



Choosing your undergraduate foundation programme

Foundation programmes (also known as access or bridging courses) bridge the gap between the qualifications you have and those you need to enter onto an undergraduate degree course in the UK. Many FE (further education) colleges, sixth-form colleges, tutorial colleges, and HE (higher education) institutions, including universities, run these programmes. Some FE colleges and sixth-form colleges are affiliated to specific UK universities and so their foundation programmes are often designed to prepare you for progression onto degree courses primarily at the linked university. Some foundation programmes are specially designed for international students, and usually include English language tuition, while others are mainly focused on UK students.

Checklist: Why study a foundation programme in the United Kingdom (UK)?

There are many good quality foundation programmes run by or affiliated to UK universities that are taught outside the UK. Whilst attending a foundation programme in your home country can sometimes reduce accommodation costs, there are many additional benefits for students who come to the UK to study this programme.

A UK based foundation programme can give you:

- A chance to improve your English. You will be speaking English in your daily life, not just in lessons.
- A route to acceptance on a degree course. If you are based in the UK for your foundation programme you can easily visit the universities you prefer to help you make your decision.
- University entrance criteria in science, engineering, and the humanities
- A supportive environment in which tutorial and pastoral care are important. When you start your degree course you will feel much more at home in the UK and therefore be able to concentrate better on your first year degree studies.
- The chance to settle in the city or region where you intend to study.



1 Common questions

How long is a foundation programme and what will I be taught?

These programmes are usually one academic year long (between 30 and 34 weeks) and start in September but in some cases a six month fast-track intensive option is available which will usually start in January. English language is usually included in any international foundation programme and is often assessed by completing coursework and/or taking an exam.

In Scotland there is a tailor-made course called the International Foundation Programme Scotland (IFPS), which can be nine, twelve or fifteen months. This includes an intensive English language course with a final exam which is recognized, within Scotland, for entry to university degree courses.

Does attending a foundation programme guarantee me a place at the university or college I want to go to?

No. All students have to meet the entrance requirements that a university or college sets. A foundation course should enable you to reach this level, but just attending a foundation programme will not ensure that you gain a place.

Some foundation programmes guarantee students who pass the course an “offer” or sometimes a “place” at university. An “offer” is when the institution that runs the degree course say they will accept a student if they reach particular grades or credits in their foundation programme. A “place” is when the institution agrees to accept the student if they pass their foundation programme.

Programmes that guarantee successful students a place rather than just an offer can be more desirable as students aren’t always able to meet the university offer they are given. If you want to study a foundation programme that guarantees students who pass a place at university, it is recommended that you check the guarantee is for a university that you would like to study at.

What is the difference between a foundation programme and an access course?

They are really the same thing but most access courses are designed for UK students over the age of 21 as a way onto an undergraduate degree course. One academic year in length, access courses are usually run by colleges where you can often get formal recognition for previous work experience. Access courses can be specific to the area that you want to study at degree level or more general where you choose from a broad range of subjects. English language tuition is not usually included in these courses so international students may need a supplementary English course to ensure their level of English is sufficient for entry to university.

Note: The term “Foundation course” is often used to describe a bridging course for art and design subjects (including architecture). Most universities expect all UK and international students to complete one of these courses before they are accepted onto an art & design related undergraduate degree course.

Will I get a qualification at the end of my foundation programme?

No. You will receive a certificate at the end of your foundation programme that should state the grades or credits that you achieved. This certificate may not always be recognized by every university or college in the UK so make sure you check that the foundation programme is widely recognized before you begin.

How is the programme assessed?

Assessment is usually done throughout the course e.g. by essay, presentation etc. and sometimes with end of term exams. You will either receive credits or often four grades, similar to those you would get from an A Level course



2 Entrance requirements

What qualifications would I need?

Entry qualifications vary throughout the UK. Foundation programmes usually want international students to have successfully completed at least twelve years of education in either their home country or in the UK. Some specific foundation programmes require that your high school syllabus must have included maths and/or some science subjects, depending on the type of foundation programme you wish to follow. For example, if you wish to study on a Science & Engineering foundation programme, you will usually need to have studied science subjects in your previous high school education.

Proof of English language ability is needed for entry onto most foundation programmes as they are taught in English and students will be expected to reach a certain level before they can be accepted onto undergraduate degree study.

Note: If, for example, degree course entry requirements state that students must have an English language ability equivalent to IELTS 6.5, it is often estimated that an average student studying approximately 15 hours of English per week can increase their English language ability by 0.5 (in IELTS) every 12 weeks. This formula can be used as a rough guide when working out what you can realistically achieve but it does not account for individual learning styles so some students may improve their English much slower or faster than this.

3 What to do next

- Get a prospectus from the university or HE institution you want to attend and find out which foundation programme/s they officially recognise.
- If you want to do a foundation programme before you decide which university to attend, make sure the programme is widely recognised by a broad selection of UK universities and HE institutions.
- Search www.educationuk.org for a list of foundation courses.
- Is your English good enough? Foundation programmes may need an IELTS score of 4.5 to 6.0. Ask your local British Council office where and when you can take the IELTS test. If your English ability doesn't meet foundation entry requirements you can improve your skills by attending a summer school or English Language course before the foundation programme begins.
- Try to find a programme with the right sort of content for the subject area you intend to study. Foundation programmes are often related to particular professions or disciplines.
- If the foundation programme you want to attend is at a university, you can apply through UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). Otherwise, you should apply directly to the institution.
- Find out whether the institution can guarantee you accommodation. If they don't, see what help they can offer you in finding Homestay, halls of residence or privately rented accommodation.

4 What else do I need to know?

You should bear in mind immigration requirements when considering whether to study in the UK. Requirements vary according to your nationality or citizenship and the length of time you want to study. You will not be allowed to extend your permission to stay in the UK for more than two years on courses that are below degree level and are of less than one year's duration. The UKCOSA website will give you further information on this topic – www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/guidenote.htm

Note in particular that you will not be given permission to enter the UK as a student if the school, college or university that you want to study at does not appear on the UK Department for Education and Skills Register of Education and Training Providers. You can check the register by clicking on 'Browse the Register' at www.dfes.gov.uk/providersregister/



5 Where can I find more information?

British Council Education Information

Website www.educationuk.org and
www.educationuk.org/scotland

For further information, you can find details of your nearest office at www.britishcouncil.org/home-contact-worldwide.htm which includes links to all our country web pages and a worldwide address book giving contact details for all offices.

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