CHOOSING A COURSE AND A UNIVERSITY

If you decide to pursue your studies at a higher level, it is important that you choose the right course, and the right university for you. You may think all universities are very similar and this is true, up to a point. All will boast excellent teaching and social facilities, but what is right for one person may be wrong for another. You can put up to five universities on your UCAS form, so it is important to research each of your choices carefully.

UCAS website:
- One-stop-shop for finding out everything you need to know about applying to university
- Over 300 institutions and over 37,000 courses to choose from
- The search function allows you to list every institution that offers the course you are interested in
- Have a look at http://www.ucasconnect.com. You can pick up lots of useful information about starting university, read blogs, get instant answers to your questions, watch online seminars from UCAS events, and watch videos through UCAStv.

Prospectuses and university websites
- These are great research tools for getting a general feel for the facilities and courses a university has to offer
- If you can’t attend an open day, many universities offer virtual tours online
- You can usually download the prospectus but hard copies are also available
- Be aware they are marketing tools. Download subject leaflets which will go into more detail about assessment methods

League tables
- University wide league tables provide an objective way of comparing universities
- All employ different weighting systems and use different sources of data which may or may not be supported by the universities
- Your university should meet YOUR criteria; academically, socially and culturally.

Independent assessments
These are usually listed in the prospectus
- NSS (National Student Survey) which is voted for by final year university students and ranks universities and subjects according to a range of different criteria based on student experiences
- RAE (Research Assessment Exercise). A 4* rating indicates that your department is producing world leading research
- TQA (Teaching Quality Assessments). Look out for judgements of confidence in areas such as the quality of learning opportunities, support and advisory services
- Other guides are available such as the Heap Guide and the Virgin Alternative Guide

Choosing a course
- Choose your course first!
- Choose something you enjoy
  - You must be passionate and excited about the subject you wish to study
  - Remember, you could be studying it in depth for 3 or 4 years or more
- Don’t limit your choices to your current studies
  - You can choose to do a single honours (one subject) or a joint honours, (two or more subjects) degree
  - You could explore an element of your current studies ie if you are studying History you could choose to do American History at university
  - You may wish to choose a course that allows progression into industry, gaining professional accreditation as you study
  - You could base your university career on a hobby, for example equine sports or dance
  - You could choose a subject that you haven’t studied before (check entry requirements in the prospectus to make sure you will be eligible to apply)
- Be aware that courses with the same name may have a very different content
  - Make sure your particular interests will be covered in the course/modules
  - If you want a practical or lab side to your course make sure that this is included too. If in doubt, ask!
- Be realistic
  - Be realistic about what you can achieve in terms of entry requirements.
  - If you are predicted 3 Cs, don’t apply for courses that require 3 As
  - It is always good to give yourself something to aim for, so use all your UCAS choices wisely
- Flexible options
  - There are many routes into higher education and you don’t have to commit to a full-time three year course in order to achieve a higher education qualification
  - Many full-time courses can be studied on a part-time basis so you could get a job, earn money and gain work experience as you study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of qualification</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>degree (BA, BSc, BEng etc)</td>
<td>3 or 4 years full-time Up to 6 years part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher National Certificate (HNC)</td>
<td>1 year full-time Part-time option available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher National Diploma (HND)</td>
<td>2 years full-time Part-time option available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation degree</td>
<td>2 years full-time Part-time option available</td>
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Choosing a university

- Do you want a campus or a city university?
  - A campus university means that all lectures, accommodation and catering are available on the same site. Good examples are the University of Kent, University of Surrey and the University of East Anglia.
  - City universities often have their facilities spread out over different sites. Learning and teaching may be in one area, with the accommodation and social facilities at another. Good examples are the University of Cambridge, University of Portsmouth and the University of Bristol.

- Does the university offer the course that suits you?

- How far away is it?
  - Do you want to live at home while at university?
  - Do you want to be close enough to pop home for the weekend with your washing?
  - Do you want to get as far away as possible?

- What are the academic facilities like?
  - Is the library well stocked with up to date resources?
  - How many computers per student?
  - How many lectures/seminars will you have per week?
  - What online learning tools are available?
  - What type of academic feedback will you get?
  - Do they have specific equipment related to your course?

- What are the social facilities like?
  - Is there a Students’ Union?
  - What sporting facilities are available?
  - What clubs/societies are there?
  - Are there any volunteering opportunities?
  - What does the local town/city have to offer?

- If you are moving away from home, what accommodation is available?
  - Universities have accommodation (sometimes known as ‘halls’) to suit most budgets; self-catered, catered, en-suite, shared flats, single/mixed sex houses or flats.
  - Most universities offer accommodation to first years.
  - Halls are a great way to make new friends. You’ll hear this over and over but it’s true: everyone is in the same boat!

- Local area, special interests and practicalities
  - Make sure the university is situated in a place that suits your interests, for example if you’re passionate about rowing make sure your chosen university has a rowing club.
  - Also think about security on campus, how close the university is to the supermarket and what the local transport links are like.

Visit the university

- It is the ONLY way to get a true impression of what the university is like:
  - Make sure you see everything you want to see
  - Talk to lecturers
  - Consider distance from home
  - Visit the accommodation
  - Talk to current students; they will tell you about what it’s like to be a student at the university
  - Ask yourself the question: COULD I SEE MYSELF LIVING AND STUDYING HERE FOR 3 OR 4 YEARS?

Useful websites

www.ucas.com
www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/index.htm
(Young People: Direct Gov)
www.opendays.com
University websites
Student union websites