

GOING TO UNIVERSITY?

Thinking about going to university?

Maybe you'd like to find out more before deciding if it's the right choice for you.

Perhaps you're already sure that university is your best option, but you'd still like to know more.

Either way, choosing to study for a degree is a life-changing decision and one that deserves lots of thought and preparation.

Before you start thinking about choosing what and where to study, it's worth asking yourself one very important question.

WHY GO TO UNIVERSITY?

Good reasons for going

Here are a few good reasons for going to university. You may want to:

- get into a particular career or type of career, and a degree will give you the skills, knowledge and qualifications you need to get in
- study a subject you really love to a higher level

- have a wider choice of career options, many careers are open to graduates of any discipline
- improve your chances of getting a better paid job
- study a new subject that's only available at university
- develop your full potential and get the highest academic qualification you can
- become more independent, and take responsibility for your own learning.

Everyone's reasons will be different. What are yours?

Dubious reasons for going

Here are some dubious reasons for going to university. You may:

- feel it's expected of you because you get good grades
- go because 'everyone else' you know is going
- fancy the student social life, but not the reading, research and exams
- think it's your only option.

Of course the views of people who are important to you do matter, but they won't be doing the course. You will!





CHOOSING WHAT TO STUDY

Choosing what to study can be tough, unless you have a definite career in mind, for example medicine or dentistry. There's so much choice, and so many subjects you never even knew existed, like Ethical Hacking!

So, it's time for some serious thinking and a lot of research.

How to start making your choice?

Ask yourself the following questions.

- Which subjects interest me enough to keep me motivated for four or more years of study?
- Which subject/s will play to my strengths?
- Which subject or course will help me to achieve my career goals?
- Which type of course will help to keep my career options open? (If you don't have any specific career ideas at the moment.)
- Will the skills and knowledge I have at the end of the course improve my chances of getting a good job?

Remember! Although you need a specific work-related degree to get into some jobs, there are many graduate-entry jobs you can get into with a degree in any subject.



Many university courses permit you to study a number of different subjects in your first year, allowing you to delay your choice of specialism until the second year. Arts, Science and Social Sciences degree courses are particularly flexible.

CHOOSING WHERE TO STUDY

Your next task is to start thinking about where to study. There are a number of factors to take into consideration. As a starting point, find out the following information.

- Which universities offer the course you want to do?
- What facilities do the universities have?
- How do the universities rank in certain areas, such as subject and student satisfaction?
- Where are the universities located and can you afford to live away from home?

It's also a good time to sit down and discuss these things with your parents or carers.

Research essentials

Find out which universities, and other higher education institutions, offer the subject or course you want to study. Use the **Planit** website at www.planitplus.net, which lists all full time courses at universities and colleges in Scotland, as well as the **UCAS Search tool** at search.ucas.com

Compare the courses. Subject and course content will vary, as will the structure and teaching methods. Which is the best fit for you? It's important to look at each course in detail, so it's worth getting your own copy of each prospectus.

Get along to university **Open Days** and tour the campus and its facilities. It's really important to get the feel of the place and talk to students and lecturers. Can you picture yourself being happy here?

You may have to book a place to attend. These events are popular so book early!

It's particularly worth looking at certain key facilities, including:

- the academic department you're interested in
- student accommodation (unless you plan to live at home)
- transport links – bus, rail and other services
- the library
- the Students' Union
- student support services
- leisure and sports facilities.

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www.planitplus.net

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Taster courses and summer schools

Many universities and colleges offer short taster courses or programmes which give you the chance to get a taste of student life. Some are aimed at people who have no previous knowledge or family history of college or university. Others are designed to give students an insight into a particular subject or industry.

These are a fantastic way to get some experience of what it's like to study at university. They tend to be really popular so places fill up quickly. Book early to avoid disappointment! Your school will have information on the sessions or programmes you may be able to attend.

Facts and figures

Check out the university's track record for student satisfaction rates, graduate destinations, teaching and research quality and other useful information.

You'll find this type of information here:

- Unistats: unistats.ac.uk
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: www.qaa.ac.uk
- Complete University Guide: www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk
- What do graduates do? UK: www.prospect.ac.uk/what-do-graduates-do

HOW AND WHEN TO APPLY

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) provides an application and admissions service on behalf of all UK universities, and other higher education institutions, except the Open University. You will need to apply online using UCAS Apply (unless you're applying to a conservatoire – see section on UCAS Conservatoires).

You can apply for up to five courses. There is an application fee of £20 for a single course choice or £25 for up to five courses.

Your school or college UCAS adviser will deliver a session on the UCAS application process, and provide you with relevant information and advice. The UCAS website at www.ucas.com/undergraduate covers everything you need to know about completing and submitting your application by the relevant deadline date.

Important dates

UCAS Apply for 2020 is available from May 2019.

Applications should reach UCAS between 5 September 2019 and 15 January 2020, with two main exceptions.

- 1 If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge Universities (you can't apply for both) you must apply by 6pm on 15 October 2019. You can only apply for one course at either of the two universities.
- 2 If you're applying for medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine you must apply by 6pm on



15 October 2019. You can only choose up to four medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or veterinary science courses. You can use your fifth course choice to apply for another subject.

The deadline for late applications through UCAS Apply is 6pm on 30 June 2020. However, we advise you to apply as early as possible as universities and colleges close courses if they already have enough applications.

UCAS Conservatoires

Conservatoires are international centres of excellence which provide specialist professional training in the performing arts. There are eight in the UK, one of which is the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

If you're applying for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland you must apply through UCAS Conservatoires Apply at www.ucas.com/conservatoires.

There is an application fee of £25. You also have to pay an audition fee. For music courses you should apply by 1 October 2019. For other courses you should apply by 15 January 2020.

Please note that there are a few exceptions. For example, if you are applying for the BA Performance in British Sign Language and English (which runs every three years) you must apply directly to the conservatoire by January in the year the course starts.

TUITION FEES, STUDENTS LOANS AND OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDING

Tuition fees

You won't pay any tuition fees if you're a Scottish school leaver and go to college or university in Scotland. The Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) pays the full cost of your course. But, you will need to complete an application form through the SAAS website at www.saas.gov.uk before you begin your course.

That means your only expenses will be living costs such as accommodation (if you move away from home), food, and travel.

However, if you study elsewhere in the UK you'll have to pay your tuition fees yourself. This could be up to £9,250 each year so most people apply for a loan to help cover the cost.

If you complete an HNC or HND at college before moving into the second or third year of a university degree SAAS will pay your tuition fees for an extra year to make sure you're funded for each year of your studies.

Help with living expenses

Although you don't need to pay tuition fees in Scotland, you might need some help to cover your living expenses, especially if you're moving into student accommodation. SAAS provides two main sources of funding, student loans and Young Students' Bursary.

Student loans

Most students apply to SAAS for a student loan to help cover their living expenses. If you live with your parents/carers, depending on household income you can apply for a loan of £4,750 - £5,750. Independent students can apply for a loan of £4,750 - £6,750. Although you need to pay back your student loan, you don't need to start paying until you've completed your course and work in a job that pays more than £18,330 a year.

You can apply from April. If you make a late application after 30th June you may not get your first payment by the start of your course in August or September. Normally, you'll be paid in monthly installments. You get a double payment for your first installment.

You'll find more information on how to pay back your student loan on the Student Loans Company website at www.slc.co.uk.

Young Students' Bursaries

SAAS provides some extra money to students who come from a household with a low income. This payment is called a bursary and you don't have to pay it back. SAAS bursaries range from £500 to £2,000 depending on your household income. There's a chance you could also be eligible for a bursary from the university or college you're applying to. Contact them for more information.

If you'd like to know more about funding your studies, and how to apply, download a copy of the SAAS Funding Guide at www.saas.gov.uk/_forms/funding_guide.pdf

Apply early for your tuition fees, loan and bursary. You can apply as soon as you know which course you want to do. Take care when filling in the form as any mistakes may delay your first instalment!

Need to follow up your application? Phone the SAAS helpline at 0300 555 0505.

Other sources of funding

Other sources of funding are available such as:

- Independent Students' Bursary
- Care Experienced Students' Bursary
- Nursing and Midwifery Bursary
- Dental Student Support Grant (DSSG)
- Supplementary grants and allowances

Not sure if it's for you?

If you're not sure that uni is for you here are just a few examples of alternative options for well-qualified school leavers.

- **College** – most colleges offer a range of higher education courses at different levels.
- **Apprenticeships** – particularly technician or advanced apprenticeships.
- **School and College Leaver Programmes** – these training programmes tend to be offered by larger employers in certain sectors, particularly in construction, engineering and financial services.

These may not interest you, but you should be aware of what they have to offer.

WHERE TO GO FOR SUPPORT, ADVICE AND INFORMATION

We haven't been able to cover everything you need to know in this article. But we do know where you can get more information, advice and support.

- Talk to your parents, family and friends.
- Speak to your teachers, especially your guidance or pastoral care teacher.
- Have a chat with your school career coach or career adviser.
- Speak with college and university lecturers, tutors and students.
- Visit Planit at **www.planitplus.net** – the career and learning information website for young people.
- Visit My World of Work at **www.myworldofwork.co.uk** – the all-age careers information and advice service.

USEFUL CONTACTS

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)

Phone: 0371 468 0468

(UCAS Conservatoires 0371 468 0470)

Web: www.ucas.com @ucas_online

www.facebook.com/ucasonline

Student Awards Agency for Scotland

General enquiries: 0300 555 0505

Web: www.saas.gov.uk @saastweet

www.facebook.com/saasfb

Student Loans Company Ltd

Tel: 0300 100 0609

Web: www.slc.co.uk

