



University
of Exeter

Your introduction to higher education

What is higher education and who goes?

Higher education is a term for study that normally takes place after your further education at sixth form or college. It often takes place at universities, but can also take place at the same colleges that you might go to undertake your post-16 qualifications (we're going to use the term 'universities' in this guide, but the information is likely to apply to other higher education providers too).

There are several levels of higher education, but most commonly people will start with an undergraduate degree and then some will progress onto a postgraduate degree.

Anyone can undertake higher education, provided they meet the requirements of the course and university they wish to study at. Lots of people choose to go after they have finished sixth form or college, however many may choose to go later in their lives.



Why do people go on to higher education?

Everyone has their own personal reasons for going on to study at university, we've listed some of the most common below:



To gain the skills needed to do a particular job – Some jobs such as doctor, teacher, accountant or pharmacist will require you to have studied a degree in a relevant subject first. Therefore, for some people going to university is the only way to get into their chosen job.



To meet new people – Students from all across the world study at universities in the UK. Many students look forward to meeting like-minded people from different cultures and backgrounds.



To gain new experiences – Going to a university allows people to experience things that they may not have done before or be able to do easily elsewhere. There is the opportunity to join clubs and societies, do a work placement or choose to study abroad.



To become more independent – Going to a university can help you to be more independent. You'll be responsible for attending lectures and seminars, handing your assignments in on time, feeding yourself, looking after your student finance and doing your own chores, if you don't already.



To study a subject they really enjoy – Many people go to university to find out more about a subject that they already like. Sometimes, students might study a subject that they haven't studied before but are interested in learning about.



Making decisions about higher education

Whatever your reason for going, at university you are studying at a higher, more in-depth level than you do at school, sixth form or college. Therefore when you get to university you tend to pick just one single honours subject so that you can focus on it in the required depth. However some people may be able to focus on two subjects which is known as a joint or combined honours course.

You may take from two to seven years studying at university depending on the subject you pick, so it's important that you've thought about what you want to study and what subject, themes and topics will motivate you to study for the duration of your course.

In order to get you started thinking about what you might want to do in the future have a think about:

- The subjects you enjoy already at school
- Any jobs that you think you might like to do in the future
- Anything that you'd love to learn more about that you don't study at school

The range of subjects you can study at university is huge! You are not confined just to the subjects your school offers; there are vocational subjects that have firm connections with jobs (even Degree Apprenticeships where you can be paid to work and study for a degree at the same time) and there are subjects that you might not have had the opportunity to learn about previously.

Thinking about these things at this point doesn't commit you to studying a subject, but as the range of options is so vast, it might help make the decision about if to go to university and what to study a little easier. It also means that if you have a firm idea already of a certain career or subject, that you've checked if you need any specific qualifications at GCSE or at sixth form or college (such as in your A level, T level, International Baccalaureate or BTEC qualifications) to get you there.

If you don't know what you might want to study at university at the moment that's ok too; you should consider picking subjects you enjoy and keep your options open. You can always talk to your teachers or careers advisors if you're unsure as they have lots of experience in helping students through their choices.



Jargon buster

Degree: The qualification you get once you have completed your studies at university.

Joint or combined honours: A type of degree where you study more than one subject.

Lectures: A method of teaching used at university. A lecture is similar to a school assembly. It involves a teacher talking to a large group of students about a subject related to their course.

Postgraduate: A student who has completed an undergraduate degree and is studying at an even higher level.

Seminars: Similar to a lesson at school, seminars are small group sessions where you discuss in more detail what was learnt in a lecture.

Single honours: A degree where you only study one subject, for example English.

Societies: Clubs of likeminded students who regularly meet up because they share a common interest in something such as acting, singing, computer gaming, watching films, etc.

Student finance: The general term for the financial support available when you go to university.

Study abroad: Lets you spend some time studying your subject at another university overseas. It's a great way to learn all about a new country.

Undergraduate: A student usually studying for their first degree on a programme which normally lasts for three or four years. You could be based either at a university or a Further Education college.

Work placement: Similar to work experience at school, a work placement lets students spend up to a year working for a company whilst gaining skills and experience which will help them to get a job after graduating.



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