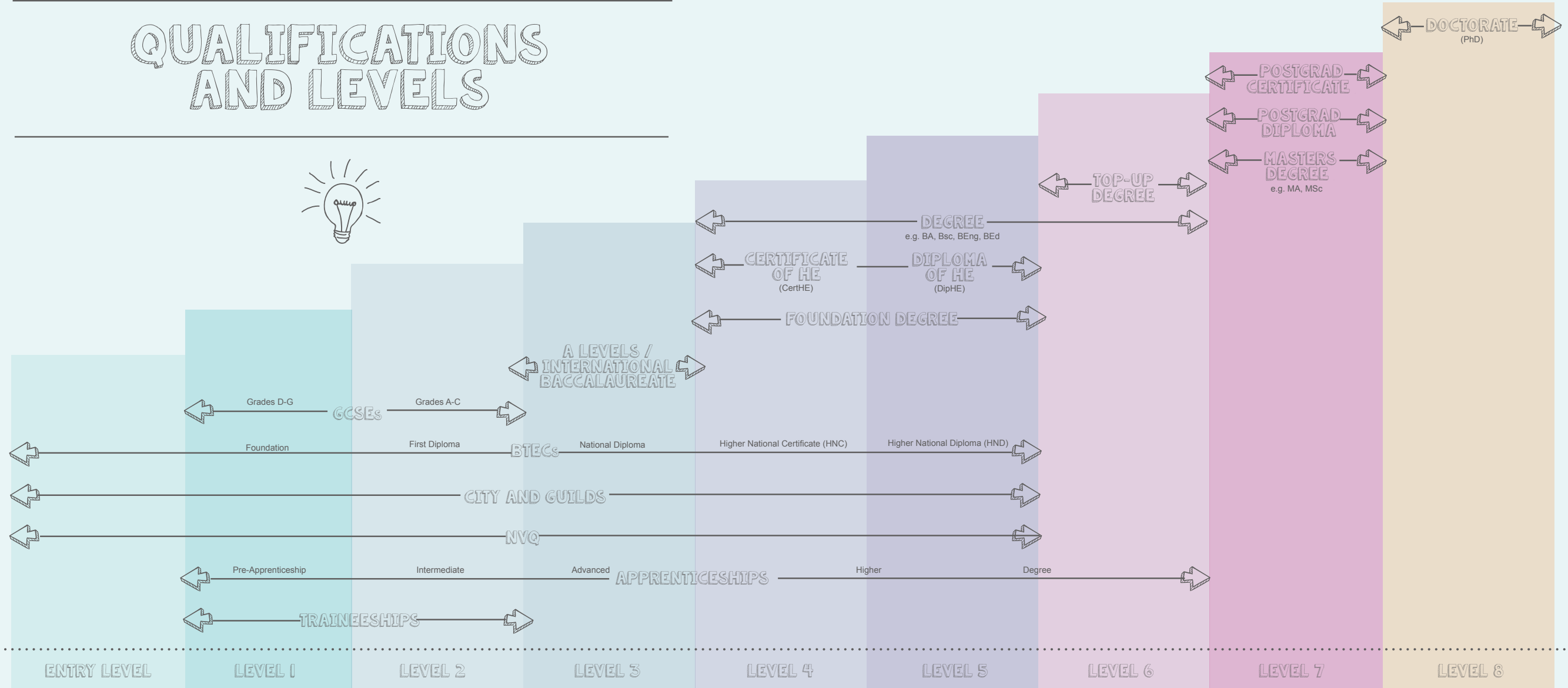
Specialist postgraduate courses

- Some universities offer specialist courses for students who have completed a Bachelor's degree and are interested in gaining qualifications to help them progress to a specific career.
- Examples of these include the PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) for students interested in teaching and various law courses for those who wish to work in the legal profession.

Doctorate/PhD

- The highest level of degree offered at universities.
- Usually for students who have already completed a Bachelor's and Master's degree.
- Takes three years or more to complete.
- Can be studied full- or part-time.
- Can lead to a career as a university lecturer.

QUALIFICATIONS AND LEVELS



STEP 1: SELECTING THE RIGHT COURSE FOR YOU

Before you begin your HE application you need to select a course that is right for **you**. Although suggestions and advice from others can be useful, ensure that the choice you make is **your decision** and one that will suit **your own** strengths and interests.

This process should not be rushed! You need to take time to research.

Try to start thinking about and researching possible courses a long time before you submit your application.

Ask yourself:

What have I most enjoyed studying at sixth form or college?

Think about what subjects you have enjoyed studying at school or college, but don't restrict yourself to those. For each subject you have already studied there could be hundreds of different courses that build on that subject area. For instance, an interest in history could point you towards an archaeology course.



Do I have a particular career in mind?

Some professional careers require you to take a specific degree. If you have a particular career in mind, you will need to find out if this is the case. Otherwise, many jobs and careers ask that applicants have a degree, without specifying the subject. You are then free to choose subjects that build on your areas of interest.



Is there a particular subject or topic I feel passionate about outside of school or college?

You may want to study something that is completely different to anything you have studied previously. Many degree courses don't require you to have already studied that subject. If there is something that fascinates you, then there is probably a university course that covers it. Take time to investigate!



See 'Where to go for more information' for some useful online course research resources (pages 54-5)

Once you are happy with your subject choice, or have at least narrowed it down, research the courses available in that area and, most importantly, their content. This can be done via UCAS (www.ucas.com) and university websites.

Course content

- Don't assume that just because a course has the same name at two different universities its content will be the same.
- Usually courses are made up of several modules which vary between institutions and focus on different topics. For instance, if you opt to study an English literature degree one institution might offer more modules in poetry, while another might offer more in contemporary fiction.
- Compare the content of courses at a variety of institutions. Consider which of them has modules that appear most suited to your interests or career aspirations.

Teaching and learning practices

- Teaching and learning practices vary between courses.
- It is worth considering whether a course suits your learning style, e.g. is it more practical or more theoretically based? Does it consist mostly of lectures or seminars, lab time or workshops? Does it offer any industry- or work-based learning?

Assessment

- Assessment methods might vary between courses. For example, while some might be mostly assessed by coursework, others could be more exam-based.
- Choose a course with assessment methods that suit you and your strengths.
- Methods of assessment might include exams, coursework essays, presentations, lab reports, portfolios, group work, work placement observations, or exhibitions and performances (for art and drama courses).

Whatever subject you decide on, can you answer 'yes' to the following questions?

- ✓ Am I passionate about this subject?
- ✓ Am I interested enough to study it for the next three years?
- ✓ Do I already have some knowledge of this subject?
- ✓ Have I thought about the type of career to which a degree in this subject could lead?
- ✓ Will I be able to meet the entry requirements of this course?

TOP TIP

Information on course content should be accessible via university and college websites online. Don't be afraid to contact the institution if this isn't the case.

To get a really good idea of what you might be doing in your first year, ask the college or university for a copy of the current first year timetable.

Selecting a course: activity pages

TASK 1

Identify a subject, topic or career of interest to you.
Record it here:



TASK 2

Research related courses.
Remember, don't restrict yourself; many different courses will relate to your one identified subject or topic. Record them here:

TASK 3

Highlight the course/s of most interest to you.

TASK 4

Identify the universities and colleges running your selected course, then complete this table:

Course name	University/college name	Interesting modules offered	Assessment/teaching methods	Entry requirements	Additional points of interest



STEP 2: SELECTING THE RIGHT UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE FOR YOU

Choosing the college or university that is best for you is as important as choosing the right course. Remember, this is somewhere that you will be studying for the next three years or more, so it's important that you choose an institution which suits your own personal requirements. Here are some steps you should take when choosing an HE provider, and other aspects you may wish to consider.

<p>1. Identify the universities or colleges that run your chosen course</p> <p>Spend time researching the institutions that run your chosen course.</p> <p>Consider course content: which courses best meet your personal learning requirements and interests?</p>	<p>2. Consider your priorities Ask yourself:</p> <p>Do I want to stay close to home or do I want to move away?</p> <p>What type of facilities do I want, both within the university/college and the local area?</p> <p>Do I have any special needs that require support?</p>	<p>3. Shortlist courses and institutions</p> <p>List the courses and institutions you find most appealing.</p> <p>Ensure you take note of exact course names and entry requirements.</p>	<p>4. Visit the universities and colleges to which you want to apply</p> <p>Visit as many of the institutions you have shortlisted as possible.</p> <p>Attend open days organised by your preferred universities or colleges. If possible, do so the year before you apply.</p> <p>Take time to visit the local area during your visit; is this somewhere you would be happy to live for at least the next three years?</p>
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Important note ...

If visiting isn't possible, research the universities or colleges you're interested in online. If you don't find the answers you need, contact the institution to find out whether it meets your requirements.

Top tip

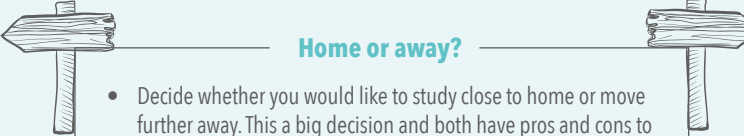
You can access virtual tours of many universities and colleges online. Search these if you're not able to visit.

Open days

Universities and colleges organise open days for prospective students, which many students try to attend the year before they apply.

These are:

- ✓ A great way to get to grips with what an institution has to offer, both on campus and in the local area, and how it might feel to study there.
- ✓ An opportunity to ask lots of questions about your chosen course, and find out information not available online or in a prospectus.
- ✓ Usually advertised on university and college websites. Also visit www.opendays.com



Home or away?

- Decide whether you would like to study close to home or move further away. This a big decision and both have pros and cons to take into account.
- Many students see university as a chance to move away from home and gain independence; others see staying at home as a more financially viable option. Whatever you decide, be sure to consider both alternatives carefully.

Facilities and extracurricular activities

- Consider the kinds of facilities available at an institution. How might these support your hobbies and interests?
- Are there any clubs or societies on offer which will support your interests, or help you to develop new ones?
- What quality of resources are available and how will they help to support your subject specific learning? For instance, consider the size of the library or the amount of available study space.
- What kind of accommodation is available if you are planning to study away from home?

Remember ...

- Financial costs vary between institutions. Research the tuition fee costs of those in which you're interested.
- Find out about bursaries and scholarships on offer: this is money students don't have to pay back. These differ between institutions.
- Take time to investigate living costs at your chosen institutions. Student accommodation costs, for example, can vary significantly.

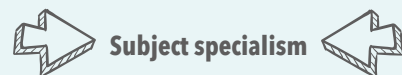


Location

- Universities and colleges are located in a variety of places. Some may be in a city, others may be more rural.
- Your experience of student life will vary depending on the location of your institution, so explore the surrounding local area, as well as the campus where you'll be studying.

Also ...

- Do you intend to work part-time whilst you are at university or college? Try to find out about employment opportunities within the institution or nearby.
- University and college careers services should provide information on locally available job opportunities.



Subject specialism

- Many HE institutions have different strengths in different subjects and departments. Look into how well a college or university caters for your chosen subject.
- Enquire about any subject-specialist facilities available, or look into ratings for your subject area by consulting university league tables (see www.unistats.com and www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk).

Study abroad and work experience

- If either is of interest to you, find out which of your chosen universities or colleges offer opportunities to study abroad or a work placement relevant to your chosen field of study.
- These are great ways to develop further skills and add value to your HE experience.



Russell Group universities

- If you are interested in studying at one of these universities, identify any additional entry requirements (some require applicants to sit an entry test in addition to meeting course entry requirements).
- Students should be aware that the application deadline for Oxford and Cambridge varies from other institutions. Currently, it is October 15th.
- See page 55 for a list of Russell Group universities.

Additional opportunities for pre-university students

To get a real sense of what university or college life will be like, look out for the various activities and events offered to students interested in applying for a degree. Subject taster days, summer schools and short courses are a great way to gain an introduction to HE, while also experiencing a university or college campus in which you might be interested.

- Many of these activities are free, and sometimes include travel, food and accommodation costs.
- Many of these courses also attempt to help students make high quality applications to leading universities; for instance, providing guidance with personal statements.
- There are usually a limited number of places and, sometimes, entry requirements. Check whether you are eligible to apply, and keep track of any deadlines.
- Visit www.unitasterdays.com or contact the institution to find out more.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE RESEARCH TOOLS



College and university online websites -

These will provide information about courses offered and their content and entry requirements as well as course fees and other aspects of university/college life.



UCAS - The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

Here you will find information on courses, colleges and universities, in addition to advice concerning most aspects of the application process. wwwucas.com



Complete University Guide - An independent guide offering a wide range of information and advice about universities, courses and student fees.

www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk



Times Higher Education: World University Rankings - Provides university world league tables, enabling students to identify where a certain institution is ranked in comparison to others worldwide. You can also search and access information about a university in which you are interested.

www.timeshighereducation.com



UK Course Finder - Helps you find the most suitable course for you using a questionnaire.

www.ukcoursefinder.com



Unistats - The official website for comparing data on courses and universities. Amongst other things, you can see how universities and colleges rank in terms of student satisfaction, fees and accommodation costs.

www.unistats.com

Fill in the table below with five universities or colleges that have caught your attention:

	Open Day
1. _____	___/___/___
2. _____	___/___/___
3. _____	___/___/___
4. _____	___/___/___
5. _____	___/___/___

Remember, just because a university or college is at the top of a league table, this doesn't necessarily mean it's the best one for you. Equally, one positioned towards the bottom doesn't have to be wrong. Consult university league tables but don't base your choice entirely on them.

Important!

When adding your university or college preferences online, ensure their course entry requirements vary in case you exceed or do not meet your predicted grades.

STEP 3: APPLYING TO A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Preparing to apply

Before you start the application process, it's important to ensure that you are well prepared so that when it comes to applying for your course online your application runs as smoothly as possible. Here are some things you can do:

Double-check all important deadlines and make a list of them

- A list of important key dates can be found via wwwucas.com or by contacting the institutions to which you are applying.
- Check to see whether your school or college has any internal deadlines that you are required to meet.

Get hold of any exam certificates you might need

- You will be asked to show your exam certificates as evidence for your qualifications. Make sure you know where they are.
- If you've lost any, order more copies. You can apply for these online from the awarding exam board. They can take up to 12 weeks to arrive.

Research further into your subject

- When it comes to writing your personal statement, you will need to show how your subject interest extends further than the classroom. Now is the perfect time to start gathering evidence to show this. Start reading around your subject, listening to podcasts and, if you can, visiting any museums, landmarks or events which might be subject related in some way.
- Take note of anything you find particularly interesting, then see if you can research it further.

Speak to the person who will be writing your reference

- Before you apply, speak to the person who will be writing your reference. Make sure they know why it is that you are applying for your chosen course. This will help them when writing your reference.



Double-check the entry requirements of your chosen course

Do you have all the necessary GCSEs required?

- GCSEs are specified as an entry requirement of most higher education courses, even though they aren't counted as UCAS tariff points. For instance, GCSE English and Maths at grade C or above might be required.
- Most higher level qualifications do not overrule the need to have the required GCSEs, so you will need to retake any GCSEs to fill in any gaps you may have before applying for your course.

Do you have the necessary work experience required?

- Some degrees, particularly those leading to the medical or caring professions, require you to have had some relevant work experience prior to starting the course.
- Arrange work experience the year before you apply. If you have left it too late, you can still refer to planned work experience in your personal statement, but it looks much better if you've already done this.

If you are applying for an art- or performance-based course, do you need to prepare a portfolio or audition piece in advance?

- Most creative arts courses require students to provide a portfolio or audition piece as part of their entry requirements. If this applies to you, give yourself plenty of time to collect work for a portfolio or to practice for an audition and check so that you know exactly what's required.

How to apply

Once you have shortlisted the courses and HE institutions to which you would like to apply, it's time to submit your application. In order to do this you will need to complete a UCAS form online. UCAS is the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service; it deals with applications to almost all UK full-time undergraduate degree and higher education courses.

What you'll need when registering and filling in your form online



UCAS will ask you for:

- The buzzword given to you by your school or college.
- Your personal details (name, contact details, etc.).
- Details of the universities or colleges and courses to which you want to apply.
- Details of the schools and colleges you have previously attended.
- The qualifications you already have as well as those you still have to obtain.
- Any employment details.
- A personal statement.
- A reference from your school or college (your school or college will provide this).



Exceptions to the rule

- When applying for performance based-courses, e.g. music, dance and drama, it's important to check whether the institution which you are applying to is listed as a UK Conservatoire. If so, your application will be slightly different as you will need to register and apply through UCAS Conservatoires. (See wwwucas.com/ucas-conservatoires/ucas-conservatoires-getting-started).
- For part-time degree courses, students usually need to apply to the university directly. If you are unsure, contact the institution.
- If you wish to study for any of the courses with the Open University, you will currently need to apply directly to them. The Open University does not have entry requirements for most of its courses, so, if you are thinking of applying, it's important to contact them for guidance on course choice.

When to apply

- **Early!** Universities and colleges receive thousands of applications and start allocating places as soon as they receive them. Give yourself the best chance you can by submitting before the deadline.
- The earlier you submit your application, the longer you are giving the university or college to consider it.
- The deadline for most undergraduate courses is currently January 15th at 18:00, but this can vary between courses and institutions.
- Some schools and colleges have internal deadlines for getting applications completed, so that they have time to write references. These could be two or three months before the current UCAS January deadline.
- If your school or college does not have an internal deadline, set your own. Don't leave it until the last minute.



Do all courses and HE institutions have the same deadlines?

- Most are January 15th. However, there are some differences.
- If you are applying for medicine, dentistry or veterinary courses, or to Oxford or Cambridge, the deadline is currently 15th October.
- Deadlines for applications to UK conservatoires also vary. Check UCAS and conservatoire websites for further information.
- The Open University has more than one deadline during the year, depending on the course. Check the individual course details on their website: www.open.ac.uk

N.B.

There is a fee to be paid when you apply via UCAS. Details are available via the UCAS website.



Give your school or college plenty of time to write your reference by completing your parts of the application form in good time.



UCAS application: frequently asked questions

What are UCAS tariff points?

- A tariff point is a number that illustrates your entry qualification grade in a simple way to HE institutions.
- Different levels and types of qualification relate to varying point numbers.
- Some HE institutions specify their entry requirements using tariff points, while others simply look at your grades, or a combination of both.
- You can find a fuller explanation of how the tariff works via UCAS online (www.ucas.com).

What is an unspent criminal conviction?

- The UCAS application form asks if you have any unspent criminal convictions. If you are unsure about this, read the explanatory notes on the UCAS website. You should also be able to clarify your own situation with your local police station.
- It is important that you get this right: there can be implications for answering incorrectly.
- If you do have an unspent conviction, do not assume this will rule you out of getting on the course. The university or college will probably ask for more information in order to assess whether or not it has any bearing on your application.

What is the most important part of the application?

Different universities and colleges, and even different courses within the same institution, place varying amounts of emphasis on each part of the application. It is therefore vital that you ensure all of the information you have provided is correct and that your personal statement is as good as it can be.



How long will the online application take me to complete?

- The application process will probably take much longer than you expect. Make sure you don't rush through it in one go.
- You can save each section and come back to it at a later date.



Did you know...?

UCAS tariff points can be gained outside of school or college. For example, if you have taken exams in music or dance, these qualifications may carry a number of tariff points. Visit UCAS for more information concerning tariff points and extra-curricular activities.

Personal statement

You will be asked to complete a personal statement as part of the UCAS application process online – an important part of the process and the area on **which you should spend the most time**. You can only submit one personal statement for all of your choices, so make sure it is applicable to all of them. Do not specifically name the course to which you are applying if your other choices don't call it by the same name.

Give yourself time for several redrafts; you're not going to get this right the first time.

What is it?

- A statement of around 4,000 characters written by you, showing an admissions tutor how you are suitable for your chosen course, and why they should pick you rather than other candidates.
- Your chance to evidence the passion and interest you have for your chosen subject and to give an impression of the 'real' you.

Who reads it?

An admissions tutor – usually an academic member of staff in the institution to which you're applying. This person will probably specialise in the subject you have chosen to study. Part of their role is to judge whether you should be offered a place on your chosen course – a judgement based partly on the content of your statement as well as your exam or qualification results.

What should I include...?

Evidence for your subject interest: The main focus of your statement should be towards the subject you have chosen to study. You need to evidence the passion you have for your subject and why you'd like to study it for at least the next three years. Admissions tutors are looking for **specific** rather than **general** discussion. In other words, don't just say you are passionate about your subject, think of how you can evidence this passion. What inspired your interest in the subject? Was it a particular book, podcast, event or summer school you attended? Can you say something interesting about a particular aspect of your subject? Is there a particular person in the field that you admire? If so, why?

Relevant hobbies and interests: This can be useful but should be kept to a minimum. Ensure that you explain how the hobbies and interests you've named are either relevant to your course or have helped you develop skills that will assist you at university or college.

Relevant work or volunteering experience: Like hobbies and interests, if you are discussing any work experience you will need to show either its relevance to your subject, or discuss any transferrable skills it helped you to develop that are relevant to your course.

Future career plans: You may wish to mention any long-term career plans you have and how your chosen course might fit into them. This is especially important if you are applying for a vocational course.

Top tip

www.ucas.com offers advice about what to include in your personal statement and how to structure it. Ensure you consult UCAS before beginning.

Personal statements for Russell Group university applications

When writing a personal statement in support of an application to any HE institution it is important that you reflect on the points you make. For instance, it is not enough to simply name a book within your statement – you need to reflect on what you specifically learnt from it with regard to your chosen subject.

This is especially the case when it comes to applying to a Russell Group university. Above all else, admissions tutors within the UK's most selective universities are looking to see whether you are able to reflect upon and analyse in depth the academic materials and course-related activities you name – that you can offer a detailed analysis of a topic that goes far beyond the material you have covered at school or college.

So, if you are applying to a Russell Group university, ensure that you are not using any broad statements when it comes to your subject; instead, try to offer a more focused and sustained analysis of a particular topic or case study.



Where to go for more personal statement advice:

- www.purepotential.org: Includes personal statement advice, as well as a personal statement library with over 100 annotated personal statements.
- www.ucas.com: Discover what to include in your statement, as well as how to structure it. Personal statement online activities and worksheets are also made available here.
- www.university.which.co.uk: Includes subject-specific personal statement advice.

Personal Statement Dos & Don'ts

Do ...

- ✓ Use a **formal style** of writing.
- ✓ Back up everything you say with **evidence** and try to link it **back to your course in some way**.
- ✓ Try to **engage and interest** your reader while communicating your passion for the subject.
- ✓ **Structure your writing**, ensuring you include a short introduction and conclusion.
- ✓ Use **positive vocabulary**.
- ✓ **Avoid repetition**.
- ✓ **Check your work** for any spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes.
- ✓ **Redraft** until you feel your statement is the best it can be.
- ✓ **Ask friends, family and teachers to check through** your statement.

Don't ...

- ✗ Copy chunks from examples of other personal statements; UCAS uses an electronic system which checks personal statements for similarities against those already in the system or online. **Universities and colleges will not tolerate plagiarism** – copying somebody else's work and using it as your own.
- ✗ Use **bland statements** like 'I have been interested in this subject since I was a child'.
- ✗ List your **qualifications** – you will already have done so elsewhere on the form.
- ✗ Include anything that you **would not** be able to talk about if you were asked to attend an interview.
- ✗ **Exaggerate or lie**; colleges and universities read thousands of personal statements every year and are very good at picking out the fake ones.

Personal statement writing activity

Filling in the boxes below will help you with ideas for the content of your personal statement. Once you've completed them, use them to help structure your statement. Feel free to move paragraphs around if you think they work better in a different order.

1. Introduction

Briefly outline why you want to study your subject at university or college. Using your first few lines, try to engage your reader. What has inspired you to study this subject? Was it a specific book or film? Or maybe some work experience or volunteering? Is there something important currently happening in the world which relates to your subject in some way? Ensure that you avoid clichés such as 'I have always been interested in this subject'. BE SPECIFIC.

2. Evidence for interest and passion in your subject

Evidence for your interest and passion in the subject should constitute the largest part of your statement. You may wish to start by discussing something that inspired your interest at school or college. However, admission tutors want to see that your subject interest goes far beyond the classroom. You could write about a specific book, artwork, documentary, historical building etc. or perhaps a lecture, seminar, university or college event that you have attended which relates, in some way, to your subject. Choose one or two of these things to really analyse and reflect on in depth. What did they tell you about the subject that you didn't know already? Have they introduced you to a new area about which you want to discover more? Again, remember to BE SPECIFIC.

3. Relevant hobbies and interests

Write about any hobbies or interests that you have which relate to your course directly or indirectly or have helped you to develop wider skills. Keep this to a minimum and only include hobbies and interests if you can relate them back to your course. For instance, 'This year, I was appointed as Captain of our school hockey team, and I am also a member of the local swimming club. These roles have taught me to balance study with extra-curricular responsibilities. This will be an important skill to have while studying at university, as I hope to make the most of sporting opportunities available on campus.'

4. Relevant work/volunteering experience

Have you undertaken any paid or voluntary work relevant to your subject? Did this teach you anything about the subject that you didn't previously know? Were you able to develop any wider skills that might be transferable to your studies? Or perhaps your experience of a particular working environment inspired your future career plans which somehow relate back to the course. Again, ensure you can relate each point back to your subject or course.

5. Future career plans

Do you have any future career plans which this subject or course might help you to fulfil? If so, what and how? Give an indication of any plans you have beyond this course (this doesn't necessarily have to relate to a career, you may like to progress to study at the next level).

6. Conclusion

Finish your statement with a brief summary of why you are suitable for the course and what you hope to gain from it. For instance, 'I am an enthusiastic and self-motivated individual, eager to explore the social sciences in much greater depth than I have done so before. I am very much looking forward to discovering new areas of the subject, in a dynamic and inspiring environment.'

Where to go for
more personal
statement advice

www.purepotential.org: Includes personal statement advice, as well as a personal statement library with over 100 annotated statements.

www.ucas.com: Discover what to include in your statement and how to structure it. Personal statement online activities and worksheets are also available here.

www.university.which.co.uk: Includes subject-specific personal statement advice.

Applying for a gap year: deferred entry

You may decide to make a deferred application to university. This means you apply a year ahead with the intention of taking a year off from study before starting your course. This is often referred to as a gap year.

When to apply

- When applying for deferred entry, the same deadlines apply for an ordinary UCAS application.
- Some students apply for deferred entry during their final year of study at school or college; others wait until their gap year during which they apply for immediate entry that same year.
- Applying for deferred entry while still at school or college will mean greater access to support from teachers and staff during the application process.

How to apply

- Apply via UCAS.
- Ensure your selected institutions are happy to receive an application for deferred entry, as some may not be.

Why take a year out?

- There are several reasons why students choose to take a year out from study. Some feel as if they want to travel or need a break, some feel they need to work to save for university and others experience a change in their personal circumstances.

What are the implications?

- **Financial implications:** course tuition or accommodation fees may increase the following year.
- **Lack of motivation:** after a year out, you may feel less inclined to want to return to study the following year.
- Some subjects, such as maths and the sciences, **require knowledge to be carried forward from previous study.** If you decide to defer for a year, are you confident you can retain that knowledge?

Important note ...

Before applying for deferred entry check directly with the institution to see if they will still be running that course the following year.



STEP 4: AFTER SUBMISSION

Once you have submitted your application, UCAS will process it and send it on to your chosen HE institutions who will then consider whether to offer you a place on your selected course or, in some cases, invite you for interview. But it doesn't end there. Here's what you should be doing while waiting to hear if your application was successful:

Monitor your application

- After submission, monitor your application online so you don't miss interview requests from universities or colleges, or requests for additional information.
- Keep track of any offers made via Track.
- Check your email regularly, as UCAS will contact you with any updates via the email address that you provided when you registered.

Ensure your contact details are kept up to date

- If your contact details change after you have submitted your application, update this information via Track. Universities or colleges may want to contact you directly.

Reply to interview invitations

- Universities and colleges sometimes send interview invitations before making an offer. These usually show up in Track, or students are contacted directly.
- Accept, decline, or ask to change the date or time of your interview via Track (but try to go at the time the institution has suggested).
- If you do make changes, contact the university or college directly to inform them.

Provide additional information

- After submitting your UCAS application, you may be asked by a university or college to send additional items in support of your application, e.g. extra pieces of work or another reference.
- Provide these as soon as possible, or contact the institution if you are having difficulty doing so.

Nominate somebody to act on your behalf

- If you're going away, or will not be able to monitor your online application for some reason, nominate a parent/guardian/relative/teacher to keep track of your application online and make decisions on your behalf if necessary.
- If you did not nominate someone when you first completed your application online, call UCAS to set this up.



You'll need your UCAS personal ID and password to login to Track.



Academic interviews

Once you have submitted your application, some colleges and universities may ask that you attend an interview before offering a place. If you are called to interview, it is vital that you are well prepared.

Know what's required

- Know what's required of you on the day. Have you been provided with any information? Do you need to prepare anything ahead of time? Will you be given any tests? Know what to expect. If you need to, contact the institution.

Practice

- Sign up for any practice interviews offered for preparation by your school or college, or ask whether anyone could do some with you.
- Ask for a practice interview with someone who has specialist knowledge in the area you want to study so that they can question your thinking about it.

Plan your journey

- Don't be late! Plan your journey in advance and allow plenty of time on the day.
- Save money by booking tickets in advance.
- When travelling, have the phone number to hand of the department or person you are meeting at the university or college, in case you experience delays.

Prepare questions of your own

- At some point in the interview, you will probably be asked if you have any questions, so prepare two or three of your own.
- If the questions you've prepared get answered during the interview, do not re-ask them; instead, say that you did have a couple of questions concerning X and Y but that these have already been covered.



How to prepare:

1. **Re-read your application:** can you confidently discuss each part and any additional work you may have been asked to submit?
2. **Revise books, theories and topics of discussion included in your personal statement:** the interviewer may ask about anything specific you have mentioned.
3. **Research any current issues relating to the course subject and mention this when appropriate during the interview.** This shows you are taking an active interest in the subject.
4. **Refresh your knowledge of the university or college and course to which you have applied.** What do both have to offer, and why have you chosen them? The interviewer will want to see that you have a good idea of what will be required by the course. Look over its content, including modules and methods of assessment.

What will the interviewer be looking for?

- That you match the person in your application.
- That you are genuinely passionate about your subject (so remind yourself what it is about that fascinates you).
- That you can talk openly and widely about any detail of your application.
- That you are motivated, enthusiastic and eager to learn.
- Anything else you may be able to contribute to their institution.



Things to remember ...

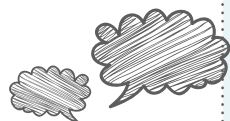
- Don't panic if you can't answer a question. Instead, be honest and explain this is the case. If it is a subject-related question, ask the interviewer for any tips on reading material which could help build your knowledge in this area, or whether any modules on the course might cover this topic.
- Do not just give 'yes' or 'no' responses to questions; ensure you expand and elaborate on your answers.

Which questions will I be asked?

The following questions are likely to come up during an interview, so plan answers for them here.

1. Why do you want to do this course?

This is the time to speak about the modules and content that the course offers. Is there anything you're particularly excited about studying? What does this university course offer that another might not? How might the course relate to your own subject interests?



2. Why do you want to come to this university or college?

Why exactly have you applied there? Consider the kinds of facilities available which might support your study. Are there any societies you'd like to join? What does the local area have to offer which might be of interest to you?

3. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

This is an important question which is likely to be asked in some form. Your interviewer wants to see that your strengths relate to your course in some way and that your weaknesses won't prevent you from doing well. Do not try to claim that you have no weaknesses because this will not be believable. Instead, think about how you could frame them in a positive way, e.g. by talking about how you manage to overcome them.



"I'm quite a slow reader. To overcome this, I hope to begin reading course material well before the course start date."

"I have good time-management skills, which will be useful to me when managing course deadlines."

"I'm self-motivated and driven, which will be vital for the independent study your course requires."

"I am shy when it comes to speaking in front of others. I'm hoping course seminars will help me to develop the confidence I need in group-based discussion."



STEP 5: RECEIVING AN OFFER

Once the colleges or universities have processed your application they may offer you a conditional or unconditional place. You will receive official notification from UCAS as soon as you receive an offer. Any offers that you do receive will be displayed in **Track**.

➔ When should I reply to offers?

- Not until you've received decisions from all your chosen institutions.
- Reply dates for your offers will vary and you will be allocated your own personal deadlines for each. These will also be displayed in Track.
- Make sure you don't miss any of these deadlines – this could mean losing your offers.
- Take time to consider your offers and talk these through with the school or college staff who helped with your application.
- When you decide to respond to offers do so via Track.

➔ What should I do if I receive more than one conditional offer?

- Select a first choice and a second choice. These are known as **firm acceptance** and **insurance acceptance**.
- You can only accept one firm and one insurance, so you must then decline all others if you receive more than two offers.
- The insurance acceptance is there in case you don't meet the requirements for your first choice firm acceptance. This means that your insurance place should have lower entry requirements than your firm first choice.
- You don't have to select an insurance place but it's wise to do so in case you don't meet the requirements of your firm choice.

Conditional versus unconditional

- Offers will be **conditional** or **unconditional**.
- **Conditional**: The university or college will offer you a place if you meet conditions related to your expected qualification results.
- **Unconditional**: You have already met the course requirements and are being offered a place. If you accept an unconditional offer you are committing yourself to it and must decline all other offers.



Offer confirmation



- Your chosen institutions will confirm your place following the release of summer examination results. These are usually sent directly to UCAS from the examination boards. UCAS then forwards these to your selected universities or colleges.
- You may get a confirmed place on either your firm or insurance choice, depending on your exam or qualification results.
- You should receive a confirmation letter five to seven days after your place is confirmed. This will appear in Track. **Keep monitoring your account online.**
- The confirmation letter should inform you of anything else that you may need to do, for example, provide proof of qualifications.

➔ What if I don't get the exam grades I needed to get onto my chosen course?

- If you miss out by a grade or two, a university or college may accept you anyway. Otherwise, they may offer you an alternative course which you'll need to either accept or decline.
- If you don't receive a place, read on to find out about Extra and Clearing.

For more information about Adjustment, see www.ucas.com/adjustment



What if my results are better than expected?



If your exam results exceed those required by your firmly accepted offer and you want to consider courses and institutions with higher entry requirements, then you have five days to look for an alternative without losing your confirmed place. This is known as Adjustment.



Adjustment: key points



- Adjustment runs from the **18th-31st August**. However, your personal five-day adjustment period starts from the moment your **conditional firm offer changes to unconditional firm**, and you register for Adjustment via UCAS Track.
- To secure an adjustment place at another institution you must have received an alternative offer through UCAS **before the five-day period ends**.
- If you don't receive an alternative place you'll remain accepted at your confirmed place.
- There are **no vacancy lists**: it is your responsibility to contact a university or college to discuss an Adjustment place.
- There is a small, additional fee to pay.



Holding no offers

If your application has been rejected, you've received no offers or have declined those you have, there are various options you may wish to consider.



What to do if you haven't used up all of your five choices

If, when first applying, you did not use up all of your five choices and hold no offers, you may be able to add and apply for more courses via Track.



For further information on Extra and Clearing, visit www.ucas.com
If you're unable to locate the information you're looking for, don't be afraid to call UCAS with any questions you have.

Important note...

It is vital that you are at home when your exam or qualification results are released. Extra and Clearing places fill up quickly, so you will need to act quickly to give yourself the best chance of securing a place.

Familiarise yourself with the Extra and Clearing process so that you immediately know what to do if you don't receive your expected results.



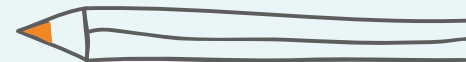
What to do if you have used up all of your five choices but have declined or not received any offers

- Providing you have made five choices on your UCAS application form and hold no standing offers, you should be eligible to apply for more courses via UCAS Extra.
- Extra is open between the end of February and the beginning of July.
- Using Extra, apply for as many courses in as many HE institutions as you wish before the July deadline but only one at a time.
- The courses you select must have been made available through UCAS Extra.
- You can apply using Extra with pending qualification or exam results.



What to do if your Extra applications are unsuccessful and/or the Extra deadline has passed

- Apply for more courses via UCAS Clearing. Even if you did not include all five choices in your initial application you will still be eligible to use this service. However, you must not hold any standing offers.
- Clearing opens in early July and usually runs until late October. However, its end date depends on how fast courses become full, so act quickly.
- Apply for as many courses in as many institutions as you wish using Clearing, but only one at a time.
- You must have received your results to apply through Clearing.
- It is your responsibility to contact the institution to which you are applying and provide your personal ID and Clearing number.



TOP TIP

Contact any colleges or universities to see whether or not it is likely they will offer you a place before applying to them through Extra or Clearing.



What to do if you still haven't received an offer

- Don't give up. Consider rethinking course choices, retaking any qualifications, or applying for a lower level course which could put you in a better position the following year. Either way, remember that all is not lost.
- Contact the HE institutions to which you have applied for further guidance and advice. They will be able to inform you of anything you can do which might help your application the following year.
- Seek further careers guidance if available.
- See the next page for alternative higher education routes and options.

Many students lose confidence at this point but it is important not to take this personally. If you don't receive an offer, it is not a rejection of you, it is just that you don't fully match the requirements a course or institution has at this time. Take advantage of any support that is available to you and then make a plan for what to do next.



Alternative higher education routes and options

There are various alternative routes into higher education for students who have not received an offer of a place, perhaps missing out on marks needed to gain entry to their chosen course.

These include the following:



Access to Higher Education Diploma

- Prepares students without the required qualifications for study at degree level.
- Often has no formal entry requirements.
- Can be completed in one year, or studied part-time over two or more years.
- Provided by colleges and some universities.
- Widely recognised by universities and colleges nationwide.
- After completion, many students gain access to their chosen degree programme.
- For further information visit www.accesstohe.co.uk



Foundation year (not to be confused with a Foundation degree)

- An extra year of study at the start of a university course, enabling students who do not meet course entry requirements to gain access to it the following year.
- Taken at the university where you intend to study your degree.
- Not a separate qualification, unlike Foundation degrees or Foundation Art and Design courses.
- Not all universities or colleges offer a Foundation year, so check with the institution if this is of interest to you.
- Entry requirements can vary. While some universities ask for Maths and English GCSEs, others do not require any formal qualifications.

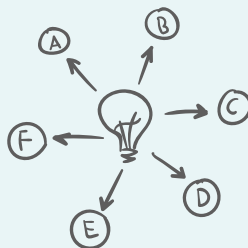


Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, Foundation degree

- Alternative higher education courses which can help students progress to a degree level qualification.
- See p.14 of this guide for further details of these.

Important note...

- Some of these courses are free for those under 24. For others, you may be able to apply for student finance.
- Speak to the finance advisor at the institution running the course to find out more.



Task 1:

Research suitable alternative higher education routes or options and record them here.

Course	Institution	Entry requirements
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____



Task 2: Now consider which of these courses may help you to progress to your chosen degree or career. You may wish to speak to the college or university running the course for further information.

STEP 6: FINDING ACCOMMODATION



Once you've accepted an offer at your chosen HE institution it's time to consider where you will live during your studies. If you're moving away from home you may be able to live in university accommodation known as **Halls of Residence**. This will usually be during your first year but some universities may offer you the option of staying in halls for the duration of your course.

If you've chosen to study at a college and need to secure accommodation, contact them for help in locating accommodation nearby. Many colleges do not offer student accommodation.

When to apply

- The application deadline for student accommodation varies between institutions but you should be able to apply once you've accepted an offer.
- Spaces are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. If you want to secure accommodation it's important to apply as soon as possible.

How to apply

- Research the various types of accommodation on offer. Universities offer a number of accommodation options which suit different budgets: for instance, while some offer ensuite bathrooms, others may have communal facilities.
- Identify your preferences and apply via the institution's online website. You may be asked to rank your choices.

Catered versus self-catered accommodation

- You may be able to choose between catered and self-catered accommodation. In catered accommodation you will have your breakfast and dinner cooked for you but will do your own cooking if living in self-catered halls.
- Catered accommodation is usually more expensive than self-catered.

What happens if I miss out on an accommodation place?

- You may need to locate alternative, off-campus accommodation. Your university should have its own **accommodation officer** who will be able to help you locate somewhere else to stay, so try to get in contact with them.
- Other options may include sharing a flat or house with other students in the local area, or renting a room in a local house with a family or homeowner.

Accommodation after your first year

- While some universities provide halls of residence throughout the duration of a course, many require you to find alternative accommodation after the first year of your course.
- Many students see this as an opportunity to move into accommodation in the local area with friends they have made during the first year.
- Don't feel as if you need to sort out second year accommodation at this stage but do ensure that you locate appropriate accommodation for your second year in good time.

How much will it cost?

Accommodation costs vary, depending on where you have chosen to study, the type of accommodation you have selected and whether or not food is included. So ensure you research thoroughly before identifying which type of accommodation is most suited to your personal budget.

Remember, bill costs are usually included in overall accommodation costs but if you are unsure, contact the university.

Living at home

Many students choose to go to college or university in their local area and stay at home. However, even if you have chosen to study locally, you too can apply to stay in halls during your first year. This is a great way to gain independence and meet other students. So consider university accommodation as an option even when studying close to home.

TOP TIP

Research available student accommodation while waiting to receive any offers. This will mean that, when it's time to apply, you'll already know which is most suitable for your personal budget and requirements.

STEP 7: APPLYING FOR STUDENT FINANCE

Once you've accepted a place at your chosen HE institution and have organised where you will stay while studying, it's time to think about applying for student finance. Student finance is money made available by the government for students' tuition fees and living costs during the course of their study. You can apply for it from **Student Finance England** (also known as the **Student Loans Company**).



Tuition fee loan

- Tuition fees are charged by universities and colleges for each year of study – an amount which varies between institutions. Currently, universities charge around £9,000 per year for UK students. However, this may vary between institutions.
- Most full-time UK students are entitled to a tuition fee loan to cover the full amount of course fees, regardless of how much they or their family earn.
- Student Finance England directly pays this amount to universities and colleges each year, meaning you won't have to pay this money up front, or worry about getting it to your institution.
- Visit: www.gov.uk/student-finance for further details.

Maintenance loan

- This is money available for student living costs; such as rent, food, clothes and books.
- Maintenance loans are 'means-tested': the amount students are awarded depends on their family's household income. In other words, the higher your family income, the less maintenance loan you are entitled to and *vice versa*.
- Maintenance loans are paid directly into your bank account at the start of each term. It's up to you how you spend this money so be sure to budget appropriately.
- Visit: www.gov.uk/student-finance for further details.

How do I apply?

- Applications for tuition fee and maintenance loans should be completed online. Visit: www.gov.uk/apply-online-for-student-finance to get started.
- If you're currently living with parents, carers or a partner, it's likely they will need to support your application, and fill in a separate form online.

When should I apply?

- Early – so that your tuition fees are paid before the start of your course and that you and anybody supporting your application have enough time to provide required documents.
- Applications open around February each year and take roughly six weeks to be processed.
- You will need to **reapply** for student finance before each academic year of study.

What if my parents/carers/partner will not support my application?

- This will mean that you may not be able to receive your full maintenance loan amount.
- If you find yourself in this position, contact the university or college and ask for guidance from the student finance advisor there.
- If you have no contact with your parents or support yourself, you may be able to apply as an 'estranged student'. For further details visit www.standalone.org.uk/guides/student-guide or contact your university or college.

What if I've applied for part-time study?

You may be eligible for a tuition fee loan but not a maintenance loan. However, changes in available finance for part-time students are due to take place, so contact Student Finance England for further information.

Additional finance

- **Bursaries and scholarships:** These are grants awarded to students by some institutions which often don't have to be paid back.
- Different institutions award different kinds of scholarships and bursaries; for instance, some are based on low household income, others on academic merit or sporting talent.
- For scholarships and bursaries students should apply directly to the institution.
- **Extra financial support:** Students who are parents or carers, have additional learning requirements, or long-term health conditions, may be eligible for extra financial support. Speak to your university or college student finance advisor to find out more.

You will need:



- A working email address
- A bank account in your name
- University/college and course details
- National Insurance number and an in date passport/long birth certificate
- Details of your household income
- If applicable, details from your parents/carers/partner to support your application.

STUDENT FINANCE: COMMON MYTHS

We spoke with a representative from the Student Loans Company, and asked them to correct or verify the following common student finance myths:

You need to be rich to be able to attend university



Untrue. Almost all full-time UK students can apply for money which will pay towards their tuition fees and living costs. In general, the less income your family has, the more financial support you can apply for from Student Finance England.



Student loan repayments will leave you struggling

"Loan repayments should be affordable for students. The amount you have to pay back depends on the amount you earn after graduating. Currently, if you're earning under £21,000 per year, you won't pay any money back. When you start earning over that amount, only a small percentage of your salary gets automatically deducted from your monthly pay. At the moment, this is 9% of the amount of money you earn above £21,000. For instance, if a student is earning £25,000 per year, repayments will be 9% of £4,000 per year. This works out at around £30 per month – basically the amount of a mobile phone contract. Also, after 30 years, the debt is wiped clean – even if it hasn't been fully repaid."

Student loans aren't available for part-time students or students over 25



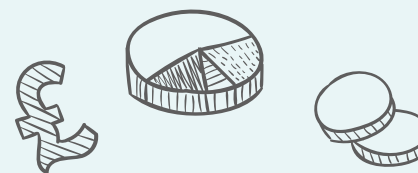
Providing you're 18 or over, your age is not taken into account when you're applying for student finance. Depending on the number of course hours, part-time students should be eligible to apply for at least a tuition fee loan.



$a+b+c$



Student finance details can change from year to year. Ensure you visit www.gov.uk/student-finance for up-to-date information.



Having a student loan will affect your chances of getting a mortgage

"Your student loan is only taken into account when banks are considering your outgoings and whether you're able to afford mortgage repayments. Like a monthly gas bill, your monthly loan repayment is considered as one of your outgoings. Basically, the overall amount of your loan isn't considered; the amount you're required to pay back each month probably will be. Taking out a student loan won't affect your credit score either – the only way mortgage, loan or credit companies know if you have a student loan is if they ask you on your application."

TOP TIP

- Most HE institutions employ a **Student Finance Advisor**. Part of this person's job is to help students who experience difficulty when applying for student finance, so contact them if you are.
- If you put down your university or college student finance advisor as 'consent to share', Student Finance England will allow him/her to speak with them on your behalf.
- Parents/carers can also be nominated as 'consent to share'.
- Students can opt to end 'consent to share' at any time.


WHERE TO STUDY HIGHER EDUCATION IN KENT AND MEDWAY



- 

Colleges delivering higher education

 1. **Canterbury College**
(Canterbury)
www.canterburycollege.ac.uk
 2. **East Kent College**
(Broadstairs, Folkestone, Dover)
www.eastkent.ac.uk
 3. **Hadlow College**
(Tonbridge, Canterbury)
www.hadlow.ac.uk
 4. **MidKent College**
(Gillingham, Maidstone)
www.midkent.ac.uk
 5. **North Kent College**
(Dartford, Gravesend)
www.northkent.ac.uk
 6. **West Kent College**
(Tonbridge, Ashford)
www.westkent.ac.uk



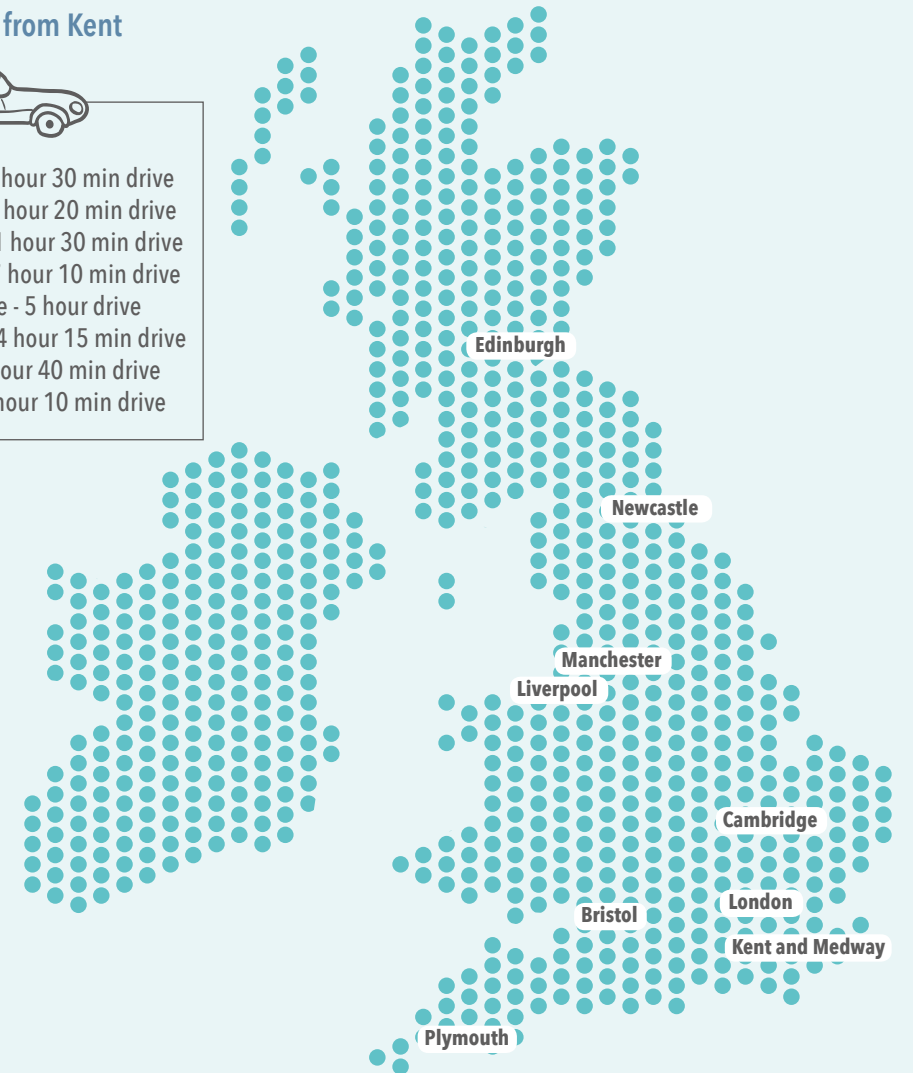
Universities

 7. **Canterbury Christ Church University**
(Canterbury, Medway)
www.canterbury.ac.uk
 8. **University for the Creative Arts**
(Canterbury, Rochester, Maidstone)
www.uca.ac.uk
 9. **University of Greenwich**
(Medway)
www.gre.ac.uk
 10. **University of Kent**
(Canterbury, Medway)
www.kent.ac.uk

Travel times from Kent



- Kent to Liverpool - 4 hour 30 min drive
- Kent to Plymouth - 4 hour 20 min drive
- Kent to Cambridge - 1 hour 30 min drive
- Kent to Edinburgh - 7 hour 10 min drive
- Kent to Newcastle - 5 hour drive
- Kent to Manchester - 4 hour 15 min drive
- Kent to Bristol - 2 hour 40 min drive
- Kent to London - 1 hour 10 min drive



WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

Complete University Guide – An independent guide offering a wide range of information and advice about universities, courses, careers and student fees.
www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk

I could – Provides progression route advice and inspiration in the form of career-related videos.
www.icould.com

Informed Choices – Advice from the Russell Group about choosing GCSE and A-level subjects.
www.russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5320/informedchoices.pdf

Kent and Medway Progression Federation – Access the 'Activity Portal' and find out about activities, events and open days available to students, run by institutions offering higher education courses in Kent and Medway.
www.kmpf.org



National Careers Service – Independent advice about progression routes and choosing qualifications.
www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/

Not Going to University – Information for students who are considering alternative options to university.
www.notgoingtouni.co.uk

Open Days – The university and college open day directory.
www.opendays.com

Plotr – Interactive quizzes that help you to find the right career.
www.plotr.co.uk

Prospects – Search for careers to find out what is involved, and what the routes are for getting there.
www.prospects.ac.uk

Student Finance – Find out how much university is going to cost, what type of financial help and support to which you may be entitled, and how to apply for it.
www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance
www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/undergraduate-finance-and-support

The Student Room – Be a part of this online student community where you can access student guides and chat with other students.
www.thestudentroom.co.uk

Which? University – Provides information about applying to universities and choosing the right course and institution.
www.university.which.co.uk

UCAS – The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.
www.ucas.com

UK Course Finder – Helps you find the most suitable course for you through a questionnaire.
www.ukcoursefinder.com

Union View – Film clips of students discussing their university and showing the campuses and surrounding areas.
www.unionview.com

Unistats – The official website for comparing data on courses and universities.
www.unistats.direct.gov.uk



The Russell Group



University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
Cardiff University
Durham University
University of Edinburgh
University of Exeter
University of Glasgow
Imperial College London
King's College London
University of Leeds
University of Liverpool

London School of Economics and Political Science
University of Manchester
Newcastle University
University of Nottingham
University of Oxford
Queen Mary University of London
Queen's University Belfast
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University College London
University of Warwick
University of York



HIGHER EDUCATION GLOSSARY

Adjustment – a system where students whose exam results meet or exceed those required by their firmly accepted conditional offer have up to five days to look for an alternative course without losing their confirmed place.

BA – Bachelor of Arts degree

BEng – Bachelor of Engineering degree

BSc – Bachelor of Science degree

Bursary – money given to students which does not have to be paid back.

Buzzword – a word chosen by your school or college when they register with UCAS. You will need this buzzword when you first set yourself up on UCAS so that you are linked to the correct school or college.

Campus – the buildings and grounds of a university or college.

Clearing – a system which enables students to apply for a place on a course with vacancies, at the end of the application cycle.

Conditional offer – an offer of a place made by a university which has certain conditions attached to it that a student has to meet in order to secure their place, such as the achievement of certain grades.

Deferral – an agreement between a university and student for the student to delay starting their course until the following year.

Degree apprenticeship – Similar to higher apprenticeships but provides an opportunity to earn a Bachelor's or Master's degree while earning a paid salary. See page 15.

Extra – The system which allows students who made five choices on their UCAS application but are not holding any offers, to apply for another course. This takes place before Clearing starts.

FE – Further education. FE usually refers to study that is taken after statutory schooling is finished but below higher education level.

Firm offer – The offer of a place which the student has accepted as being their first choice.

Foundation degree – A vocational degree that includes work-based learning and is completed in a shorter amount of time than a full degree. Students can usually go on to do an extra year or two at the end of the Foundation degree to receive a full Honours degree.

Foundation year (also called Year 0) – Only available in some subjects. For students who have not met the degree entry requirements, the foundation year enables them to do some preparatory study for the degree. Successful completion usually guarantees a place on the full degree course.

Fresher – This is the name given to a student who is just starting their time at university.

Gap year – A year away from study, most frequently between the end of school or college and the start of higher education.

Graduate – A person who has been awarded a degree from a higher education institution.

Halls – The Halls of Residence are blocks of accommodation on campus for students. Priority is usually given to first year students.

HE – Higher education. Study at degree level or higher. HE courses are offered at universities and some colleges.

Higher apprenticeship – Provides students with the opportunity to gain a higher education qualification while earning a salary. See page 14.

HNC/HND – Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma. See page 14 for a full explanation.

Honours degree – A qualification awarded by a higher education institution after the satisfactory completion of a Bachelor degree programme. When studying for a Bachelor's degree with honours, students are required to pass a higher number of credits than if studying for an ordinary degree. As such, a degree with honours is held in higher esteem.

Insurance – The offer of a place which the student has accepted as being their second choice.

Joint honours degree – A combined degree in more than one subject.

Lecture – A discussion and presentation delivered by a university or college lecturer while students take notes.

Master's degree – A higher level degree which can be taken after satisfactory completion of a first degree. Also known as a postgraduate qualification.

Oxbridge – an informal term to describe the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate in Education. A teacher training course taken after successful completion of a degree.

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy. A qualification beyond a Master's degree level which is the culmination of years of research in a specific subject area.

Postgraduate courses – Higher level courses, usually taken only after successful completion of a degree.

Reading week – A period during the university term when there are no taught sessions and students are expected to work on their own study and research.

Russell Group – A group of 24 leading UK universities, set up as a collaborative group in 1994. Places at Russell Group universities are generally the most competitive. They include Oxford and Cambridge.

Sandwich year – A year of work or study abroad as part of your course. This usually takes place before your final year.

Scholarship – Financial help awarded to students by an institution.

Single honours degree – A degree in a single subject.

Seminar – a classroom based activity that is more interactive than a lecture. Discussion is usually based on course material.

Students' Union – A student organisation present in most universities and colleges. It is there to represent students on local and national issues, as well as organising many activities for students on campus.

Tariff points – The points system attributed to entry qualifications for HE courses.

Top-up year – For students who have successfully completed an HND or foundation degree and want to progress onto the final year of an honour's degree programme.

Track – Accessed online through UCAS. This is where students track the progress of their application, receive information on offers made, and reply to offers.

Tuition fees – These are the fees charged by universities and colleges for their courses.

Tutorial – A one-to-one discussion session with your tutor about your work or issues with the course.

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Almost all students applying for full-time higher education courses in the UK apply through UCAS.

Unconditional offer – An offer of a place made by a university or college with no conditions attached to it.

Undergraduate – A student who is in the process of studying for their first degree.

Vocational course – A work-related programme of study designed to help you into a specific career.

Work-based learning – learning which takes place in a work environment.

DEADLINE CALENDAR

The dates included here are approximate. It's important to check exact dates via the UCAS website, as these may change each year. Key dates for UK Conservatoires and Open University courses may also vary.

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
<p>Early September: UCAS applications open for courses starting next year</p>	<p>October 15th: Application deadline for medicine, dentistry and veterinary courses, and for Oxford and Cambridge Universities.</p>		
JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
<p>January 15th: Application deadline for most courses, other than those with October and March deadlines.</p>	<p>Late February: Extra opens</p>	<p>Mid-March: Application deadline for some art and design courses (although some have January 15th deadline).</p> <p>End of March: Universities will usually have made their decisions by this stage.</p>	
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
<p>Early May: University and college decisions due on applications submitted by January 15th.</p>	<p>End of June: Applications received after this date will automatically be entered into Clearing.</p>	<p>Early July: Last date to apply through Extra.</p> <p>Early July: Clearing opens.</p>	<p>Mid-August: A-level results published. Adjustment opens for registration.</p> <p>End of August: Remaining offer conditions must be met by this date. Adjustment period ends.</p>
SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
<p>Mid to late September: Final opportunity to apply for courses starting this year.</p> <p>End of September: Clearing vacancies removed from UCAS search tool.</p>	<p>Late October: The last opportunity to add Clearing choices and for universities and colleges to accept Clearing applicants.</p>		

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www.kmpf.org