



Choosing your degree programme and institution

A United Kingdom (UK) degree carries prestige throughout the world. In coming to the UK to study, you will also be surrounded by native speakers of the international language of business and commerce.

The possibilities of where and how you study are endless. You can choose from literally thousands of courses in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. You can be sure of their quality because there is a strict system of quality assurance.

Checklist: Why study a degree course in the United Kingdom?

- More intensive, shorter, degree courses will save you time and money in gaining a high-quality education
- Tight controls are kept on the quality of education and standard of degrees
- There are a huge range of courses and places in which to study, enabling you to choose the type of institution and location you prefer
- If you are not at the right level to enter a UK degree there are a wide range of access, foundation and bridging courses you can choose from
- Attending a Scottish university (many of which have four year degree courses) could mean that you do not have to take a foundation course
- The opportunity to improve your fluency in English will improve your job prospects and help both you and your employer develop international links.
- The UK is at the forefront of scientific and creative innovation and you could learn alongside some of the world's top intellects, providing an excellent atmosphere for study
- It is easy to apply through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) www.ucas.com which lets you apply to six institutions on one form. Applications can also be made online through 'International Apply' <http://www.ucas.com/studyuk/index.html>



1 What do I need to think about?

Start to choose a course and preferred institution

There are so many degrees and so many places to study that choosing a course and institution can be difficult. You may have a personal preference, for your own reasons, but if you are starting with only a vague idea, put the questions in the checklists below next to the institutions you pick out.

Checklist: Choosing the right course

- Is the subject right for you? What type of degree is it? What are the options with the subject?
- Does it improve your chances of following your chosen career?
- Will it be recognised by employers or educational organisations in your own country? This is particularly important.
- What are the teaching methods? Are you happy with them?
- How did the department fare in the most recent QAA where education institutions define academic standards and quality for external review?
- How is the degree programme assessed? Would you prefer continuous assessment or a more exam-based programme?

Is a University the only place I can take a degree?

No, you can also go to a higher education college or a college of further education. Colleges of higher and further education offer degree courses validated by universities, as they do not usually have their own degree awarding powers. So they will be of the same standard. This means that you have a huge choice of colleges, locations and learning environments.

Checklist: Choosing the right institution

- Is the higher education institute large enough (or small enough) to have the facilities you would like? What does it do about student support?
- Is it in a city or the countryside? Where in the UK is it? Does this matter to you?
- Is it on a campus or not? Does that matter to you?
- Is it close to any relatives or friends you have in the UK?
- Is it close to an airport that you could use to get home?
- Do you like the way it assesses work – by coursework, written exams or both?
- It's most recent review by the Quality Assurance Agency generally satisfactory?
- Can you afford the course fees?
- How much university accommodation is on offer, and what is its range? Are you given any guarantees about accommodation in the first and final years as an overseas students?
- Can you afford to live in this town or city?

For more information, refer to *HE Tuition Fees* in this series.



2 What can I study?

Types of degree courses	Typical content	Usual length
Honours degrees	One subject studied in depth	Usually three years but can be four, especially in Scotland. Architecture, medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences degrees are five to seven years. (see specific subject sheets in this series)
Joint Honours degree	Two subjects studied in less depth	Three to four years (more often four in Scotland)
Combined Honours degree	Two or more subjects studied in less depth	Three to four years (more often four in Scotland)
Ordinary / General degree	One or more subjects studied at less advanced level	Three years
Sandwich course	Course including up to one year of integrated work experience	Four to five years
Foundation degree	Employment related higher qualification (subjects such as e-systems; design and technology)	Two years (option to progress to an honours degree after a further fifteen months of study)

First degree titles

Bachelor of Arts	BA
Bachelor of Science	BSc
Bachelor of Education	BEd
Bachelor of Engineering	BEng
Bachelor of Law	LLB
Bachelor of Medicine	MS or BS

At some of the Scottish universities, a first degree in Arts carries the award of Master of Arts (MA).

Most first degrees take three or four years to complete, though some professional courses, such as architecture, dentistry, medicine and veterinary science, can take between five and seven years.

Master awards in engineering, science and mathematics (**MEng, MSci, MPhys, MChem**) can have direct entry from secondary education. These are increasingly becoming the standard for those who want careers as professional engineers or scientists. These integrated masters degrees take four years. In the first year students follow a Bachelor degree syllabus but if they attain high grades they may get the opportunity to follow an integrated Bachelor/Masters level syllabus in their third and fourth years.



3 Can I compare universities and colleges?

Yes. There are a number of ways by comparing the content of different courses. Courses do vary considerably from different universities and colleges. Check individual prospectuses available via www.educationuk.org.

(i) By looking at external reviews

The power to award degrees is regulated by law. It is illegal for an institution to offer to award a UK degree without proper authorisation. To see which universities and colleges offer courses leading to recognised UK degrees go to www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/

What guarantees are there on the quality of degrees and teaching?

The **Quality Assurance Agency** (QAA) is responsible for regulating standards and quality for UK higher education. It produces a Code of Practice which provides the institutions with guidelines on how they should manage academic standards and quality.

As well as setting standard guidelines the QAA also carries out inspections of institutions to see if they are reaching these targets. These QAA inspections are called 'Institutional Audits' and the reports are published on their website at www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/

During summer 2005 a National Student Survey was carried out which asked all recent graduates to give their feedback on the institution they attended and the programmes they followed. This information will be useful when choosing between courses and institutions so check the new **Teaching Quality Information** website at www.tqi.ac.uk

(ii) By looking at the unofficial rankings compiled by various publications.

This includes *The Times* newspaper (<http://www.thegooduniversityguide.org.uk/>) which ranks by institution and subject, and *The Guardian* newspaper (<http://education.guardian.co.uk/universityguide2006/0,,1595180,00.html>), which ranks by subject.

Both of these unofficial rankings are compiled by pulling together information from various official sources. These different types of information are not designed to be added together and averaged to give an overall mark and so you need to be cautious when using these rankings.

(iii) By checking that professional courses are recognised in your own country and knowing that the education system is different to what you are used to. You can expect:

- Lectures in large groups – one or two per week for each course in the degree programme.
- You could take four or five different subjects at the same time.
- It has a more personal focus than many education systems.
- Seminars and tutorials – small groups, led by a lecturer or professor, to which each student is expected to contribute.
- In science, technical and engineering subjects, a lot of your time will be spent in supervised laboratory work.
- You will have a course tutor who will advise you individually on your course work, and a personal tutor who is there to give you further advice and support.
- More emphasis is given to independent work and the development of self-study skills than in many other systems. There is seldom a single text-book for a course which the lecturer will rigidly follow and you will be expected to read widely around your subject and to find and analyse relevant material for yourself.



4 Entrance

What qualification will I need?

- GCSE/GCE passes in five subjects, of which at least two subjects are at GCE/VCE A-Level
- GCSE/GCE passes in four subjects, of which at least three subjects are at GCE/VCE A-level
- A Pass in Vocational A-Level (VCE) Double Award (12 units)
- A Pass in an Advanced General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ)
- Scottish Certificate of Education/Scottish Qualifications Authority Intermediate/Higher/Advanced Higher passes in five subjects of which three are at the Higher Level
- Scottish Certificate of Education/Scottish Qualifications Authority passes in four subjects at the Higher Level
- Scottish Certificate of Education/Scottish Qualifications Authority Intermediate/Higher/Advanced Higher passes in five subjects of which two are at Advanced Higher Level.
- An Irish Leaving Certificate with five subjects at grade C or above, four of which are at the Higher Level
- A National Certificate or Diploma (awarded by BTEC/EdExcel)
- A Higher National Certificate or Diploma (awarded by BTEC/EdExcel) - An International Baccalaureate with a minimum of 24 points
- The satisfactory completion of a full-time Foundation Course in Art and Design (this is preferred for entry to art and design courses) not less than one academic year in length, together with one of the following:
 - GCSE passes in five subjects
 - GCSE/GCE passes in four subjects including one at GCE A-Level
 - GCSE passes should be at least at Grade C or above
 - Successful completion of an approved Access course
 - Other qualifications which are considered acceptable by the University

What if I do not have these qualifications?

Many international students take an access, foundation or bridging course, which usually lasts a year. This can be taken at the same university/college as you intend to take the degree, or one close by. For more information, refer to *Choosing a foundation course* in this series.

Are there any English Language requirement?

You should be able to speak and write English well. You may be asked to provide formal proof of your standard. It is worth checking this early to make sure you have enough time to take an English language test. Most universities and colleges will accept one of the following:

- International English Language Testing System (IELTS) band 6 or above
- Cambridge Proficiency of English or Cambridge Advanced English grade C
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score 550 or higher
- NEAB University Entrance Test in English for speakers of other languages, grade 3
- Many universities run, or will place you on, intensive language courses for up to three months prior to entry if you do not meet their required standard. You should be able to discover the scores your chosen departments require, along with details of pre-entry courses, from the university or departmental prospectus.

It is possible to take the exams for many of the qualifications listed here at your local British Council office. Contact your local office for more information or go to:

www.britishcouncil.org/learning-exams.htm.



5. How do I apply?

Apply for a full-time undergraduate course through UCAS

- 1 Check the minimum entry requirements for each course you want to apply for. There is no point making an application if you do not have them. (Bear in mind that the institution could ask for more than these minimum requirements if there is competition to join the course).
- 2 Apply in one of four ways:
 - online, using 'Apply online', a web-based application system for international and UK applicants
 - by post, using the printed application form available from UCAS or from your local British Council office. (Only if the online version is not possible)

There is a charge for all applications through UCAS – see <http://www.ucas.com/> or contact your local British Council office for details of current charges and how to pay.

Points to remember:

- You may apply for up to six courses on one application form. If you are applying for medicine, dentistry or veterinary sciences/medicine you may only apply for four courses.
- You can only make one application per academic year through the UCAS system.
- Start thinking about this early – over a year before you want to start your course

Key dates:

- 1 September (the year before the course starts) – all applications open
- 15 October – closing date for applications to courses in medicine, dentistry or veterinary sciences/medicine and to Oxford and Cambridge Universities
- 15 January – closing date for UK students
- 15 January – closing date for route A art and design applications
- 1 January – 5 March – application period for route B art and design applications (See *Art and Design* in this series)
- 30th June – closing date for international students (unless you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge or for medicine, dentistry, veterinary science/medicine or route B art and design courses). Please note: popular courses will have been filled by this date so UCAS advise you to apply earlier if you can.



6 Next steps

Checklist: Your next steps

- Once you have shortlisted your preferred courses and colleges, you should get the college prospectuses – these are also available on the Internet and can be accessed at www.educationuk.org. These will tell you exactly what qualifications you need for different courses. Carefully consider the courses and colleges you like next to the checklists above.
- Get the UCAS application form available from the British Council and online from www.ucas.com. You can apply for up to six courses on one form, four for clinical programmes.
- You can apply through UCAS from 1 September of the year before your course starts. Applications for clinical subjects (such as medicine) and Oxford and Cambridge must be in by 15 October. For all other courses apply as early as possible – international students can apply until the end of June.
- You should be aware that some programmes, such as medicine, may require an interview, while others (dance, drama) ask for an audition or (art and design) a portfolio.
- UCAS will inform you about each university's decision as soon as it is made.

7 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/

For practical advice on living in the UK download *Studying and living in the UK* from www.educationuk.org/bc_img/body/articles/pdfs/stud_live_uk.pdf

8 Where can I find more information?

British Council Education Information

Website www.educationuk.org

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.

EducationUK Scotland

Website www.educationukscotland.org

Wales International Consortium

www.walesinternationalconsortium.com

Access Courses Database

Database of Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) recognised Access courses

Website www.ucas.com/access

Foundation degrees

Website www.foundationdegree.org.uk

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Telephone +44 (0) 870 000 2288

Fax +44 (0) 1928 794 248

Email info@dfes.qsi.gov.uk

Website www.dfes.gov.uk

National Assembly for Wales Training and Education Department

National Assembly for Wales
Cathays Park
Cardiff CF10 3NQ

The Council for Independent Further Education (CIFE)

Executive Secretary
Dr Norma Ball
75 Foxbourne Road
London SW17 8EN

Telephone +44 (0) 20 8767 8666

Website www.getthegrade.co.uk

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

Southgate House, Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Telephone +44 (0) 14 5255 7000

Fax +44 (0) 14 5255 7070

Email comms@qaa.ac.uk

Website www.qaa.ac.uk

The National Kingdom National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC)

ECCTIS Ltd
Oriol House
Oriol Road
Cheltenham GL50 1XP

Telephone +44 (0) 870 990 4088

Fax +44 (0) 1242 258 611

Email info@naric.org.uk

Website www.naric.org

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL52 3LZ

Telephone +44 (0) 870 1122211

Fax +44 (0) 1242 544961

Email enquiries@ucas.ac.uk

Telephone +44 (0) 292 082 5111

Fax +44 (0) 292 089 8630

Website www.learning.wales.gov.uk

Scottish Executive Education Department

Victoria Quay
Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

Telephone +44 (0) 131 556 8400 or +44 (0) 845 774 1741

Fax +44 (0) 131 244 8240

Email ceu@scotland.gov.uk

Website www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Departments/ED

International Foundation Programme – Scotland

Head Office

77 Southpark Avenue
Glasgow G12 8LE

Telephone +44 (0) 141 357 0123

Fax +44 (0) 141 357 0199

E-mail ifps@mac.com

Website www.ifps.ac



Department of Education Northern Ireland

Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Bangor
County Down BT19 7PR

Telephone +44 (0) 2891 279279

Fax +44 (0) 2891 279100

Email mail@deni.gov.uk

Website www.deni.gov.uk

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