

University?



College?



# Thinking about Higher Education?

An introductory guide to university and college for young people



# Are you:

- Aged 13-16?
- Thinking about what you might like to do when you leave school?
- Interested in finding out more what studying at university would be like?

## If so, this guide is for you!

This guide is designed to give you an overview of what life is like at university and also answer any questions you might have.



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# What is higher education?

Higher education is the term used to describe courses of study in universities and colleges that are at a higher level than you can do at school, which lead to qualifications called degrees or diplomas.

Most people start higher education courses at age 17 or 18, after studying in the sixth form/year at school, or at college. Some students may decide to take a year out first or may even come back to studying later in life as a mature student.

Higher education courses are available at a wide range of universities and colleges all over the UK, and there are currently more than 40,000 courses and 300 different places to choose from.

# Why go to university or college?

For a variety of reasons:

- **To study a particular subject in more depth**

You may already enjoy a particular subject at school – like English, French, Chemistry, Maths or Music, or you may want to branch out into a new area – e.g. to study Surveying because you like Geography, or Zoology because you enjoy Biology.

- **The career you are interested in may require a degree level qualification**

To become a doctor, dentist, architect, town planner, teacher, lawyer or chartered engineer, for example. Or you may be interested in one of the many high-level jobs that are open to people with degrees or diplomas – in management, marketing, banking, administration etc.

- **For the university experience**

Higher education isn't just about studying. Being a student at university or college widens your experience of the world – you meet new people from all over the UK and overseas and from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. You are also offered a range of exciting opportunities for your social life as well as your studies, and you have the opportunity to leave home if you want to! This makes your time in higher education an all-round experience as well as a chance to develop a range of skills, which are highly valued by employers.

# University word buster (Match the words to the definitions)



- The buildings and surroundings of the university.
- The most common qualification awarded by a university, usually after completing a minimum of three years of studying.
- Pieces of written work, which are submitted by students to the university and are one way of testing what students have learned.
- When students begin their time at a university they are often referred to as this. There is also a whole week dedicated to introducing these students to university life.
- A person who has successfully completed a university course.
- This is one of the ways you'll be taught at university. These can vary in size from about 30 to over 200 students. Usually a member of the university teaching staff will give a presentation whilst students make notes.
- This is the formal process of entering a university, it can involve a ceremony at the beginning of your first year. Some universities use the words 'enrolment' or 'registration' instead.
- A person who has returned to study a course at university that is at a higher level than the first course they completed. These courses are often called Masters or PhDs.
- Contains information about the institution and the available courses, including advice on how to apply and the benefits of accepting a place.
- These are where groups of students meet to discuss a subject with a university teacher. They are generally student-led and interactive.
- A person who is currently studying to complete their first course at university. This usually takes three or four years of full-time study.

# How is university different to school?

## Course Choices

Generally in school students tend to study around 8-12 different subject areas depending upon which qualifications they are taking, whether GCSEs, BTECs, NVQs or Standard Grades. This is usually from a choice of about 15-20 which might be offered within a typical secondary school.

At university level, students will often just concentrate on one or two main subject areas. However this is from a choice of approximately 40,000 different courses that are on offer around the UK.

## Extra-Curricular Activities

Just like in school, universities offer lots of activities for you to take part in, when you aren't studying or revising. They run a huge variety of clubs and societies, which range from sports clubs, community groups, student newspapers, radio stations, political and religious groups. There are also student drama societies and music groups of all kinds, from choirs and orchestras, to helping out backstage at gigs, which anyone with interest and enthusiasm can join. These aren't just limited to sports, arts and music; they can be as varied as the Cheesy Pop Appreciation Club; for all of you Justin Bieber and One Direction fans or the PS3 Lovers' Group; for those whose thumbs are up to it!

## Moving away from home

For the majority of people, whilst they are studying at school they will also be living at home with parents or carers. Going to university can give some students their first opportunity of moving out of home and living independently, alongside other students. There is a lot to consider when moving away and universities offer different sorts of accommodation and living arrangements. You can find out more about these later on in this guide.



# Course choices

You can study any subject that you have already studied at school, or you can try something new.

- For example, if you are good at Biology and Chemistry you might like to study Medicine, Microbiology, Physiological Sciences, Marine Biology, Environmental Science, Agriculture or Human Nutrition, to name just a few.
- If you enjoy History at school, you might choose a course in Archaeology, Ancient History, Egyptology, Classical Studies, Politics or International Relations.
- Skills in Maths or Physics could prepare you to study Engineering, Astronomy or Economics.
- Many other subjects are on offer too. For example: Art and Design, Computer Science, Travel & Tourism, Media Studies, Music Technology, Architecture, Physiotherapy, Sports Science, Law or Business Management.

You don't have to choose just one subject. Joint or dual honours courses let you combine two subjects (e.g. History and Politics, Business and French, Physics and Maths) and some combined studies courses can be even more flexible.

Most universities and colleges now use a modular structure for many of their qualifications. This means that their courses consist of units called modules, which are combined to make up a complete degree, diploma or foundation degree programme, which often makes it easy to study a selection of modules from different subjects within your single qualification.

The University year is in most cases split into two semesters, which are made up of 12 weeks teaching and three weeks for revision and exams (e.g. September to December, with exams in January, and February to May, with exams in June). Many courses are also assessed by coursework and assessments throughout the term and the number of exams you have, will depend on the course that you have chosen.

Some courses include a whole year or a number of shorter periods working in industry or business. These are often known as sandwich courses. Other courses, like modern languages usually include a year working or studying abroad. Many courses in a wide variety of other subjects also offer you the opportunity to study abroad, as part of an exchange programme.



With over 40,000 courses to choose from, it is impossible to mention them all, below are six main areas that many of these courses will fall in to. See if you can think of one or two extra for each of the areas and some jobs you might work in with those subject areas.

### **Arts & Languages:**

Architecture, Fashion, Fine Art, Costume Design, Photography, French, Hispanic Studies, Arabic, German with Festival & Events Management

### **Business:**

International Management, Accounting & Finance, Business & Marketing, Public Relations

### **Technology & Engineering:**

Software Engineering & Computer Forensics, Civil Engineering, Motorsport Engineering, Radio Production, Surf Science & Technology

### **Science:**

Animal Science, Science & Football, Physics & Astronomy, Chemistry & Education

### **Medical & Health Science:**

Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, Nursing, Midwifery, Paramedic Studies, Optometry

### **Social Science:**

Politics, Criminology, Psychology, Youth & Community Development, Police Studies



# Accommodation options

You can choose whether you want to live at university or whether you want to stay at home.

There will of course be some things to consider when making this decision:

- **Some universities are in the centre of large cities whilst some are located in the countryside. If you don't live near to a university, then you need to decide whether it is practical to travel there from your home, every day.**
- **Some universities are split across a few different sites whilst others are on purpose built, self-contained sites, called campuses. Many of these campuses have student accommodation on them, meaning it is only a five or ten minute walk to your lectures each day.**

You can choose to apply anywhere in the UK, regardless of where your home is. Many students make the most of the opportunity to leave home, but others will decide to continue living with their family.

## Halls of Residence

This is a big 'student hotel' where you get your own private bedroom but share facilities such as kitchen and bathroom with other students. It is a great way to make new friends when you first start university as the size of the halls can vary, with up to 300 people all living together. Halls of Residence also include your food, which means you don't have to worry about learning to cook straight away!

## Self-Catered Flats

These are similar to Halls of Residence, but the main difference is that you don't get any meals provided and so need to cook for yourself - or eat out! In flats you will usually have a private bedroom and bathroom but will then share a living area and kitchen with about five or six other students.

## Student House

After the first year at university is over, many students decide to move into a house with a small number of their closest friends. It is just like living in a house like many of you will be doing now, but it does come with the added responsibility of doing your own cooking, cleaning and paying your own bills! However it is good preparation for when you do need to move out permanently and get your own house or flat.





# Clubs and societies at university

Joining a club or society at university is a great way to make friends and can also help you gain valuable skills that will be useful later in life. There are 100's of clubs and societies ranging from sports teams to music groups, art clubs to volunteering. What sort of society would you like to set up when you join university?

Be creative and try to think of something that nobody else can. It could be to do with your favourite programme, band, hobby or pastime.

What would the club be called?

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Who would it appeal to?

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If you were given £50 by the university, what would you buy to help start up the society?

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What would you do at the group meetings?  
Where could you go on trips?

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Universities are always keen to help start up new societies and clubs, so with a bit of luck, you can be the president of this society in a few years' time!

# Money Matters

The closer you get to applying to university, the more you will hear about the costs and also the support that is available. The following is a very simple introduction to how you might manage your money whilst at university.

## Tuition Fees

This is the money that is paid to the university to fund your course and currently all universities charge fees. Which country of the UK that you live in, will determine how much you have to pay.

## Student Loan

All students are able to borrow money to pay for their tuition fees and also to pay for any living costs that they have. This can include money for rent, books, clothes, bills etc.

## Bursary

This is free money that you can get from universities; this never needs to be paid back. It can be used to help with your living costs and is given to students depending upon their background.

## Scholarship

This is another type of free money that you can get from universities and is often a reward for academic, sporting, musical or voluntary achievements.

## Grant

This is free money that is awarded from the government to help students fund university. Amounts are dependent on the student's family background.

## Managing your money

As you can see from the above list, there is quite a lot of financial support when it comes to paying for life at university. The most important thing is to budget your money and make sure that you are sensible throughout the year.

Can you think of three other ways, apart from those mentioned above, how you might increase the amount of money you have at university? (Part time job, Christmas/birthdays, help from parents/family.)

Thinking about what we have looked at so far in this guide, can you think of ten things you might need to spend money on whilst at university?

## Useful links

- [www.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.gov.uk/studentfinance)
- [www.wales.gov.uk/sfwpartnersub/home/news](http://www.wales.gov.uk/sfwpartnersub/home/news)
- [www.delni.gov.uk/index/further-and-higher-education](http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/further-and-higher-education)
- [www.saas.gov.uk](http://www.saas.gov.uk)

# What is life as a student really like?

Across the next few pages are interviews with four typical students, answering questions about all different parts of university life. Next time you meet somebody who is going to university, have a think about the questions you might want to ask them!

**Name: Thomas**  
**Course: Sport Development**

## What were you most looking forward to when coming to university?

I was really looking forward to meeting new people, all with a variety of backgrounds and interests. I was nervous but excited about being given more independence in terms of living, free time and the way in which you tackle your studies at university compared with school.

## What were your main concerns about coming to university?

I was worried that with so many courses to choose from, I might make the wrong decision. I really enjoyed PE at schools and I am interested in working in schools, clubs and the community with people who want to develop their sporting abilities. The university recommended this course to me and it was definitely the right choice for me.

## What would be your top tip to anyone who is considering university?

It would definitely be to visit a university yourself and meet as many students as you can. When I was in Year 11 I had never even seen what a university looked like, but after going on a school trip, I met lots of current students and some of the teaching staff. Nobody in my family had ever studied at university, so it was hard to find people to ask what it was like. That trip made me realise that if I worked hard I could get to university and I am now studying a course that I love!

**Name: Samantha**  
**Course: Architecture**

## How did you find settling in to university life?

I moved into Halls of Residence in my first year, which was a great way to make lots of new friends very quickly. I met lots of people who lived on my corridor and then meal times in the canteen were another good chance to make new friends. I had also always wanted to play hockey, but never gave it a go whilst in school, so decided to try out for the university team. I now have training twice a week and play a match once a week, this again is another great chance to meet new people.

# What is life as a student really like?

## Was money a big worry for you?

I got a full student loan to pay for my fees, which I don't need to pay back until I get a well paid job, so that was a big relief. I lived with my mum and younger brother when I was at school and because my mum only worked part-time, I was entitled to a lot of 'free money' from both the government and the university I am attending. This has meant I don't have to worry about the cost of living in Halls of Residence, as I use my grant and bursary to pay my rent. I also have a part-time job in a local restaurant which gets me some extra pocket money for new clothes and trips out with my friends.

## What would be your top tip to anyone who is considering university?

Start doing your research into courses that you are interested in, as early as possible. I was always interested in art and design, but never really knew about what an architect did. I ended up taking a gap year at the end of Year 13 to get some work experience and find out more about what it would be like to study Architecture. If I had been a little bit more organised then I could have done this during sixth form and in my holidays, but I am glad that I finally got on the course I wanted to do.

**Name:** Daryl  
**Course:** Social Work

## When did you decide you wanted to come to university?

From the age of 12 I grew up in foster care and always wanted to finish school as soon as possible and get a job. At first I left school at 16 with three GCSEs and spent a year trying to get a job I enjoyed and that paid well. Only when I was 18 did I decide to go back to college and resit some of my GCSEs. I achieved six passes including my English and Maths and so decided to carry on at college and studied for a further two years to achieve a BTEC Diploma. This enabled me to apply to university and secure a place on a course.

## How did you decide which accommodation to live in?

As I had already lived for two years on my own before starting university I was worried that I wouldn't enjoy living in a large Halls of Residence and asked to stay in a flat on my own. The university's Care Leaver Support Worker recommended that I moved into a shared flat, so that I wouldn't be on my own, but would still have my own personal bedroom and bathroom. This was great advice, as two of the people in my flat are now my two best friends. The university also has a great policy for care leavers, which means I can stay in my flat all year round and don't have to worry about finding different accommodation during the Christmas and summer holidays.

What is a typical day like for you?

The great thing about the course I am on is that every day is different! I have a few weeks each year when I am attending lots of lectures and seminars, but then I will have a few months when I will be out on a placement, working with a local Social Work agency or department. The placements are great in that they allow me to experience first hand how to carry out the role of a social worker and also give me the opportunity to decide which areas of social work I like the most. I don't really have much time for a part-time job, but the financial support from the university I receive for being a care leaver means I am able to save this to spend on essentials such as transport and textbooks.

Make a list of questions here that you would want answered from a current university student:

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Name: Quincy  
Course: English Literature

Did you always know you wanted to come to university?

Both of my parents have been to university and they always told me what a great experience it was for them. They both studied Medicine and encouraged me to study a course that I really enjoyed as well. I have always loved reading and studying literature and hope one day to become a teacher or a lecturer.

Was money a big worry for you?

I worked really hard at my GCSEs and managed to achieve 3A's in my A-Levels. Due to this, I was awarded a scholarship by the university I am at. This was a great help as I wasn't eligible for any grants or bursaries but I did get a loan for my fees, which anyone is entitled to.

Do you have much spare time?

I am in lectures for twelve hours per week and have to put aside about the same for reading and writing essays. In addition I am the President of the Film Society, which meets twice a month and has about fifty members. Everybody in the society gets together and watches a film before all sitting around and discussing it. We bring popcorn and drinks and it is a great way to meet new friends who have similar interests. It has also broadened my knowledge of films and encouraged me to watch movies that I would never usually have considered.

# Where to go next?

## 14-16 qualifications

You will keep your options open if you have passes in a range of subjects as this gives universities and colleges a good indication of your academic ability. Check out the UCAS website for information on grades required for subjects like English and Maths as these are important to do well in at an early stage. Increasingly universities (and employers) look at your grades from these years at school. You will also need to be aware of your own schools' sixth form/year entry requirements or those of your local college.

## Post-16 qualifications

The main routes people take are either to stay on at school or go to college after doing their GCSEs or Standard Grades. Many of these students will take a number of subjects, whilst others may opt to study for an equivalent vocational qualification. There are many other equivalent qualifications that students may study for, including the BTEC Diploma, Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, International Baccalaureate or Welsh Baccalaureate.

## University entry requirements

Each course at university has its own specific entry requirements. If you want to study Medicine you will need to study a couple of science subjects, usually including Chemistry and Biology and for many engineering courses you may need both Maths and Physics. There are also many courses that do not require any particular subjects and this is because you will start the subject from scratch at

university. For some courses, such as Psychology, a science or maths background may be helpful. For others, a mixture of arts and science may be desirable. For all these courses you will need good grades in whatever subjects you have taken and you will have to show that you really are the right sort of person to do well in that subject. In Scotland (where many degree courses last four years rather than three) it may not be necessary to study a particular school subject before studying that subject at university or college.

## What else do universities and colleges look for?

When you apply for a place at a university or college, admissions staff will also look at what you have done outside your studies – your hobbies and interests both in school/college and outside. They take notice of experience such as work placements or voluntary work and any positions of responsibility that you may have held either in school or elsewhere. This additional background information helps to build up as complete a picture of you as possible, and contributes to decisions whether to offer you a place on your chosen course.

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With over 40,000 different courses and over 300 institutions to choose from, choices regarding progression into university or college can be difficult to make. And what are the reasons for going on to higher education in the first place?

HELOA is the professional association of staff in higher education who work in the field of education liaison and provide guidance and information to prospective higher education students, their families and advisers.

Established in 1990, the Association now has over 880 members from 138 higher education institutions from across the United Kingdom. Our members work in a wide range of functions within universities, covering areas of schools and colleges liaison, student recruitment, widening participation, external relations, marketing, publications and publicity and student services.

For more information about HELOA and the services that our members offer, please visit our website [www.heloa.ac.uk](http://www.heloa.ac.uk)

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