

The Higher Education Guide

2011/12

Welcome to the Higher Education Guide

This publication is designed to help you with your higher education decisions.

If you would like further help with your higher education decisions you can contact your Personal Adviser (PA) in School, College or at a Connexions Centre.

Personal Advisers give information, advice, guidance and support to young people aged 13 to 19 (and up to age 25 for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities).

STEP 1 - DEVELOP COURSE IDEAS

Timescale: start in January (of Year 12 normally)

Whatever you decide to study, choose a subject that will hold your interest for at least three years. Whilst some jobs do require a specific degree subject (eg medicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy and engineering), many do not. Most graduate jobs ask for candidates from any degree subject, which means that your career options are wide.

Universities alone offer 900 degree subjects and there are over 60,000 courses in a variety of subjects, both familiar and new.

Think about:

- Continuing with one of your present subjects
- Combining two or more of your current subjects
- Combining a subject that you are studying now with a new one
- Taking a completely new subject or subjects
- Taking a general vocational course linked to a broad occupational area eg business studies, art and design, engineering, travel and tourism
- Choosing a job related course e.g. medicine, optometry, physiotherapy

Software help for developing course ideas

You may wish to do some research using self-assessment and interactive packages.

Computer software programs can help you to develop your course ideas. Some give you the chance to answer a series of questions to match your interests, preferences and abilities with a database of career or course opportunities. You can also use them simply as an information resource.

Here are some examples of software or online resources that can help you. You will be able to use some of these either in school, college or at your local Connexions Centre:

Career matching

Think about your possible career first and then look at HE courses which will help you get to where you want to go.

- **Kudos**
A program to match your interests to careers. Your responses can be saved and re-used/amended at a later date. Ask your Careers Co-ordinator or PA for the password to access this program.

- **ECLIPS**

Use the program's search option to generate suggestions for careers based on factors such as study subjects, work skills and work settings. Ask your Careers Co-ordinator or PA for the password to access this database.

Course matching

- **hotcourses.com** This website at www.hotcourses.com includes course searching for degree and other courses, as well as career search and career comparison information.

Still clueless?

If you are still really not sure what kind of course you would like to do or what job/career you are aiming for then there are two very useful websites that can help you.

- **The Stamford Test** on the UCAS website (www.ucas.com – click on the Students tab > Stamford Test) is designed to help you find the right course for your interests and abilities. Firstly put in your details then you will be asked around 70 questions about your interests before being presented with a list of possible areas of study and future employment and links to relevant course details.
- **UK Course Finder** (www.ukcoursefinder.com) is also a questionnaire-based system (you will need to register to use it). This asks which subjects you like and also which ones you dislike. It will then suggest courses at the type of institutions and geographical areas that you specify. It takes around 15 minutes to complete.

There are many more useful websites which will help with developing your course ideas – see [STEP 2 - Research Your Course Ideas](#) for details. Of course, if you are still stuck you could see your Connexions Personal Adviser at school or at your nearest Connexions Centre.

STEP 2 - RESEARCH YOUR COURSE IDEAS

Timescale: between February and August (of Year 12 normally)

Once you have generated a list of possible course ideas, you will need to use a range of information resources to research them in detail.

Where to begin?

The Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) website is where you will make your application. UCAS also gives you the possibility of beginning your search for HE opportunities online at www.ucas.com.

Other online information

You'll find lots of useful information on the internet. The following sites should help with your research:

- **Websites of individual universities and colleges**
With over 20% of students now intending to live at home while studying at university or college (a growing trend), you may find it useful to look at the websites of places to study in your region.
- It's worth noting that many online prospectuses provide the opportunity to email admissions tutors about courses. Some also provide departmental links, giving you access to lecture notes, reading lists, details of lectures and previous exam papers.
- www.prospects.ac.uk – **Prospects (The Careers Services Unit)**
This website provides information on what you can do after HE (by subject area studied). There are also examples of current graduate vacancies.
- www.unistats.com – **The College and University Comparison Site**
This site allows you to compare information (including UCAS points required for entry) for different subjects and institutions. You can also find out what sort of jobs recent graduates are doing and what thousands of students said about the quality of their HE experience.
- www.skill.org.uk – **Skill (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities)**
For information and advice about applying to higher education, disability support, funding, etc.

Books/publications

Higher education information is also available from books and publications, some of which are listed in this section. Some of these titles should be available in your school or college:

- **Degree Course Offers**
Brian Heap's book includes tables which outline points and grades needed for particular courses. There is also advice on completion of the Personal Statement, typical interview questions and special features of courses.

- **Into Higher Education (Skill: National Bureau for students with Disabilities)**

This book gives useful information about grants and benefits, choosing the right course, making applications, and university and college facilities. It also contains profiles written by disabled students. If needed, further advice and help is available from:

The Skill Information Service, Chapter House, 18 -20 Crucifix Lane, London, SE1 3JW

Telephone: 0800 328 5050

Minicom: 0800 068 2422

Email: info@skill.org.uk

Web: www.skill.org.uk

Other sources of information

- **University / College Staff**

Make direct contact with University/College staff for more help and advice. You can make contact by letter, email or telephone. Check the prospectus or website for details.

- **Admissions or Course Tutors**

Can provide you with more detailed course information, because they are responsible for recruitment and/or teaching the course you are considering. You will be able to find out if you are likely to be interviewed or required to take a test as part of the admission process.

- **School Liaison or Marketing Department**

From here, you can find out about open days and taster courses or arrange an individual visit. Open day visits are highly recommended. Some taster courses are run for applicants of medical and veterinary courses, such as the Medlink and Vet-Medlink courses at www.medlink-uk.com

STEP 3 - FINALISE YOUR COURSE IDEAS

Timescale: by the end of August (the end of Year 12 normally)

When carrying out your research, you need to ensure that your chosen courses and institutions meet your requirements and needs.

You may find it useful to list the criteria which are important to you. Use the following suggestions to make a record through which you can compare course ideas using your own order of priority:

- **Entry requirements (grades / points score needed):** Are they within your reach? Be optimistic but realistic. Talk to your school or college tutors.
- **Location and distance from home:** How far from home do you want to be? Do you want an urban or rural environment?
- **Costs:** Some places are cheaper than others. It's not only London that can be expensive. Are there bursaries available?
- **Accommodation options:** Are all first year students offered accommodation? Is it self-catering or not? What are the extras?
- **Social activities:** What clubs, societies and sporting facilities are there?
- **Part-time work:** Does the institution help and/or encourage this or employ students on site?
- **Academic facilities:** How big is the department? Is ICT/equipment readily available and up to date?
- **Reputation:** What is the quality of teaching and research? What do recent students say about it?
- **Course assessment:** Is it solely examination-based or partly dependent on coursework?
- **Course teaching methods:** What balance is there between lectures, seminars, tutorials, practical or work-related activities?
- **Type and structure of degree or other qualification:** Is it what you're looking for - eg non-vocational, vocational, single honours, joint honours, combined honours, modular or sandwich?
- **Disability support:** Check the disability support provided eg wheelchair access, learning support, assistive technology etc. Does it meet your needs?
- **Study/employment abroad:** Is time abroad an integral part of the course? What are the opportunities to participate in the Erasmus programme?
- **Exemptions from professional examinations:** Does the course have modules which are recognised by professional bodies - eg in law or accountancy?

- **Graduate destinations:** Where do students progress to after completing similar courses - eg what percentage find employment? What variety of careers do they enter?
- **Other:** This is where you add any of your personal priorities.

Use the resources listed in [STEP 2 – Research Your Course Ideas](#) in this section to find the information you need to finalise your course ideas.

Remember:

- You can apply for up to five courses on your UCAS form. You may apply for more than one course at the same university/college but only one of your choices can be for either Oxford or Cambridge.
- No more than four of your choices can be from any one of these following three areas: (i) medicine; (ii) dentistry; (iii) veterinary medicine and veterinary science.
- Make sure you check the application deadlines for any courses you are interested in - eg there is an early closing date of 15 October for Oxford or Cambridge and for any course in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or veterinary science.

STEP 4 - MAKE YOUR APPLICATION

Timescale: ideally, you should be ready to apply in September of Year 13

Once you have chosen up to five courses you will need to make your application.

You can submit your application to UCAS from **1 September**. The closing date is **15 January**, except for Oxford and Cambridge, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and veterinary science applications, when it is **15 October** (earlier by three months).

- Remember to check with your school/college for **internal deadlines** for providing references to accompany your application.

Students on one-year courses prior to applying to HE

If, for example, you are repeating a year to improve your grades, or are a mature student taking an **Access to HE course**, you need to start and finish your course search research very quickly in your first term. Use the resources listed in [STEP 2 – Research your course ideas](#) to find the information you need. Refer to your school/college tutor or seek advice at your local Connexions Centre.

Applying for Art & Design courses

In previous years, there were two routes into Art and Design, but now you apply through the normal route. The only difference is that there are two application deadlines for Art and Design courses – **15 January** and **24 March**. Universities decide which deadline to use for each course.

Applying for courses in Law and Medicine

Certain universities and colleges require prospective students to take an admissions test before being allowed on to certain courses. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure they are entered for these tests, so check if the courses you are interested in require you to sit an admissions test. They include:

- **Cambridge Assessment** (www.admissionstests.cambridgeassessment.org.uk) includes BMAT (**BioMedical Admissions Test**), ELAT (**English Admissions Test**), TSA Oxford, TSA Cambridge, TSA UCL (**Thinking Skills Assessment**) and STEP (**Sixth Term Assessment Paper**).
- **LNAT** (www.lnat.ac.uk) The **National Admissions Test for Law**, or LNAT, is run by a consortium of UK universities. A full list of these universities can be found on the LNAT website. The test helps universities to make fairer choices among the many highly qualified applicants who want to join their undergraduate law programmes. It is an online test with multiple choice and essay questions which are taken at one of their listed centres. There are practice tests on the website.
- **UKCAT** (www.ukcat.ac.uk) The **UK Clinical Aptitude Test** is used in the selection process by a consortium of UK University Medical and Dental Schools. The test helps universities to make more informed choices from amongst the many highly-qualified applicants who apply for their medical and dental degree programmes.

Check the timescale for all admissions tests (registration deadlines may be prior to the deadline for your UCAS application). Plan well ahead to ensure you register for and take any required tests in good time. (Note: there is a fee for the tests mentioned above.)

YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

- Along with your estimated grades and the reference, this is a key section. It is your opportunity to make your application stand out from the rest. A messy and badly-written form, e.g. full of spelling and grammar mistakes, could undermine your chances of success.
- It is important to note that UCAS “Apply” does not have an inbuilt spell-check – so it is a good idea to type up your statement in a word processing application, such as Microsoft Word and then paste it into the UCAS form.
- You are limited to 4,000 characters, including spaces.
- It is vital that your statement is true, accurate and all your own work – UCAS have a system in place to check for plagiarism.
- It is essential to explain the reason behind your selection of courses. In some cases it is linked to your interest in the subject(s). In others your choices may be closely related to your intended career. Remember that each university or college that you have applied to will see the personal statement.
- Include employment, work experience or voluntary work you have done, particularly if it is relevant to the course you are applying for and indicate any skills you have developed.
- Mention if you have been involved in any schemes such as summer schools, mentoring activities, anything to do with the Gifted and Talented programme or any ASDAN certificates (such as the CoPE Qualification).
- Add in details of any other relevant courses you have taken part in, for example Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, Millennium Volunteers, Young Enterprise.
- If you are planning to take a gap year, you need to explain what you are going to be doing.
- Mention hobbies, interests, school or college achievements and positions of responsibility. Do not simply list these – rather you should stress what you have gained by doing these activities.
- Don’t lie on your personal statement, however don’t draw on negative things that have happened to you eg “I play the piano but failed my grade 7”.

WHAT ARE ADMISSIONS TUTORS LOOKING FOR?

- **Intellectual ability**
Can you show you have the ability and personal qualities to cope with the academic and professional demands of the subject and the course?
- **Motivation**
Are your reasons for applying realistic and well thought out?

- **Competitive applicants**
How do you think you will compare to the competition? Is the course you are applying for over-subscribed? If so, how will you make yourself stand out from the crowd?
- **Students who will make a contribution**
Do you participate in class/group discussions? Do you join in with college or school life? Mention this on your personal statement.
- **Applicants who are likely to get the grades/points**
Have you checked the course requirements? Ask your subject tutors about your predicted grades – do they match up with the course requirements? If not, you may get a straight rejection.

Entry Profiles

Check out university or college websites to find out if they include specific information on which entry criteria admissions tutors are looking for. Admission criteria profiles provide detailed information on entry qualifications and any other criteria used to select applicants.

Interviews

Fewer universities are now offering interviews to applicants so this increases the importance of the Personal Statement on the UCAS application form. However, should you be called for an interview, it is important to be well-prepared.

The following is a checklist to help you prepare for that interview:

- Read “Degree Course Offers” and “Choosing Your Degree Course and University”, both by Brian Heap. The former book gives examples of typical interview questions and interview preparation for subject areas. The latter gives descriptions of degree courses including content
- Plan your Journey
- Practice talking about yourself
- Dress smartly – this does not have to mean formally
- Arrive in plenty of time eg 10 minutes early
- Re-read the prospectus, course details and your UCAS application
- Be prepared to explain why you have applied for that particular course
- Have some questions prepared about the course or institution that you can ask at the interview
- Check to see if your school or college can arrange a mock interview for you.

FACTS ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FULL-TIME STUDENTS

You might have heard reports of changes English universities and colleges will make in 2012. Don't be put off – the system is designed so that students from England studying full-time for their first degree or other higher education course will not have to pay anything while they study. More details are given here:-

From September 2012, universities and others providing higher education will be able to charge up to £6,000 a year for their courses¹. Some will be able to charge up to £9,000 a year – to do so they will need to meet strict criteria to make sure that all eligible students, regardless of background, can access those courses. Please contact the relevant university or college for further information.

Full-time students who are studying for their first degree or other higher education course can benefit from a range of financial support.

No upfront costs

- You don't have to pay for your course yourself upfront.
- You can get a loan to cover the cost of your tuition, which you only start to pay back when you are earning over £21,000 a year.

Loans for living costs

- Available to help with living costs such as food, accommodation and travel.
- A loan of up to £5,500 will be available if you live away from home and study outside London.
- A larger loan of up to £7,675 will be available if you live away from home and study in London.
- A loan of up to £4,375 will be available if you live with your parents.

Non-repayable grants

- Available to help with living costs such as food, accommodation and travel.
- If your household income is up to £25,000 you will be entitled to a full grant, of £3,250, which you won't have to pay back.
- If your household income is between £25,000 and £42,600 you would be entitled to a grant of between £50 and £3,250, which you won't have to pay back.

¹ Tuition charges for courses at private higher education institutions are not subject to this limit. You may still be able to apply for support for your tuition and maintenance if you are studying at a private university or college, and their admissions offices will have the details.

£150million National Scholarship Programme

- Will be introduced from 2012 and worth £150million a year by 2014/15 to help people from lower income households.
- Details will be available on UCAS and university websites from Summer 2011.

How loan repayments are expected to work²

- You only start to pay back when you are earning over £21,000 a year.
- You repay 9% of your income above £21,000. So, for example, if your salary was £25,000, the 9% would only apply to £4,000, meaning you would repay £30 per month.³
- If your salary falls below £21,000, your repayments stop – for example if you take a career break or are unemployed. Repayments only start again when you earn over £21,000.
- Loan repayments will be deducted from your salary, normally through the tax system.
- If you have not repaid your loan after 30 years it is written off

Rates of interest

The Government's plans^o are that:

- Interest on your loan will be applied at inflation (RPI – Retail Price Index) plus 3% while you are studying, and up until the April after you leave university.
- From the April after you leave university or college, if you are earning below £21,000, interest will be applied at the rate of inflation.
- For graduates earning between £21,000 and £41,000, interest will be applied between RPI and RPI + 3% on a gradual scale depending on income.
- For graduates earning above £41,000, interest will be applied at RPI + 3%.

² Subject to Parliamentary approval.

³ Depending on the outcome of the Government's forthcoming consultation, a charge may be applied to any additional payments to repay part or all of a loan early

^oSubject to Parliamentary approval.

Frequently asked questions

Eligibility

Q: I am a student from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland – will this apply to me?

A: No. Students who normally live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland will receive financial support for university from the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government or the Northern Ireland Executive (as appropriate).

Q: I am an EU student intending to study in England – will this apply to me?

A: EU students from outside the UK that meet certain eligibility criteria will have access to a loan to cover the cost of their tuition. They will generally not be entitled to support for their living costs.

Q: I am studying on a part-time course – will this apply to me?

A: Part-time students studying at least 25% of the intensity of a full-time course will also have access to a loan to cover the cost of their tuition. More details on this will be available in due course.

Repayments

Q: Will loan repayments affect my ability to take out a loan?

A: This would be a decision for the loan provider, but student loan information won't be shared with credit reference agencies by Student Finance England.

Q: Will loan repayments affect my ability to get a mortgage?

A: The Council of Mortgage Lenders has advised that a student loan is very unlikely to impact materially on an individual's ability to get a mortgage. The amount of mortgage available may depend on net income.

Q: What control do graduates have over how much they pay back per month?

A: Graduates do not have control over how much they repay each month via the tax system.

For more information about the financial support available and the benefits of going to university or college, visit www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance

WEBLINKS

Hotcourses.com

This website has lots of information with all sorts of search techniques. You can search by course or institution and browse course “categories” if you’re looking for ideas. Hotcourses also provides careers information and you can even compare careers if you’re in two minds about what you’d like to do. The site also has a funding search facility, so that you can find out if you might be eligible for funding awards.

Web: www.hotcourses.com

Prospects – The UK’s Official Graduate Careers Website

This website is full of information and useful for people considering HE, already in HE or just looking for some careers information. Find out about different careers and job sectors, what jobs would suit you, working abroad, earnings, graduate employers and much more. There are also advice and Frequently Asked Questions sections, useful links and message boards.

Web: www.prospects.ac.uk

Push – The Ruthlessly Independent University Guide

Push is aimed at prospective students to help them make the right choice of university or college. The information is compiled by students and recent graduates. There are league tables and a search facility that will give you a shortlist of universities based on your own criteria.

Web: www.push.co.uk

Skill (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities)

This site has information for students with any disability who are interested in applying to HE. Topics covered include applying for a course, disability support and student experiences in HE. It also has a database that provides contact details for the disability coordinators at universities and colleges providing HE courses.

Web: www.skill.org.uk

UCAS – Universities & Colleges Admissions Service

UCAS is the main organisation through which applications for higher education in the United Kingdom are processed. The website provides a range of useful information and facilities, including a test which can help you find subject areas of interest, a course search facility, on-line application and application tracking, and a tariff calculator (to help you figure out how many points your grades equal for entry to HE).

Telephone: 01242 222444

Web: www.ucas.com

CUKAS – Conservatoires UK Admission Service

This is the online admission service for applications to study music at a music conservatoire. The website provides information for prospective students and the facilities to research and apply for practice-based music courses at UK Conservatoires

Web: www.cukas.ac.uk

Unistats - The College and University Comparison Site

This site allows you to compare information (including UCAS points required for entry) for different subjects and institutions. You can also find out what sort of jobs recent graduates are doing.

Web: www.unistats.com

Unofficial Guides

For the “unofficial” lowdown on UK universities, together with advice, links and other useful information. You can get current students’ opinions on the university or HE college you’re considering, together with inside information on accommodation, facilities, social life etc.

Web: www.unofficial-guides.com