

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 enter five universities on your UCAS form, so it is important to research each of your choices carefully.

UCAS website

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

Prospectuses and university websites

- These are great research tools for getting a general feel for the courses and facilities a university has to offer.
- You can usually download the prospectus, but hard copies are also available.
- Be aware they are marketing tools. Download subject leaflets as these will have more details about the assessment methods used and the different modules that are available.
- Most prospectuses will have details of open days and opportunities to visit. If you can't attend an open day, look out for virtual tours and other information online.

League tables

- University league tables provide an objective way of comparing universities, but you shouldn't base your final decisions on them.
- All employ different weighting systems and use different sources of data, which may or may not be supported by the universities.
- Remember that the university should meet your criteria; academically, socially and culturally.

The three main undergraduate league tables are:

- *The Complete University Guide*
- *The Guardian University Guide*
- *The Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide*.

Independent assessments

These are usually listed in the prospectus and can include:

- the National Student Survey (NSS): voted for by final year university students and ranks universities and subjects according to a range of different criteria based on student experiences.
- Research Excellence Framework (REF): rates the quality of research produced by the university. A 4* rating indicates world leading research.
- Teaching Quality Assessments (TQA): Look out for judgements of confidence in areas such as the quality of learning opportunities, support and advisory services.

Choosing a course

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 three or four years, or more if you progress to postgraduate study.

Don't limit your choices to your current subjects

- 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. For example, if you are studying History, you could choose American History.
- 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, ie sport or dance.
- You could choose a subject that you haven't studied before. Check the entry requirements in the prospectus to make sure you will be eligible to apply.

Be aware of different course content

- Courses with the same title can have very different content.
- Make sure your particular interests will be covered in the course/modules.
- If you want a practical or laboratory side to your course, make sure that this is included too. If in doubt, ask!

Assessment methods

- At university you can often choose courses that are assessed in the way you perform best.
- If you struggle with exams, you can sometimes choose courses that are assessed mainly on coursework. However, most degrees will contain some exam based assessment.

Be realistic

- Be realistic about what you can achieve in terms of entry requirements.
- If you are predicted three subjects at grade C, don't apply for courses that require three subjects at grade A

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 gain 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.

| Type of qualification | Duration |
|--|--|
| Traditional academic degree (BA, BSc, BEng etc) | Three or four years full-time Up to six years part-time |
| Higher National Certificate (HNC) | One year full-time Part-time option available |
| Higher National Diploma (HND) The HND can be topped up with a final third year in order to earn a Bachelor's degree | Two years full-time Part-time option available |
| Foundation degree | Two years full-time Part-time option available |

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. The University of Kent is an example of a campus university.
- 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.

Does the university offer the course that suits you?

- Choose your course before your university.
- Make sure you research your chosen course so that it meets your requirements.

How far away is the university?

- Do you want to live at home while at university?
- Do you want to be close enough to go home at the weekends?
- Do you want to move away and experience life in another part of the country?

Academic facilities

- 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 and how often?

Social facilities

- Is there a students' union?
- What sporting facilities are available?
- What clubs/societies are there?
- Are there volunteering opportunities?
- What does the local town/city have to offer?
- What kind of induction/welcome events does the university offer?

If you are moving away from home, what accommodation is available?

- Universities have accommodation (sometimes known as 'halls') to suit most budgets. Typical options include: single/mixed sex houses or flats, self-catered, catered, en-suite and shared flats.
- Most universities offer accommodation to new students.
- Living in university accommodation is a great way to make friends.

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.
- If you already have a part-time job, find out if there's a branch near to your chosen university and if you can transfer to that branch during term-time.

Other practicalities

- How close is the university to a supermarket/pharmacy/medical services?
- Is the university on a bus route?
- How close are the nearest railway stations?
- What security measures are there at the university? For example, at Kent, we have Campus Security officers who are on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Visit the university

It's the only way to get a true impression of what the university is like

- Plan ahead: make sure you see everything you want to see.
- Talk to lecturers, university staff and current students to get an impression of what the university is like as a place to study, live and work.
- Consider the distance from where you live.
- Visit the accommodation.
- Ask yourself: "Could I see myself living and studying here for three or four years?"

This leaflet was produced in October 2018. The University of Kent makes every effort to ensure that the information contained in its publicity materials is fair and accurate and to provide educational services as described. However, the courses, services and other matters may be subject to change. For the most up-to-date information, see: www.kent.ac.uk Full details of our terms and conditions can be found at: www.kent.ac.uk/termsandconditions

Useful websites

www.ucas.com
www.opendays.com
www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk
www.unistats.ac.uk
 University websites
 Students' union websites