

# Supporting Vocational Learners Progress to Higher Education: A Guide for Advisers

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We hope that the information, resources and web links provided here will be of use to advisers who support vocational learners, including potential learners in the workplace who are interested in progressing into higher education (HE). It is aimed at both experienced Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) practitioners and those new to IAG who have a responsibility for or an interest in, helping learners and potential learners find out more about higher education.

Information on progression to HE for both learners and advisers has traditionally focused almost exclusively on the requirements of A-level learners. The focus of this guide is on providing information and links for supporting vocational learners from level 3 (e.g. Access to HE Diploma, BTEC, 14-19 diplomas and work based learners) in line with the aims of all Lifelong Learning Networks.

This guide is also available on our website:  
[www.linkinglondon.ac.uk](http://www.linkinglondon.ac.uk)

We welcome any suggestions, comments and feedback to help us make it a valuable resource for anyone who provides information and advice and/or guidance about HE.

### **About Us**

The Linking London Network is a membership organisation of universities and colleges in Central, East and North London which aims to improve the progression of vocational learners into and through Higher Education. We are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and partner subscriptions, and are hosted by Birkbeck, University of London.

If you found this guidance document useful or would like to discuss our work in area of vocational learning, please contact:

[info@linkinglondon.ac.uk](mailto:info@linkinglondon.ac.uk) or phone the progression advice line on 020 7380 3226.

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		<b>1. An Introduction to Higher Education</b>	
		<b>1.1 What is Higher Education?</b>	
		Higher education refers to studying for qualifications such as a degree or higher national diploma. There are also different types of degrees such as foundation degrees. These can be studied in further and higher education colleges as well as universities. A wide range of courses can be studied, from academic courses such as English, history and maths, to courses with a vocational focus, for example Teaching, Nursing and Sports coaching. Courses can be studied on a full time basis, or in many cases by part time or distance learning.	
		Higher education in the UK has changed significantly over the past thirty years. The number of students studying at universities and colleges has increased dramatically, with over two million students at higher education institutions today.	
		Competition for places at university is now more intense than it has ever been. Consequently good careers advice is even more essential; to ensure that potential applicants make informed choices and a strong application	

with increased focus on a learner's passion for their subject and their commitment to succeed. Potential applicants should also consider alternative routes to gaining a HE qualification should the traditional 3 years full time study at university not be a viable option for them.

Other ways of accessing a Higher Education qualification, at any stage in life, include:

- Studying a HE course delivered in a FE college
- Following a Higher Apprenticeship, whilst working
- Studying part time, whilst working
- Studying online, whilst working
- Studying for an ordinary degree (2 years full time), followed by a final year at a later date, to make up a full honours degree.

The age of undergraduates has also changed. Formerly these were largely school leavers studying full time. The student population now includes significant numbers of mature and part time students.

Higher education is part of what is commonly referred to as 'lifelong learning', which is not limited to the compulsory school years, but extends through an adult's working life and sometimes into retirement.

### Facts and Figures

- There are currently approximately 170 universities and HE colleges offering over 55,000 different full time undergraduate course combinations
- Universities are self governing and independent, and typically range in size from 4000 to 32000 students (The Open University has 180,000 students)
- For 2007/08 HESA confirmed there were 1,922,185 students studying HE in English HEIs
- In addition to the above there were 122,147 students studying HE in English Further Education Colleges of which 10,321 were students at FECs in Greater London
- Enrolments of HE students have increased by 30%

overall between 1997 and 2007

- There has been a 52.3% increase in part time undergraduate enrolments between 1997 and 2007
- Currently approximately 43% of all HE students are studying part time
- According to UCAS statistics in 1999 67.5% of all accepted students into full time undergraduate HE had studied A-levels alone. In 2009 this figure has reduced to 49.8%
- Over 126,000 vocationally-related honours and higher degrees and professional qualifications were awarded in 07/08 up 3% from the previous year and an increase of 20% over 5 years
- Over 14,000 Foundation degrees were awarded in 07/08– up nearly 30 per cent on the previous year and more than double the number of students graduating with Foundation degrees in 2005
- Over 3000 Foundation degree courses are currently available
- 100,000 vocational learners enter HE every year

### 1.2 What are the benefits of completing an HE Course?

There are a number of potential benefits that higher education can offer:

- For a number of careers entry is only possible via a HE qualification: e.g. Dentistry, Nursing, Law, Teaching, Chartered Engineering, Architecture
- HE develops a number of transferable skills highly valued by employers including verbal and written communication skills, numeracy, interpersonal skills, ICT skills, organisational and time management skills and analytical and critical thinking skills
- A higher education qualification can lead to increased earning potential, a wider range of opportunities and a more rewarding career. Many employers target graduates in their recruitment campaigns.
- On average, graduates tend to earn more than people with level 3 qualifications who did not go to

university

- Graduates are less likely to be unemployed
- Graduates are more likely to have flexibility in their work, e.g. the option of working from home
- Studying in HE provides the student with the opportunity to study a subject of interest in depth and encourages them to see the world from different perspectives

### 1.3 Routes into Higher Education

#### 1.3.1 Entry Requirements

Every HE course will have its own specific entry requirements and these may vary greatly between institutions. For example entry requirements for competitive courses at universities will be high whereas The Open University does not require previous qualifications for most of its courses.

Traditionally, entry requirements have been based upon academic qualifications such as A levels. Although still true for certain universities, this is generally no longer the case.

Entry to HE can be through:

- A generally recognised Level 3 qualification
- Previous study in HE
- Work experience deemed to be equivalent to a recognised qualification
- A combination of the above

This means that the main routes into HE are:

- School/college
- The workplace
- Other HE courses

#### 1.3.2 Main Qualifications for Entry to HE

In England there is a national qualifications framework which means it is possible to compare different qualifications.

The main vocational qualifications which on their own or in combination with others can be considered

for entry into HE are known as level 3 (HE starts at level 4).

The main entry qualifications are:

**BTEC National Diploma** / Two years full time

**Advanced 14-19 Diplomas** / Two years full time

**Access HE Diploma** / One year full time / two years part time

**NVQ3\*** / Part time / day release / workplace - assessment

**A levels** / Generally two years full time

**Other vocational qualifications** / Varying modes of study

\* While in theory it is possible to progress to HE, usually onto a foundation degree, from NVQ 3 in many cases additional bridging support/modules may be required to ensure the learner has written skills and study skills to a required level. This also applies to students on Advanced Apprenticeships, (although HEIs are starting to realize that with the government's ambitious targets to increase the number of apprentices this may become a growth area).

### 1.3.3 Non-A level routes into Higher Education

LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATION	ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) DIPLOMA	ADVANCED APPRENTICESHIP
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	Aimed at adults who may have few, or no, formal qualifications. Designed to provide the skills needed to progress to HE.	Work-based training programme.
<b>LENGTH OF STUDY</b>	1 year full time, 2 years part time.	Between one and three years to complete depending on sector.
<b>ENTRY REQUIREMENTS</b>	No formal entry requirements. Learners must demonstrate motivation, commitment and the desire to study. In the absence of prior GCSE attainment individual providers often require prospective students to undertake an entry test.	Level 2 qualifications such as 5 GCSEs at A*-C, or an Apprenticeship at L2.
<b>WHO OFFERS IT?</b>	FE Colleges, some adult education colleges and a limited number of community based organisations.	Apprentices learn primarily in the workplace as paid employees, typically with day release at FE Colleges or a private WBL training provider to underpin knowledge.
<b>HOW IS IT STUDIED?</b>	Flexible courses, enabling students to study full time or part time.	Most of the training is 'on the job'. The rest can be provided by a local college or by a specialist learning provider.
<b>HOW IS IT ASSESSED?</b>	Usually assessed on the basis of coursework. However, on most courses learners take an examination skills unit or complete assignments under exam conditions.	Students work towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3, along with the Tech Cert (BTEC or City and Guilds) and Key Skills. They need to complete all 3 elements to complete the framework. Assessment methods are determined by the appropriate Sector Skills Council.
<b>WHAT'S IT WORTH?</b>	Students must achieve 45 credits at Level 3 and a further 15 credits must be achieved at level 2 or 3 (1 credit = 10 learning hours). From 2010, each level 3 unit that is successfully completed for the Diploma is awarded a pass, merit or distinction grade. Level 2 units are not graded nor are any additional Level 3 units.	Advanced Apprenticeships do not currently carry a UCAS tariff although the qualification is seen as a route to HE, particularly on to Foundation Degrees, flexible work-based HE or Higher Apprenticeships. Advanced Apprentices will gain work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 3, Key Skills and, in most cases, a relevant knowledge based certificate such as a BTEC.
<b>UCAS TARIFF</b>	N/A	Although the Advanced Apprenticeship does not, itself, carry a UCAS tariff, some Advanced Apprenticeship frameworks will include a component part, such as a BTEC Level 3 Diploma or a BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma, which does carry a UCAS tariff.
<b>WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?</b>	<a href="http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk">www.accesstohe.ac.uk</a> and <a href="http://www.ocnl.org.uk">www.ocnl.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk">www.apprenticeships.org.uk</a>

<b>LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATION</b>	<b>ADVANCED DIPLOMA</b>	<b>BTEC LEVEL 3 EXTENDED DIPLOMA</b> (before 2010 this qualification was called the BTEC Level 3 National Diploma)*
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	Combination of general and applied learning designed to support progression to HE or employment.	Work related qualification. Aims both to support progression to HE or employment.
<b>LENGTH OF STUDY</b>	2 years full time.	2 years full time.
<b>ENTRY REQUIREMENTS</b>	Level 2 qualifications such as 5 GCSEs at A*–C, or a Higher Diploma at grades A*–C. For some Advanced Diplomas grade C or above may be required in maths and/or English.	Level 2 qualifications such as 5 GCSEs at A*–C, or a relevant Level 2 BTEC qualification. For some BTECs grade C or above may be required in maths and/or English.
<b>WHO OFFERS IT?</b>	Offered in schools and colleges, some of which share delivery of different components. Also involves work experience.	FE Colleges, schools, private training providers.
<b>HOW IS IT STUDIED?</b>	Full time study in college or school, though some learning may take place through work experience.	Normally studied full time although students may, in some cases, have the option of studying part time.
<b>HOW IS IT ASSESSED?</b>	Some parts are externally assessed. Most components are internally assessed and externally moderated by the relevant awarding bodies.	Assessed and graded through assignments. All assessments are quality assured through internal verification and Edexcel carry out external verification activities.
<b>WHAT'S IT WORTH?</b>	Equivalent to 3.5 A levels. It attracts UCAS tariff points and the maximum points that can be gained are 490.	Equivalent to 3 A Levels. Students get a combination of 3 grades - Pass (P), Merit (M), or Distinction (D). Each combination attracts a different UCAS tariff (see below).
<b>UCAS TARIFF</b>	A* = 350, A = 300, B = 250, C = 200 D = 150, E = 100 Students also undertake 'Additional Specialist Learning', which could be an A-Level or BTEC qualification, and will receive additional UCAS points for this.	The UCAS tariff according to the 3 grades obtained: DDD = 360, DDM = 320, DMM = 280, MMM = 240, MMP = 200, MPP = 160, PPP = 120. NB: From 2010 there will be a new overall Distinction* grade. UCAS are yet to confirm the points for this.
<b>WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?</b>	<a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk">www.direct.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.edexcel.com">www.edexcel.com</a>

### Maths and English Requirements

Learners will also need to demonstrate ability in English and if relevant maths, via:

GCSE at grades A-C

Key Skills at level 2

Functional skills at level 2

Entry tests if available

Open University units

HEIs will set their own requirements for English and maths. A number of HEIs will accept key skills and/or functional skills at level 2, while others will only consider learners with GCSE grades A-C. Learners will need to check entry requirements carefully.

#### 1.3.4 Admissions Tests

Some HEIs require learners to pass an admissions test as well as meet standard qualifications for courses in certain subjects.

Further details for these tests are provided by UCAS: [www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/admissions/](http://www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/admissions/)

#### 1.3.5 UCAS Tariff

The UCAS Tariff is a points system used to report achievement for entry to higher education (HE) in a numerical format. It establishes agreed comparability between different types of qualifications and provides comparisons between applicants with different types and volumes of achievement. For a list of qualifications included in the UCAS Tariff go to: [www.ucas.com/students/ucas\\_tariff/qualifications](http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/qualifications).

A number of HEIs express their entry requirements in the form of UCAS tariff points (often with specific grade requirements) for full time undergraduate courses. Some HEIs do however still ask for specific grades instead of a UCAS tariff score. While some HEIs also ask for UCAS tariff points for part time provision a number of institutions, including

Birkbeck, University of London and The Open University have their own admissions policy and have more flexible entry requirements.

For information on vocational qualifications and the UCAS tariff points attached go to: [www.ucas.com/students/ucas\\_tariff/tariffables](http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/tariffables).

#### 1.3.6 UCAS Entry Profiles

For full time undergraduate courses a good source of information on entry requirements, including admissions tests along with a wide range of useful related information on the applications process are UCAS Entry Profiles. Entry Profiles are compiled by staff at the university or college, who understand the kind of detail learners need to know about their courses, and what kind of personal qualities, interests and experiences will be helpful for them to have, in order to be successful learners on the course they ultimately choose. Entry Profiles can be found via [www.ucas.com/students/coursesearch](http://www.ucas.com/students/coursesearch) on the UCAS website, and are signified by the symbol EP.

### 1.4 Higher Education Qualifications

#### 1.4.1 Introduction to HE Qualifications

HE qualifications cover a wide range of subjects, including combinations of subjects, and work areas. It is not always possible to neatly divide courses into 'academic' or 'vocational'.

However, it is possible to say that some courses more than others – for example Foundation Degrees and BTEC Higher National Diplomas, or short courses in the workplace – are seen as more 'work related' in terms of learning, teaching, content and assessment. In choosing a suitable course it is always important for learners to research carefully before making a choice.

#### Choosing a qualification

Universities and colleges offer a wide range of HE

Qualification	Length Full Time (years)	Length Part Time (years)	Where next?	Final level
Honours Degree (BSc, BA)	3	4-6	Masters degree	6
Foundation Degree (FdA, FdSc)	2	3-4	Honours degree	5
Higher National Diploma (HND)	2	-	Honours degree	5
Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)	1	2	Foundation or Honours degree	4
Higher National Certificate (HNC)	-	2	Foundation Degree or Honours degree	4
Short courses, accredited employer or vocational training	Various	Various	Other courses, foundation or honours degree	Various

## Levels of UK Qualifications

For further information on HE qualifications see the “useful websites” section of this booklet.

courses which lead to a range of different types of qualifications. It's important that learners choose the qualification that will best suit their needs and career aspirations. What kind of qualification learners study towards depends (to some extent) on what they want to do with the qualification at the end of their studies.

### 1.4.2 Qualification Levels

Within higher education there are different 'levels' of courses. In England there is a higher education qualifications framework which means it is possible to compare different HE qualifications. On this framework courses are 'graded' in terms of difficulty, at levels 4, 5 and 6. This framework also means that having finished one course at one level, students may progress to the next level.

### 1.4.3 Honours (Bachelors) Degrees

Usually takes 3 years full time or 4 years if the degree course includes a period of study abroad or on a work placement. They are usually called a **Bachelor of Arts (BA)**, **Bachelor of Science (BSc)** although some degrees have their own title like **Bachelor of Medicine (MB)** or **Bachelor of Education (BEd)**.

Honours degrees can also be taken part time or by distance learning. A part time honours degree can take between 4 and 6 years to complete.

### 1.4.4 Foundation Degrees

Often studied at an FE or HE college they are available in a range of vocational subjects like early years, youth and community work and health studies and are usually studied while in employment, but are also often available as a full time course. They are roughly

equal to the first 2 years of a degree and it is possible to gain a BA/BSc degree qualification with further study.

### 1.4.5 Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs)

HNDs are usually offered by FE and HE colleges and are available in a variety of vocational (work related) subjects. They are roughly equal to the first 2 years of a degree. It is sometimes possible to continue studying after the HND to gain a degree. HNCs are usually studied part time over 2 years by students who are also working. HNCs can allow entry to a 2nd year of a degree.

### 1.4.6 Higher Education Certificates & Diplomas

Certificates of Higher Education are academic, rather than vocational qualifications.

They are roughly equivalent to a first year of a degree or an HNC and usually take a year of full time study to complete. Higher Education Diplomas are available in a range of subjects including health related courses like Nursing and Midwifery. They usually take 2 years full time and potentially can be topped up to a full degree with further study.

### 1.4.7 Short courses

Many short courses or even in house training provided for employers by higher education institutions may be accredited at higher education level (level 4 upwards on the national framework). This is at the same level as other higher education courses. These may include short courses from degree courses but also professional qualifications.

#### 1.4.8 Study modes: full time or part time?

Courses may be full time or part time. Bear in mind that this refers to the overall amount of study required per week not just time in the classroom. The actual classroom attendance on a full time course may be only 12 hours per week. Similarly the amount of attendance required on a part time course will vary between courses.

Part time courses may require attendance in the evenings only, or during the daytime. Some Foundation degree courses in particular require occasional weekend attendance for students who are in full time employment during the week.

#### 1.4.9 Distance learning

Distance learning courses require no attendance, and learning is carried out by self study and online study. This requires the ability to motivate oneself to study alone, but may be very suitable for those who are unable to attend regularly otherwise.

There are different definitions of what counts as part time study so this is another area to research carefully when considering different courses. In particular it can have an impact on financial support.

#### 1.4.10 Credit Transfer

Increasingly, higher education courses are made up of smaller **modules** or **units**. Taking and passing these credits as well as the final qualification can give the learner 'credit' towards other qualifications and save having to repeat learning.

For more about this visit: [www.linkinglondon.ac.uk](http://www.linkinglondon.ac.uk)

#### 1.5 A Guide to Higher Education Finance

The following information summarises student finance support for both full and part time students. Student finance for HE is complex and frequently changes. Please refer to the relevant web sites listed in the "useful web links" section of this publication

for more detailed and up to date information.

#### 1.5.1 Student Finance: full time undergraduate students

##### EU Students

Students from a European Union (EU) country outside of the UK may be able to apply for help with living costs as well as tuition fees if they meet certain residency conditions. Further information for EU students can be found on [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

##### International Students

International students are liable to pay the full amount of fees for studying in HE. For more information about studying in HE as an international student go on to: [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)

##### Refugees & Asylum seekers

Refugees are entitled to home student fees and student loans. Asylum seekers are not entitled to home student fees or student loans, except at the discretion of individual HEIs.

##### Tuition fees for full time undergraduate students:

The following information applies to students who are classified as home students studying on full time undergraduate courses in the UK:

From September 2006 universities have been able to charge variable tuition fees for full time higher education courses up to a maximum set by the government. For 2010/11 entry this maximum has been set at £3,290. The vast majority of universities will be charging the maximum amount for full time undergraduate degrees. Foundation degree fees also have a maximum of £3,290, although in many cases the fees set by individual institutions is lower.

*Tuition fees do not have to be paid while students are studying. Students will be able to take out a student loan for fees to cover the tuition fees charged by the university.*

### 1.5.1.1 Loans

There are two types of student loan available—one for fees to cover the tuition fees charged for the course and one for maintenance to cover living expenses. Loans will have to be repaid, but not until after graduation and once the graduate is in employment and earning above £15,000. Students need to apply online at [www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk](http://www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk)

#### Student Loan for Tuition fees

All home full time students can apply for the exact amount the university or college charges for their course and the money will be paid directly to the student's university or college to cover the cost of fees.

#### Student Loan for Maintenance

The Student Loan for Maintenance is there to help towards accommodation and other living costs while they are studying. The maximum loan for 2010/11 is £6,928. Students can take out around 75 per cent of the maximum Student Loan for Maintenance regardless of their household income - this is called the 'non income assessed' part of the loan. Whether they get the remaining 25 per cent - the 'income assessed' part of the loan - depends on their household income. It is also effected by any help they get through the Maintenance Grant (though not the Special Support Grant).

### 1.5.1.2 Grants

#### Maintenance Grant and Special Support Grant

"Home" students may be able to get help with accommodation and other living costs through the Maintenance Grant or Special Support Grant. Whether they qualify - and the level of grant they will get - will depend on their household income.

They do not need to be paid back, and should be applied for at the same time as students are applying for Student Loans from the government - through the

main student finance application. For 2010/11, around 40 per cent of new students are expected to qualify for the full Maintenance Grant, with many more getting a partial grant.

#### Maintenance Grant

The amount of help students can get through the Maintenance Grant and Special Support Grant is the same. But if students get the Maintenance Grant, some of it is paid instead of the Student Loan for Maintenance. In other words, it will reduce the amount students can get through Student Loans.

#### Special Support Grant

The Special Support Grant replaces the Maintenance Grant for certain groups of students entering higher education.

If students get the Special Support Grant, it won't affect how much they can get through the Student Loan for Maintenance - and it won't be counted as income when working out if students are entitled to income-related benefits or tax credits.

Students will qualify for the Special Support Grant if, during the academic year, they meet the conditions for being a 'prescribed person' under the Income Support or Housing Benefit Regulations. Students who are likely to qualify include:

- single parents
- other student parents if they have a partner who is also a student
- students with certain disabilities

Students should contact their local authority if they are not sure which grant to apply for.

### 1.5.1.3 Bursaries

Universities and colleges wishing to charge the maximum fees for a course will have to provide at least £329 a year in non-repayable financial support (based on 2010/11 figures) such as bursaries, to

students on these courses who are receiving the full maintenance grant or special support grant. According to the Directgov website [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) in 2008/09 the typical bursary for a student receiving the full maintenance grant on a course charging the full tuition fee was £800. It will be important that learners speak to the university or college that they are interested in and find out what it offers. They can go on to the universities website or contact their student advice service for information. For more information on bursaries go to [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk). Learners should apply to their HEI as soon as their place is confirmed.

#### How to Apply

Learners should apply as soon as possible once they have applied. They do not need to wait until they have a confirmed place. Based on their circumstances, they can use the online calculator at [www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance) to work at what is available to them.

Learners can apply online at [www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance) or complete a paper form which can be downloaded from the same site.

#### 1.5.1.4 Scholarships

Many colleges and universities also offer scholarships. Availability can be based on a range of factors – such as the subjects previously studied, or where students live or based on income. Learners can find out what's on offer from the university or college's website, or from their student support office.

#### 1.5.1.5 Additional Financial Support for Full time Students

Extra help is available for students with a **disability**, **mental health condition** or **specific learning difficulty**, and for students with **children** or **adult**

**dependants**. The *Access to Learning Fund* can also provide help for students on **low incomes** who need extra financial support.

#### The Educational Grants Advisory Service (EGAS)

EGAS operates nationally and offers advice on sources of funding including access funds, hardship funds and charitable trusts: [www.egas-online.org](http://www.egas-online.org).

#### National Health Service bursaries for health professional courses

To qualify for NHS financial support, learners must be accepted for an NHS funded place on a full or part time course which leads to professional registration as a:

- chiroprapist (including podiatrist), dietician, occupational therapist, orthoptist, physiotherapist, prosthetist, and orthotist, radiographer, audiologist or a speech and language therapist
- dental hygienist or dental therapist
- nurse or midwife (degree course)
- nurse, midwife, or operating department practitioner (diploma course)

For more information, visit:

[www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students)

In addition, learners on medical or dentistry undergraduate programmes are eligible for an NHS bursary during the later stages of their pre-registration training: [www.nhs.gov.uk/](http://www.nhs.gov.uk/)

#### Social Work

Students studying for a degree in social work may be entitled to a non-repayable bursary through the NHS Business Service Authority's Prescription Pricing Division. These bursaries are available to eligible students who don't get funding from their employer, and are studying an approved degree or diploma course in social work. Each institution will tell

students if their course qualifies. For further information go to: [www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students)

#### **Dance and Drama Awards (DADAs)**

Most drama and dance undergraduate full time courses are state funded. However a number of private drama and dance colleges operate separate funding arrangements. Students who gain places may be eligible for a DADA. Further information can be obtained from: [www.ncdt.co.uk/](http://www.ncdt.co.uk/)

### **1.5.2 Financial Help for Part time students in Higher Education**

#### **Tuition fees for part time students**

There are no regulations stating how much higher education institutions can charge in tuition fees for part time courses. Students need to check with individual HEIs to find out how much they charge – they should also find out how much the fees are likely to rise over the length of their course.

#### **Help for part time students: Fee Grant and Course Grant**

The main sources of help for part time students are:

- a Fee Grant (to help with tuition fees) - paid directly to the college or university
- a Course Grant (to help with study costs, such as books, materials and travel) - paid directly to the student.

What's available will depend on personal circumstances and the course being studied. Students won't have to repay any help they get through the Fee Grant or Course Grant.

#### **1.5.2.1 Part time Students' Grants**

**Fee Grant and Course Grant: if students get benefits**

If students are getting certain benefits, they will automatically qualify for the maximum Fee Grant and

the maximum Course Grant available for the course's duration. The maximum figure for 2010/11 is £1495.

The maximum Fee Grant students can get is based on how 'intensive' the course is - how long it will take to complete compared to an equivalent full time course.

#### **Fee Grant and Course Grant: if students have a partner or children**

The maximum household income students can have and still qualify for a particular level of financial help is set higher if students have a live-in partner or dependent children - though their partner's income may be counted towards their household income.

#### **How to apply for the Fee Grant and Course Grant**

Students will need to make a separate application for each academic year, using the application form for part time student finance (PTG1), which can be downloaded from the direct gov website.

#### **Open University students**

The same rules on the fee grant and course grant apply, but The Open University deals with its own applications. Students need to contact The Open University directly for a separate application form. For more information, visit The Open University website: [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)

### **1.5.2.2 Additional Financial Support for Full and Part time Students**

In addition to grants, part time students should explore the following sources of financial support where they are applicable:

1. Grants from Educational trusts and charities e.g. The Educational Grants Advisory Service (EGAS)
2. Additional Fee Support Scheme and Access to Learning Fund
3. Career Development Loans

Extra financial help is available for students in particular circumstances:

- **Students with a disability, mental health condition or a specific learning difficulty.** Provided the student is studying at least 50% of the full time equivalent, they can apply for extra help from the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) or Access to Learning Fund.
- **Students with children or adult dependents**
- **Students claiming benefits**

For further information: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

#### Equivalent and Lower Qualifications (ELQs)

On 7 September 2007, John Denham, The Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, announced that from 2008/09, funding would no longer be provided to students from England and Northern Ireland who study for a qualification that is equivalent to, or lower than, a qualification they already hold. Certain courses will be exempt from this policy such as teaching, nursing, social work and foundation degrees.

For further information regarding funding go to: [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/funding/elq](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/funding/elq)

## 2. Making HE Choices

### 2.1 Supporting vocational learners in making informed choices about HE

In many ways supporting vocational learners who are interested in going to HE is no different to working with A-level applicants. Regardless of their current course learners will need to spend a lot of time and effort in researching options effectively and in making a strong application.

Where non A-level learners will often need additional support, is in identifying suitable HE programmes to apply to. Entry information in general is not as clear and transparent as for A-level applicants. When researching course entry information on the UCAS website information for non

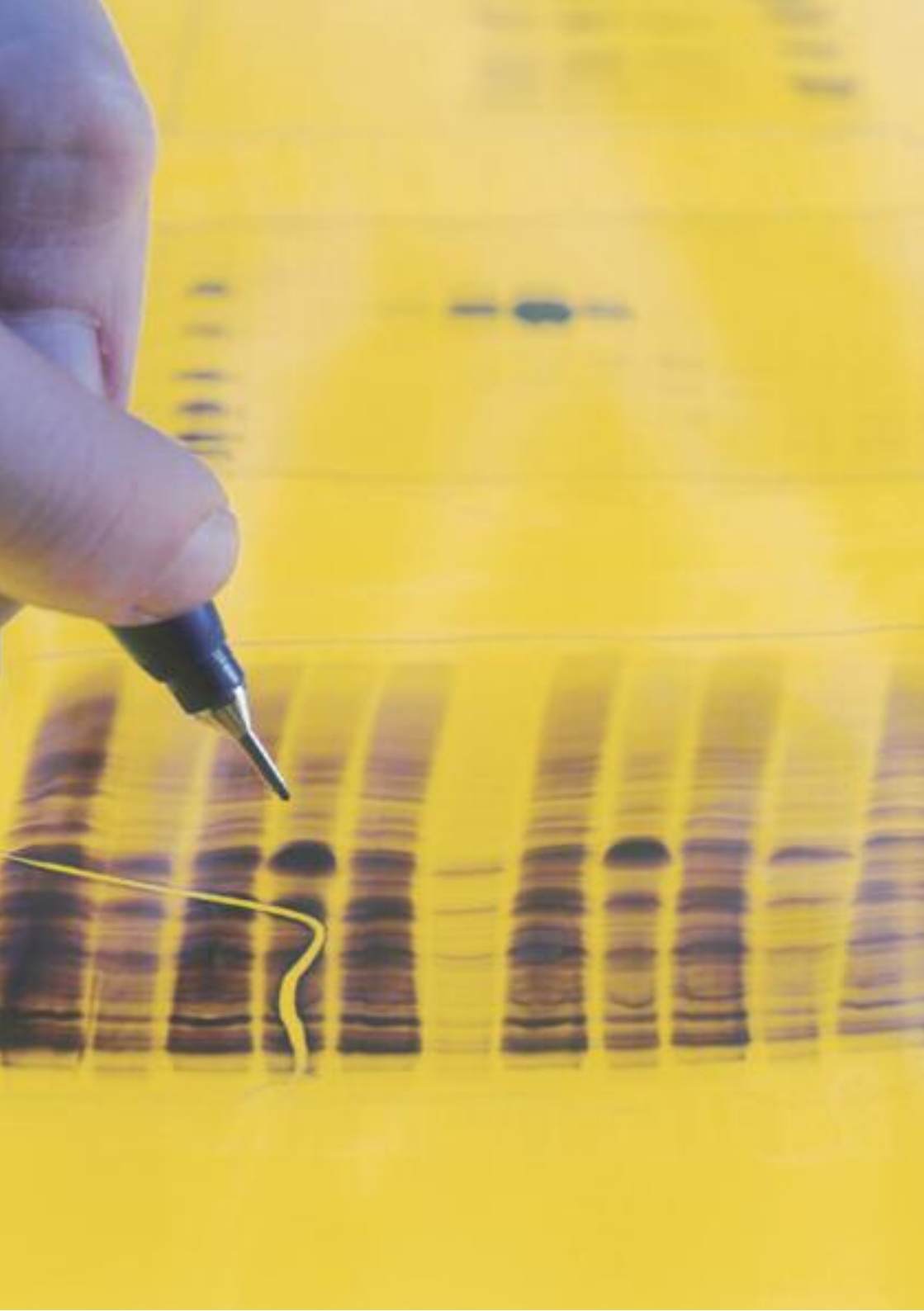
A-level learners is often of variable quality.

Information is often missing or in some cases out of date, e.g. referring to the old Access to HE Certificate rather than the Access to HE Diploma which has replaced it and not including the new grading criteria. Entry criteria for Advanced Apprentices interested in progressing to HE is particularly scarce.

When learners on non A-level programmes are unable to identify entry criteria for their qualification they will sometimes assume that the HEI is not interested in applicants studying their qualification. Absence of information does not always mean that the HEI is not interested in an application from a student with a qualification not listed in the entry criteria. Some learners will feel confident in making contact with an HEI in this instance, while others will not and may value support from their tutor/careers adviser to do so.

Non A-level applicants will need to understand how entry requirements will be articulated for their particular qualification and where entry criteria is displayed in the form of A-level grades only, be conversant with the UCAS tariff and how to convert A-level grades into a tariff score. This is applicable for BTEC and Advanced Diploma applicants but not all non A-level level 3 qualifications are UCAS tariffed, e.g. Access to HE Diplomas and Advanced Apprenticeships. In this case in the absence of specific entry criteria, an applicant or their tutor/adviser will need to contact the HEI for clarification.

All applicants to part time HE provision are not as well served as full time applicants who can research and apply through the UCAS system. Information on part time provision is not centralised as with the UCAS full time model and applicants will need to either contact the HEI directly and/or use search engines like "hot courses" ([www.hotcourses.co.uk](http://www.hotcourses.co.uk)). There is also no common admissions process, HEIs will have their own individual admissions processes



and applications will have to be made individually to each HEI.

For more information on admissions information for non A-level applicants please visit the Linking London website: [www.linkinglondon.ac.uk](http://www.linkinglondon.ac.uk)

### 2.1.1 UCAS Tariff tables

This guide focuses on BTECs, 14-19 Advanced Diplomas, Advanced Apprenticeships and the Access to HE Diploma. Of these qualifications only BTEC and Advanced Diplomas are included in the UCAS Tariff:

#### The Advanced Diploma: Principal and Generic Learning

THE ADVANCED DIPLOMA	POINTS
A*	350
A	300
B	250
C	200
D	150
E	100

#### The Advanced Diploma: Additional & Specialist Learning Component

BTEC NATIONAL AWARD	GCE A LEVEL	GCE AS LEVEL	TARIFF
	A*		140
DISTINCTION	A		120
			110
MERIT	B		100
			90
	C		80
PASS			70
	D	A	60
		B	50
	E	C	40
		D	30

#### BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma

GRADE			TARIFF POINTS
DIPLOMA	CERTIFICATE	AWARD	
DDD			360
DDM			320
DMM			280
MMM	DD		240
MMP	DM		200
MPP	MM		160
PPP	MP	D	120
	PP	M	80
		P	40

### 2.2 The Starting Point

When it comes to choosing a higher education course prospective students have never had so many courses and institutions to choose from. There are over 50,000 full time undergraduate course combinations offered at over 300 HE institutions. When it comes to part time and distance learning provision, while there are no official statistics, two of the largest providers of part time and distance learning courses are The Open University, who offer more than 600 HE level courses, and Birkbeck University of London who offer over 250 courses.

Choosing what to study and where is an important (and often life changing) decision that learners need to devote plenty of time to. Learners on a two year level 3 programme should start their research early in year one. Those on one year level 3 programmes, for example Access to HE Diplomas, need to hit the ground running and be supported in their HE planning as soon as possible.

Some learners will have a very clear idea from the start what they want to study in HE and where they want to study it. However for the majority of potential HE learners a great deal of time and effort needs to be put into making sure that they make

informed choices that are best for them. Before going straight onto what courses are on offer where, learners should take time to reflect and take stock of their current situation, where they are now if you like. Self-assessment is an essential first step in the decision making process.

### 2.2.1 Personal circumstances

Before exploring HE opportunities learners need to think carefully about their current circumstances and responsibilities. Adult learners in particular will need to think about the consequences on work, social life and home life and consider carefully how they plan their time effectively.

If adult learners have not studied for some time they could try a taster or short course to gain confidence and brush up skills before committing to anything longer. Learners should check with their local college or university or contact The Open University who run a number of Openings courses: [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)

### 2.2.2 Previous study

Learners should reflect on current and/or previous learning when considering what to study in HE. What have they enjoyed studying and why? What did they find particularly comfortable studying and conversely what did they find challenging? For example if project work is a strength they should find out if this forms a part of the course they are interested in. On the other hand if science or maths is a weak spot they need to think carefully before choosing a university course with a high science and/or maths content.

Learners also need to consider their preferred learning style. Some people learn by doing, others by observing, discussing and working it through before putting it into practice. Learners should consider how they learn best before choosing the right HE course for them. The Open University provides a learning

styles survey [www.open2.net/survey/learningstyles](http://www.open2.net/survey/learningstyles) which will help learners find out how they learn most effectively.

### Accreditation of Prior Study

Adult learners should be encouraged to find out if previous qualifications and/or experience could count towards what they want to study now. They may have obtained certificates and completed assessments in the workplace which could be accredited (credit for prior study). This could count towards what is required for the course they want to apply for and could mean that the HE course could be completed in less time.

Credit can also be awarded for learning gained outside the classroom at home, work, or in a community setting. This could include managing a team, running a business or community group. This is usually known as the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). For more information go to [www.linkinglondon.ac.uk](http://www.linkinglondon.ac.uk)

### 2.2.3 Transferable Skills

It is important that prospective HE students review and reflect on their skills and abilities before choosing and applying for a course. Being aware of their own skills and indeed areas for improvement will help learners choose the course that is right for them and will assist them in making a strong application. Learners will need to identify what skills are required/preferred for the course they are applying for and provide evidence of these on their application, specifically the personal or supporting statement. Being “self aware” is also key to a successful CV or job application.

While admissions staff will not necessarily expect applicants to have developed all the skills asked for to a “high” level they will expect to see evidence of how applicants are developing them. While some skills are

subject specific, e.g. specific language skills for a language based course, there are a number of generic skills that all admissions staff (and employers) will be interested in seeing evidence of in the application.

These include:

- Written and verbal communication
- Numeracy skills
- Team working
- Planning and organising – time management
- Problem solving
- Computer literacy
- Motivation, commitment, determination and enthusiasm

### Evidence

Evidence of these skills can be gathered from *previous experience of work, education, interests and life in general*. For example a parent who has managed to juggle work and study effectively as well as raising children could use this to show evidence of effective time management skills. In fact time management is one of the most important skills needed in order to make a success of HE. Poor time management skills is one of the most common reasons for poor academic performance.

In addition to these more “generic” skills, HE courses may require certain skills and relevant experience, especially vocational ones like medicine or law. Learners should look carefully at prospectuses and entry profiles on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) website ([www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)) to find out what they are looking for. If learners feel they need to develop these skills further they need to be pro-active in organising, for example, work shadowing or work experience where possible.

### 2.2.4 Career plans

Learners need to think carefully about their long term career plans. Do they have a career in mind? If so they

will need to find out whether they will have to study a particular subject or not (e.g. Social Work, Nursing) or if studying a specific course will shorten their professional training (e.g. Law).

Choosing a course based on a career can be fairly straightforward, for example if a learner is interested in a career in engineering then they are likely to choose an engineering degree, (although even then the choice of engineering degrees is vast and a specific engineering subject may be required). However, careful research is still needed even when a learner has a clear career plan. For example learners may be surprised to find out that the majority of undergraduate degrees entitled “education” do not qualify students as a teacher.

To try to ensure that the career is right for them learners should read careers information, trade magazines, and speak to people currently working in the job. For a list of websites providing careers information and links to further information including relevant professional bodies please go to useful web links listed in this guide.

### 2.2.5 Creating a skills portfolio

Learners need to know what they are good at and have the evidence to prove it. There a number of e-portfolios, sometimes called personal development portfolios (PDPs), which enable learners to record their activities, work and educational experience. Doing so will make completing applications for jobs and courses that much easier and effective. For a list of e-portfolios please see useful web links in this guide.

### 2.3 Choosing what to study

Vocational courses can be divided into those which are broadly vocational (e.g. media, business, computing) and courses that lead to a professional qualification. Professional qualifications are the qual-

ifications required to practice at a high level in certain jobs or professions.

Learners will need to make contact with the relevant professional body to find out which courses they accredit to make sure that what they plan to study gives them the right qualification for the career they are interested in.

Once learners have reflected on their personal circumstances, previous experience, skills, and career plans the following needs to be considered, where relevant:

**To consider:**

- Their expected grades - If they are currently studying a level 3 course
- The type of qualification they want to study (e.g. Degree, Higher National Diploma, Foundation Degree. See HE Qualifications section of this booklet)
- Their preferred mode of study: full time or part time/distance learning (see Higher Education Qualifications section of this booklet)
- Whether they want to study one subject (single) or combined with another (e.g. joint/major/minor/combined) or a modular degree
- If they are interested in a work placement, e.g. sandwich degree, or study options abroad.

**To find out:**

- Course content – courses with the same name offered by different HE institutions can sometimes be very different!
- If the course will help them progress their career plans?
- Entry requirements (e.g. what qualifications they are asking for. These may be more flexible for adults. For some part time and distance learning courses there may not be any formal entry requirement )
- If they are asking for any work related experience, IT

skills, health check or for some courses a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check

- How the course is taught (e.g. lectures, seminars, practicals, through self study packs, online etc)?
- How the course is assessed (e.g. exams, continuous assessment)?
- Costs: What are the fees and extra costs of the course e.g. registration fees, materials, examination fees?
- How long is the course and what are the hours of attendance?

#### **HE Partners in the Linking London Lifelong Learning Network**

The Linking London Network is a membership organisation of universities and colleges in Central, East and North London offering a wide range of HE courses and study modes. A number of our further education colleges offer HE courses, primarily foundation degrees and HNDs and HNCs. For more information visit [www.linkinglondon.ac.uk](http://www.linkinglondon.ac.uk)

#### **2.4 Choosing the Right University**

The first decision learners need to make is whether to stay at home and travel in each day or move away to study. For many learners, for example those with family commitments studying locally or by distance learning may be the only option. Learners planning to study locally need to pay particular attention to how long it will take to travel to the university each day, how much this will cost and where exactly their particular course is taught. Those planning to move away need to work out how far from home they want to be and will need to spend time researching what sort of accommodation is on offer and how much it will cost.

Once they have decided either to stay at home or move away learners will need to find out which HE institutions offer the course they want to study. If they

are planning to study full time they can go on to the UCAS web site to identify the institutions that offer the course they have chosen in the area/part of the country they want to study in. If they are thinking of studying part time Learndirect and hotcourses (see “useful web links” section of this guide) provide information on part time and distance learning provision.

Whether studying locally or moving away learners will want to find out some or all of the following:

- Academic facilities, e.g. library & IT services
- social facilities: sports, clubs and societies etc
- student support services – e.g. study skills support/financial advice/counselling
- what bursaries are on offer
- When they can visit – universities have open days and most also organise regular smaller scale tours
- “reputation” of institution with employers (see below)
- what links the institution has with employers
- the research interests and specialisms of members of staff

The Unistats website ([www.unistats.com](http://www.unistats.com)) publishes the results of the annual National Student Survey which is an excellent source of information on a range of relevant areas. It includes information on student achievement, graduate employment, student population (including the number of mature, part time and overseas students) and what students who are at or have recently left the university have to say about their experiences.

### University League Tables

While there are no official league tables produced for HEIs, the most popular unofficial league table guides are those produced by the Times and the Guardian newspapers (see “useful links”). League tables need to be treated with caution as results often differ, as

each league table is decided by weighting a range of different factors.

What learners won’t find in any league tables is whether the atmosphere and environment is right for them, so they need to make sure they make the time to visit them.

## 3. Applying for a HE Course

### 3.1 How to apply to HE

#### 3.1.1 Applying for Part time Undergraduate HE courses

For most part time courses, learners will need to apply directly to the university itself - this includes all courses with Birkbeck, University of London and The Open University.

Learners can search for part time courses online through the Directgov or hotcourses websites as well as contacting the institution they are interested in directly. Please see the useful web links section of this guide for more information.

Deadline dates for applications will vary as will the application form and process itself. Learners will need to contact individual institutions to find out more.

#### 3.1.2 Applying for Full time undergraduate HE courses

The vast majority of applications to Higher Education for full time undergraduate courses are made through UCAS although there are a few courses that may require direct application. These include a small number of 1-3 year full time diploma courses offered by private drama schools. Further information regarding application procedures for drama schools can be found on the Conference of Drama Schools website: [www.drama.ac.uk](http://www.drama.ac.uk). The other main exception are practical undergraduate full time music courses offered by music conservatoires. For most of these courses application is via the Conservatoires Admissions Service (CUKAS). [www.cukas.ac.uk](http://www.cukas.ac.uk)

Most full time higher education courses offered by

further education (FE) colleges are now included in the UCAS system. However, learners should check prospectuses or contact the FE college directly just to make sure.

All applications through UCAS are completed online using UCAS Apply.

Applicants can make a maximum of 5 choices on the UCAS Apply form. Additional choices can be added at a later date if an applicant uses less than 5 on the original application.

Apply will arrange these into alphabetical order. Each university and college will only see details of their course or courses for which they have applied. They will not see their other choices until they have received their final decision.

The combination of choices allowed depends upon their chosen course(s):

- For Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Science, learners can apply to a maximum of 4 courses. (The remaining 1 choice can be used for alternative subjects).
- In previous years, there were two routes into art and design (Route A and Route B). For courses starting in 2010, applicants apply through the normal UCAS route. However there are two application deadlines for art and design courses. Universities and colleges decide which deadline to use: 15 January or 24 March. For more information: [wwwucas.ac.uk/students/choosingcourses/specificsubjects/artanddesign](http://wwwucas.ac.uk/students/choosingcourses/specificsubjects/artanddesign)
- If applying to Oxbridge, learners must choose either Oxford or Cambridge, they cannot apply to both.

### 3.1.3 Key Application Dates

Below is a short summary of UCAS application dates. There are different dates to be aware of when making an application and waiting for decisions from their chosen universities and colleges.

See [wwwucas.com/students/importantdates](http://wwwucas.com/students/importantdates) for a complete listing of dates.

### Key Application Dates

<b>September 2010</b>	Application processing begins.
<b>15 October 2010</b>	Last date for receipt of on-time applications to Oxford University, University of Cambridge and courses in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science or veterinary medicine.
<b>15 January 2011</b>	Deadline for on-time applications from UK and EU students to be guaranteed equal academic consideration.
<b>26 February 2011</b>	Applicants can refer themselves through Extra for the first time.
<b>31 March 2011</b>	Universities and colleges should aim to have sent decisions on all applications received by 15 January.
<b>30 June 2011</b>	Final deadline for receipt of applications for immediate consideration. Those received after this date held for Clearing.

Some universities and colleges require learners to also pass an admissions test for courses in certain subjects. Further information is available on the UCAS website: [wwwucas.com/students/choosingcourses/admissions](http://wwwucas.com/students/choosingcourses/admissions)

## 3.2 Completing the Application for full time undergraduate courses

### 3.2.1 How to complete an Application

Applications to UCAS can only be made online. To register an application through a school or college learners will need the organisations "buzzword". Individuals who are not currently studying at school or college do not need one.

UCAS provides detailed information aimed at both applicants and teachers/advisers.

If learners do not have access to a personal computer with an internet connection, they can apply at their nearest online centre: [www.ukonline-centres.com](http://www.ukonline-centres.com) Alternatively, learners can contact their local library or careers centre to see if they can offer computer access.

When using UCAS Apply, text is available on screen for each section of the form to help learners complete it correctly. They can also save their form and complete it in their own time on any computer with internet access.

There are seven sections on the UCAS application: personal details; additional information (for UK applicants only); choices; education; employment; personal statement and reference. Once learners have completed the first 6 sections the referee will then add the reference and forward it to UCAS.

### 3.2.2 Common mistakes when completing the UCAS form

The mistakes cited below are common mistakes applicants make that should be avoided.

#### Registering to the UCAS website

- Trying to enter a username password before registering. Learners need to register before obtaining these.
- Registering as an individual when the learner is currently studying at a school or college. If this happens staff and advisers at the college will not be able to access the form to check, add a reference etc. This can be changed by contacting UCAS directly.

#### Personal Details section

- *Previous surname at 16th birthday*: leave blank if it's the same as now
- *Home address*: don't fill in if it's the same as their

postal address

- *Using an inappropriate email address*: university admissions staff will see this, so learners need to avoid anything in poor taste
- *Dual nationality*: only fill in if the learner has a passport of a second country
- *Permanent residence/student support*: the name of the learners local authority
- *Fee code*: usually 02 (Local Authority). Common mistakes are learners selecting 01 (private finance) and 99 (other)
- *Occupational background*: for younger learners this is their parents' or carers' occupational background. If they are not working, the job they used to do. For mature students it is their own occupation.

#### Education

- Not including all qualifications and results, even failed ones.
- Not including course currently being studied. These are highlighted as "pending".
- Dates for completed qualifications should be August of that year, the date of certification not the date any exams were taken or when the course finished.
- If applicants are taking the examinations of another country they should not try to give a UK equivalent. They should state exactly what they are doing and let the university decide the equivalence so as to avoid any confusion. If the column headings on the form are inappropriate, then applicants should ignore them.

#### Employment:

- Only paid work is supposed to be included. This can include full time and part time and holiday work.
- Unpaid work experience and voluntary work should instead be included in the personal statement
- It doesn't matter if the full address of previous employers cannot be remembered.



#### Personal Statement:

- Applicants should type their personal statement in a separate word document first. Once they are happy with it they can then copy and paste it into this section. There is no spell check facility in UCAS Apply. Times New Roman or Arial should be used with font size 12.
- There are 47 lines available although feedback from HEIs and UCAS suggest leaving the last line blank as copies sent to HEIs by UCAS sometimes “lose” the last line.

#### 3.2.3 Final points

Learners should print off and keep a copy of their UCAS form once complete. If invited to interview they will need to refer back to their form and having a copy will prove invaluable in the unlikely event the online form goes “missing”.

Learners losing their user name and/or password is a common and time consuming problem for schools and colleges. Learners need to be made aware that they must record their log in details carefully as soon as they have registered. Some staff when helping learners register on UCAS Apply make applicants record their user name and password on a form for future reference.

Admissions staff often start going through applications and making offers prior to the official deadlines. It is advisable whenever possible for applications to be submitted in advance of these deadlines when places, particularly on popular courses, are starting to fill up. Any early application also has the potential advantage of being more carefully looked at and suggests to those reading it that the applicant is well organised and enthusiastic.

### 3.3 Personal Statements

#### 3.3.1 How to write a Personal Statement

Personal (or supporting) statements are a standard

component of applications not only for full and part time HE study but also for job applications.

Adult vocational learners are in a particularly strong position when making applications, because of maturity, life and work experience and focus and commitment to their career. Younger vocational learners also have an advantage over those A-level students with little or no work experience. Vocational learners need to make the most of their work experience, particularly when relevant to the course being applied for. They need to make sure they avoid just describing the experience but actually reflect on what they have learnt and how this relates to the course they are applying for.

Vocational learners often have more experience of researching and completing projects and giving presentations. Providing evidence of where and how they are developing independent research skills will be of great interest to admissions tutors. A common feature of many vocational courses is continuous assessment. Meeting a number of course work deadlines throughout the year can be used as evidence that these learners are developing effective time management skills.

Adult learners often have several years (or more) of employment to draw on when writing a personal statement. A number of highly relevant skills needed in HE are likely to have been developed in the workplace. These could include team work and leadership skills, producing reports and papers, working flexibly and working under pressure effectively, ICT skills, problem solving skills and so on. Combining work and/or study with family commitments can also be mentioned to highlight good organisational skills and motivation. If adults have had a break from work or study they need to show that they are ready for the challenges of HE. They could mention relevant reading they have done, skills developed, if relevant, in raising a family

and provide examples of skills developed from interests outside of work and study.

### 3.3.2 What Admissions Staff are looking for

All admissions tutors will be looking for **evidence** that applicants:

1. *Are enthusiastic about the subject.*
2. *Are motivated.* Have they thought of why they want to go on to HE? Do they understand what is involved? How committed are they?
3. *Are they an interesting person?* They don't want people that won't contribute to class discussions or who won't get involved in university life. These are the students that are often more likely to drop out early.
4. *Have the capability to succeed on their course.* They want reassurance that they will be able to obtain the grades required and cope once they are on their course.
5. *Are able to write clearly and concisely.* They will also be looking for any spelling, punctuation or grammatical mistakes.
6. *Can provide evidence that they are developing effective study skills.*
7. *Have some experience of the world of work* (particularly for vocational courses).
8. *Broad key skills* (teamwork, communication, able to work under pressure and meet deadlines etc.).

Admissions staff will use personal statements to:

1. Help them decide who to make offers to and who to reject.
2. Decide which applicants to interview.
3. Develop lines of questioning during an interview.

### 3.3.3 What to include in a personal statement

Below are some suggestions of what applicants should include in a personal statement:

- why they have chosen the course(s): need to show enthusiasm for the subject

- the reasons why that subject area interests them: e.g. relevant books, articles, journals read, conferences, workshops attended, relevant people spoken to, relevant work experience gained etc.
- evidence that they understand what is required to study the course, e.g. if applying for nursing courses, showing that they know how scientific the subject is
- where applicable, demonstrating an understanding of the profession they are applying to train towards (e.g. Nursing, Physiotherapy, Social Work, Law, Architecture)
- how their current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that they have chosen
- how they are developing effective study skills
- why they want to go to higher education, e.g. how completing this course will help them achieve their long term career plans
- details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if relevant to the chosen course(s) and what they have gained from these experiences that are relevant to their application
- hobbies, interests and social activities that demonstrate skills and abilities.

### 3.3.4 Common Mistakes made when completing a Personal Statement

- Beginning with “*I have always wanted to study/to be a...*” or “*Ever since I was young I wanted to...*” Learners need to think of an interesting beginning.
- Describing activities/responsibilities/interests without stating what experiences and skills have been gained and why this is relevant to the course they want to study: don't tell, show.
- Getting tied up using complicated words. If they are enthusiastic about their subject it should come through without confusing the tutor with long rambling sentences.
- Apply for lots of different subjects – it makes writing an effective personal statement impossible.

Making a statement specific to one institution – it will not please the other 4!

- Repeating information that admissions staff can find on the rest of the form.
- Only using a small amount of the space available.
- Copying other personal statements available on the web. UCAS use *Copycatcher* software on all applications.
- Poor spelling, punctuation etc. If the applicant can't write 1 side of A4 without making mistakes how will they cope with an extended essay or dissertation!

### 3.4 HE Interviews

#### 3.4.1 Preparing for HE Interviews

HEIs differ in their approach to interviewing applicants. Increasingly, the majority of applicants for HE courses do not get invited to an interview. This is primarily due to the increasing number of applications to HE and the staffing costs and logistics in interviewing all applicants. However for some subjects, particularly vocational and particularly those such as Medicine, Nursing, Social Work and Teaching where direct contact with the public is involved, the interview process is a major component.

It is important that learners realise that the interview is a two way process. While the HEI is assessing their suitability for the course, the learner has an opportunity to gauge whether this is where they want to study for the next three or so years.

#### 3.4.2 What Learners can expect

An interview can last between ten minutes and an hour. Interviews are usually conducted by one interviewer, but there could be two or more present. In many cases one person from the department they have applied to will interview them. For some courses, such as Teaching, Physiotherapy or Architecture there may be someone to represent the profession in addition to someone from the

department.

The majority of the interview will be devoted to questions about the chosen course. Interviewers will be trying to discover why students have applied for a particular course, how much they already know about the chosen subject, if they have the aptitude and thinking skills to learn more, and whether they have thought about what the degree course will involve.

Before the interview applicants should:

1. Find out exactly where the interview is taking place and when.
2. Sort out their transport arrangements.
3. Decide on what to wear: ideally smart or smart/casual.
4. Re-read all paperwork about the course and go through their personal statement.
5. Keep up to date with current affairs relating to the subject, e.g. by reading a quality daily paper in the weeks leading to the interview.
6. Find out more about the institution, their facilities, subject specialisms etc.
7. Check what they have been asked to take with them, e.g. portfolio.
8. Think about what questions they may ask and how they would answer them.
9. What they want to ask them.
10. Be aware of their body language, particularly when they first meet the interviewer(s).

#### 3.4.3 Common Interview Questions

When preparing for an interview it is a good idea for learners to go through possible questions and make brief notes, e.g. a maximum of 3 bullet points for each answer which will help make their answers to the point and avoid waffle.

Here are some questions they may be asked:

- What interests them about this course?

- Why do they want to study at this institution?
- Why do they want to study (X) course?
- What have they found out about (X)? (especially if this is a new subject for them)
- What have they enjoyed about their current course and why?
- What are their career plans?
- How do they think their degree will help them in their career plans?
- How did they become interested in their chosen course?
- What are their main interests outside their studies?
- Other than their academic work, what are they most looking forward to about university life?
- Why should they offer the applicant a place on this course?
- What films or television programmes have they enjoyed recently? What books have they read?
- Are there any questions the applicant would like to ask? (e.g. options on the course, student support during the course, library or learning facilities)

#### 3.4.4 What Interviewers expect

Interviewers expect applicants to:

- Have thought carefully about their application
- Have a general understanding of what they will cover in the course
- Show genuine interest and enthusiasm
- Be able to listen carefully to their questions and to express their views, ideas and opinions
- Be able to take part in a discussion with them
- BE NERVOUS!

What Interviewers don't expect:

- They will not expect prospective learners to know everything about the subject they have applied for. If they did there would be no point in studying it. Finally, learners should not forget that any interview is a 2 way process – do they want the learner on their

course AND does the learner want to be on it!

### 3.5 About References

#### 3.5.1 Submitting Effective References

While in most cases advisers will not be expected to write a reference for an applicant, IAG staff have a role to play in schools and colleges in ensuring tutors understand what constitutes an effective reference. Most admissions tutors pay particular attention to the reference section of the application form and a well written, informative reference will do much to ensure the success of the application.

If an applicant is not currently studying they could ask a tutor who has recently taught them if relevant. If they have been out of education for several years, their employer or somebody who knows them (e.g. a senior teacher at their child's school, GP etc.) but not a relative, can give them a reference.

#### 3.5.2 Writing References: Key Points

- When writing the reference, referees do not need to repeat any of the information that the student has given unless they want to comment on it.
- Each university and college chosen by the student will see the reference.
- Those universities and colleges, however, will not know to which other universities and colleges the student has applied. If an institution is mentioned in the reference, this could compromise the application.
- Referees should provide a brief statement about the course curriculum. *Don't assume that all admissions staff are familiar with vocational qualifications, especially new or revised vocational qualifications, e.g. new 14-19 diplomas, or revised Access to HE Diploma courses.*
- References should not give information about a student's health or disability without their agreement.
- Under the Data Protection Act any student can ask



C O L L E G E

1885

SILIVM

IN MEMORY OF  
JAMES H. WILSON  
1885-1915

1885  
J. H. WILSON

for a copy of the reference and any other personal information that they have about them.

- All comments should be positive. If in doubt referees should omit any aspects that cannot be commented on positively. Omission can be equally as telling.
- If the student is on an Access or Foundation course or other one-year course, the referee may not have known them long enough to write a full reference. In this case, they should say so and explain that they are providing a temporary reference with details of how the course is assessed and the number of credits that are awarded. They should include confirmation that they will send a more detailed reference directly to all chosen universities and colleges next spring. False / misleading information may result in the application being cancelled.
- Information from the UCAS application, including the reference, will go on the student's university file and will be used to help make initial decisions about things such as which personal tutor to allocate to a student.

### 3.5.3 Other Useful Information to provide on References

Admission tutors find it helpful if the following information about the applicant is included:

- existing achievement, with particular reference to subjects relating to the courses for which they are applying.
- motivation and commitment towards the chosen course(s).
- any relevant skills achievement, whether certificated or not.
- potential (other than predicted grades).
- powers of analysis and independent thought.
- relevant curriculum enrichment and other activities.
- relevant work experience, such as work placements,

voluntary & community work.

- proposed career plan.
- where relevant, their suitability for training for a particular profession.
- any factors, such as personal circumstances, that may have affected, or might affect their performance.
- information about any special needs and other requirements, provided the student is happy to share this information.
- any information they want to add about performance in individual units of qualifications, that the student has not already given in the personal statement e.g. project work, portfolio etc.

### 3.5.4 Final points

*55% of references are written within 5 weeks of the deadline (Aimhigher 2008)*

*Admissions tutors spend approximately 3 minutes per application (Aimhigher 2008)*

All admissions tutors would make the same plea to referees that they keep it clear, simple and concise – and use a reasonable font size, ideally font size 12, remembering that UCAS will reduce the finished article to half size.

Further Information is available at:

[www.ucas.com/advisers/online/references](http://www.ucas.com/advisers/online/references)

### 3.6 After Applying: What Next?

For applications via UCAS the following steps occur:

1. UCAS process the application
2. UCAS send a welcome letter confirming personal details and choices
3. The HEIs applied to receive a copy of the application
4. The HEIs decide whether to make an offer and/or invite to interview or not

Detailed information on the UCAS applications process is available on the [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) site.

### 3.6.1 Key Points

The welcome letter includes a personal ID to access UCAS Track which enables learners to follow the progress of their application.

The only “official” offers are those sent by UCAS on the “Statement of decisions” letter. Learners often receive verbal or written/e-mail offers from individual HEIs but these should not be considered as confirmed until this letter arrives.

Learners who have not been invited to an interview should attend an open day before deciding whether to accept an offer.

Any questions a learner has about any offers should be directed to the relevant HEI.

Interview decisions are sent directly to the learner rather than via UCAS. If the learner cannot make a particular interview date they need to contact the HEI as soon as possible.

HEIs must make a decision about an application by the end of March for all applications received by the 15th of January.

The statement of decisions letter from UCAS includes a date by which the learner has to respond. This date will vary from individual to individual but is usually in April or May.

Learners who have not used up their 5 choices can add a further choice(s) at a later date.

Learners can change their choices of HEI(s) up to 14 days after the application form has been received by UCAS. After this date applicants will need to contact the HEI directly to discuss further. Learners can defer entry to HE for a year by indicating this on their UCAS form. In the personal statement they should explain their reasons for wanting to take a year out, as admissions tutors look for positive plans. They should check with their chosen institutions that they accept deferred entry. Most admissions tutors view a year out, if used construc-

tively, as a beneficial experience.

### 3.6.2 UCAS Extra

UCAS Extra is available from late February to the end of June. If learners are without an offer, for whatever reason, and they have used all 5 choices already, Extra enables applicants to have an additional choice through UCAS. This means they do not have to wait until Clearing to continue to find a place. Those eligible for UCAS Extra will automatically be able to refer themselves by using the online applicant enquiry service on the UCAS website.

### 3.6.3 Clearing

Clearing operates from July to September and gives applicants the chance to apply to institutions that still have places on their courses. This is available to those students not holding any offers, didn't get the grades needed, or who applied after the 30th of June. Spare places are advertised on the [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) site and in the Independent newspaper.

## 4. Preparing for Higher Education

### 4.1 Preparing for Student Life

Many learners, while looking forward to studying in HE, will be nervous about the transition into HE. Some mature learners in particular may be nervous about the challenges and pressures of HE study. Mature students may experience different pressures to other students. Family commitments are usually greater, particularly if they have children. A higher education course will have a big impact on their daily routine, so they need to prepare themselves and those around them. They need to try to ensure that they have sufficient marked time for quiet, uninterrupted study. Universities and colleges are aware of these pressures and do what they can to help. Many have special mature student advisers or welfare

officers, as well as counsellors and summer programmes to prepare learners for the transition into HE, and there is usually a mature student's society to provide help, support, and a forum for sharing experiences.

It might be a good idea for learners to draw up a schedule of how they will manage their time in a typical week as a student. To do this, they will need to find out the likely timetable for the course they are interested in and work out roughly how much time they will want to spend on campus, if relevant, taking into account, for example, time to be spent in the library and at social events.

### Getting ready to go

There are a number of things that students need to think about and plan for before starting HE. These can include:

- confirming accommodation arrangements if moving away to study
- ensuring finances are planned: e.g. setting up a bank account, when any loans, awards, bursaries will be paid, devising a budget etc.
- transport & travel arrangements
- accessing childcare services
- what to take on the first day: eg copies of exam certificates and other paperwork, passport sized photos etc.
- what course materials, books etc that may be needed before starting
- special requirements: for example if a learner has a disability
- devising a timetable to help manage time effectively.

## 4.2 Acquiring Skills for learning

### 4.2.1 Study Skills

Learners will need to develop a range of new skills when they are studying on a higher education course. These will include note-taking, referencing, managing

their time effectively, working to deadlines, research skills and writing essays. Study skills support will vary although most HEIs run study skills workshops and some will provide ongoing study skills support through a drop in or booked 1-2-1 service.

BBC RaW (reading and writing) provide online activities such as games, quizzes and tests to help learners brush up on their study and reading and writing skills: [www.bbc.co.uk/raw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw)

The Open University offers a range of free information on how to study effectively, from reading and taking notes, to essay writing and getting the most out of lectures and seminars.

If learners do experience academic problems, whether with the material itself or due to a heavy workload, they should first of all talk to their tutor. They are there to help and can give good advice and suggestions. The HEI may also have a mentoring scheme, whereby newer students gain academic guidance from a more experienced student.

### 4.2.2 ICT Skills

There are a range of introductory courses for adults who may want to brush up their IT skills before starting in HE. Courses vary from those aimed at the complete beginner to refresher courses. Local adult education centres, libraries and FECs are a good starting point. The BBC also offers a free online course for beginners [www.bbc.co.uk/webwise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise). Refresher courses aimed at learners with some prior experience of using computers include CLAIT (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) and ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence). THE ECDL is usually available through Adult Education centres and can also be taken as a distance learning course. The Open University offers a certificate in information technology and computing that can be studied by distance learning: [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses).

#### 4.2.3 Numeracy Skills

Again local Adult Education centres and FECs often provide face to face courses to help learners brush up their numeracy skills. Online support includes free taster courses offered by Learndirect website ([www.learndirect.co.uk/courses](http://www.learndirect.co.uk/courses)), the BBC Skillswise website ([www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise)) and Open University courses ([www.open.ac.uk/study](http://www.open.ac.uk/study)) including their Opening Course “ Starting with Maths” <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk>

#### 4.3 Student Support in HE

##### 4.3.1 Student support services

Student support services will vary from institution to institution and learners should research what is available when making choices about where to apply to. These services can include:

- housing
- finance
- childcare facilities
- counselling services
- study and IT support
- mentoring schemes
- support for students with additional needs
- job hunting support etc.

##### Student Unions

Every university will also have a Student Union, which is run by students for students. They usually offer discounts for travel, entrance fees to events, museums and galleries. The Student Union looks after the rights and interests of students and runs a wide variety of clubs and societies.

Most student unions also have a welfare officer who will give confidential advice to students on virtually any welfare or course-related problem. Some also have a mentoring scheme, where more experienced students give academic guidance to newer students.

Alongside sporting and entertainment based

societies a range of societies aimed at women, mature students, and lesbian, gay and bisexual students are also run by most HEIs Student Unions.

##### 4.3.2 Personal problems

###### The NUS

The NUS (National Union of Students) [www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk) website has advice on dealing with homesickness and other problems commonly faced by new students.

Most will have a counselling service available - or students can call or email organisations such as the Samaritans, [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) who offer emotional support 24 hours a day.

##### Student Accommodation Services

Most universities have student accommodation services that are run on campus to help students with accommodation problems. These services are especially useful to new students and international students. The university's accommodation services may also give details of local letting and estate agents with whom they enjoy good relationships, as well as details of local newspapers which have property supplements. Students may also get help with accommodation from their local councils.

The NUS also has a Housing advice service [www.nus.org.uk/en/Student-Life/Housing-Advice](http://www.nus.org.uk/en/Student-Life/Housing-Advice) that offers advice and guidance on the different types of accommodation available to students, deposits, staying safe and, among other things, the TV licence.

##### 4.3.3 Improving job prospects

Most HEIs have active career/job shops which can provide advice and support on finding part time employment. There are a range of job opportunities at HEIs including working in cafes, bars and halls of residences. A number of HEIs also employ students in widening participation activities, promoting the

benefits of HE and acting as role models in local schools and colleges. Working while studying full time, as long as it does not negatively impact on student's academic work, will strengthen a CV as well as help pay the bills.

#### 4.3.4 Student health services

Larger HEIs usually provide their own student health centres on campus. This may include access to GPs, dentists and counselling services. A list of local GP surgeries is usually included in welcome packs and students are strongly advised if living away from home to sign up with a doctor in the first term. Healthcare for students is often provided at a reduced rate or even free. Students need to familiarise themselves with what they are entitled to and make use of it.

There are also lots of sources of useful online health advice (though they should always seek professional advice for ongoing concerns). The BBC's Surgery website ([www.bbc.co.uk/switch/surgery/advice](http://www.bbc.co.uk/switch/surgery/advice)) contains information on things like stress, drugs and sexual health for young people. NHS Direct ([www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)) contains a comprehensive self-help guide, while the [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) website contains general information on health and well-being.

#### 4.3.5 Student with disabilities

HEIs have become increasingly aware of the needs of students with disabilities. The majority now employ a specialist disabilities adviser to ensure students have full access to all services.

Provision varies according to the institution so if a learner has a disability or specific learning difficulty, they are strongly encouraged to make early direct contact with individual institutions. Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) may be available to cover extra costs involved in attending a higher

education course because of a disability or medical condition.

In addition, all higher education institutions should now have a Disability Equality Scheme, setting out how they intend to improve disability equality across their institution. Skill: the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, offers information and advice on all aspects of higher education and student's life. They publish *Into Higher Education* a guide for people with disabilities considering applying for higher education courses at university or college. Skill also provides contact details of disabilities advisers and operates a free telephone helpline for other queries. For more information: [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk).

#### 4.3.6 Childcare provision

Most universities and colleges offer some form of childcare provision - these can include such things as:

- crèches
- out of school clubs
- toy libraries
- holiday play schemes

Learners should contact their university or college for information on what's available.

Facilities vary considerably and there is often competition for places. It is therefore a good idea to apply early for places at a nursery or crèche.

Further information on childcare provision in FE colleges and universities can also be obtained from **The Daycare Trust** ([www.daycaretrust.org.uk](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk)) - a charity promoting childcare facilities within higher education. The trust can also help with details of benefits and grants available to students with children.

If individuals are looking for childcare provision outside of their university or college, ChildcareLink is a government website that pulls together childcare information from local authorities and enables

individuals to search for the appropriate care in their area. It contains comprehensive national and local childcare information as well as details of child minders, pre-school groups and after-school clubs. For more information, visit their website (<http://childcarefinder.direct.gov.uk/childcarefinder>).

### 5. Glossary of terms

- **Access to HE Diploma course** - Access courses are designed to prepare mature students without the necessary qualifications for entry into university or college and to provide the underpinning knowledge and skills needed to progress on to HE level study.
- **Advanced Apprenticeships (AA)** - These are qualifications in practical work-related skills which can be gained while they are in a job with a local employer. They are an opportunity to earn money, learn new skills and gain a qualification at the same time. During the AA learners work towards gaining an NVQ level 3. For more information check out the website at [www.apprenticeships.org.uk/](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/)
- **Assessment** - A means of measuring learning (e.g. an exam, essay, presentation).
- **Award** - The overall qualification learners receive having taken the necessary modules or units.
- **Careers Services** - These provide a very important service for all learners whatever stage they are at in their course. They can help in terms of providing advice and guidance about a vast range of career possibilities which students might want to consider once they have completed their course. Many universities are also able to provide information about opportunities for part time and temporary jobs during their time as a student. Often future employers will visit universities to recruit students for employment and the Careers Service will have details of these “milk round” events.
- **CATS** – Credit Accumulation Transfer Scheme -

Sometimes it is possible to gain credit for completing parts of a degree. If learners have already studied to HND level, on a degree programme or for relevant professional qualifications before they start a degree, they may be able to transfer credits to a new course, under the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme, CATS. This can allow greater flexibility and means that if the learner changes course, move to another institution or take a break from study or change from full to part time, students can take the credits with them.

- **Certificated Learning** - Learning from a previous course which has been assessed and for which learners have a transcript.
- **Credit** - A measure of academic learning
- **Elective** - An elective is a unit or module (or subject of study) freely selected by the student at university or college. On some courses an elective would be a period of course-related work experience or language.
- **Essays** - Essays are pieces of written work, which are submitted by students to the university and is one form of assessment. Essays usually have a set number of words (depending on the subject or tutor but often around 2000 words) and students are expected to answer a question, showing that they have done some research and are able to discuss the issues clearly and logically. Essays are more common in certain subjects than others.
- **Experiential** - Gained from experience.
- **Experiential Learning** - Learning from life or work experience which has not yet been assessed.
- **FE** - Further Education. Further Education refers to post 16 education which can be offered at colleges, institutes of education, schools and in the workplace. Often a wide range of vocational and academic qualifications can be studied.
- **HE** - Higher Education - Higher Education usually refers to post 18 study at a higher level. Most higher education students study for HNDs or foundation

degrees, undergraduate degrees or postgraduate degrees.

- **(LA) Local Authority** – Mainly responsible for education for those up to 18 years old – they have a Finance or Student Awards Section which deals with requests for funding for people living in that local area who wish to go to university.
- **Level Descriptor** - A description of the type of learning skills or knowledge required to gain credit at a certain level (e.g. '*ability to analyse and evaluate complex data to predict economic trends*').
- **Level** - A measure of the difficulty or complexity of learning. In relation to other higher education courses, the first year of a degree course is usually known as *level 4* and the third year as *level 6*.
- **Mature Students** - Generally a mature student is a student who does not enter Higher Education directly, or after a gap-year, from school or college. Mature students often have wider experience of the workplace and life as a whole, or have spent some time away from study. Specific definitions of “mature students” may be applied when financial help is sought to support their studies.
- **Module** - A small course – or '*building block*' within a larger course. Often means the same as a *Unit*.
- **National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)** - National Vocational Qualifications are practical qualifications which confirm the competence and skills of a worker in a specific profession or job. Each NVQ is broken down into smaller units and each unit tests a specific skill. NVQs are available from Level 1 (the lowest level) to Level 5 (the highest level).
- **Prospectus** - A prospectus is a booklet (or CD-ROM or website) which gives the details of courses, activities and student life at a university or college. A university prospectus is normally designed to give information to anyone who wishes to study with that university and can be obtained from the Admissions Office.



- **Research** - Research is a key feature of most university courses. Research involves collecting information about a subject from a variety of sources including books, journals and the Internet or by carrying out experiments or talking to people and analysis of this information.
- **Sandwich course** - Sandwich courses are degree courses which include an extra year 'sandwiched' between the years of study. During the extra year the student usually goes on work experience with an organisation or department relating to their subject. If the degree is in languages, the extra year will usually involve a trip abroad. (e.g. A sandwich course in Spanish may involve a year living and working in Spain.)
- **Student Loans** - There are low interest loans from the government to help students pay their living and study costs while they are at university.
- **Tuition fees** - Tuition fees for full-time courses are set by the Government and paid to the university directly by the student or by the local authority if the student is eligible for fees support. Depending on their (or their family's) circumstances the entire fees may be paid for them by the Local Education Authority. The tuition fees for part time courses will vary according to the length of the course and the university they will be studying at.
- **UCAS** - The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service for the UK. All students applying for full-time courses apply through UCAS. For more information visit the main website at [wwwucas.com](http://wwwucas.com)
- **UCAS Tariff** - A points system for entry into Higher Education which takes account of different grades and accommodates a range of different types of qualification. Entry qualifications and grades are calculated together as a tariff points score. Higher Education institutions express their offer of a place at university in terms of a tariff points score rather than as grades (e.g. 300 tariff points rather than three B grade A

Levels). However not all HE entry level qualifications (usually level 3 qualifications) are tariffed at present. For more information visit: [wwwucas.com](http://wwwucas.com)

- **Unit** - a small course – or 'building block' within a larger course. Often means the same as a *Module*.
- **Vocational** - Vocational learning is training directly related to work or employment. Vocational courses prepare learners for particular careers, occupations or trades and may involve a substantial element of work-experience.

## 6. Routes into HE table

See Table opposite

## 7. Resources, Links and useful websites

### 7.1. IAG Organisations

**AGCAS:** [www.agcas.org.uk/](http://www.agcas.org.uk/)

- AGCAS is the professional association for higher education (HE) careers practitioners. It includes resources, professional development, labour market information for HE careers services.

**NEXT STEP:**

<https://nextstep.direct.gov.uk>

-Next Step is a publicly funded service, helping adults in England get the advice they need for future skills, careers, work and life choices. Services can be accessed via the web, by phone and face to face by appointment.

**Connexions:** [www.connexions-direct.com/](http://www.connexions-direct.com/)

- Information and advice for young people

**Graduate Prospects:** [www.prospects.ac.uk/](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/)

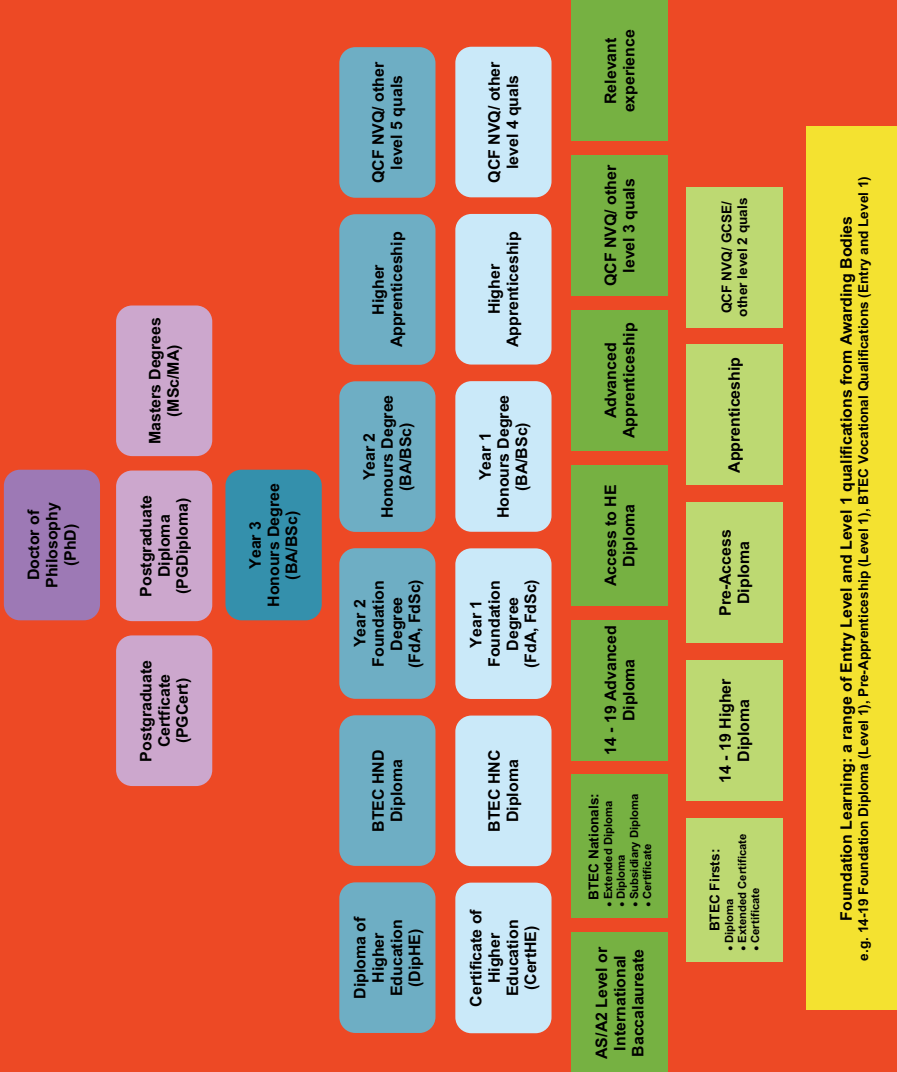
- The UK's official graduate careers support service. Packed with useful information, including detailed graduate destinations statistics.

**The Institute of Career Guidance:** [www.icg-uk.org/](http://www.icg-uk.org/)

- The Institute of Career Guidance is the largest professional association for guidance practitioners in the

# Routes into Higher Education

Level



**Foundation Learning: a range of Entry Level and Level 1 qualifications from Awarding Bodies**  
 e.g. 14-19 Foundation Diploma (Level 1), Pre-Apprenticeship (Level 1), BTEC Vocational Qualifications (Entry and Level 1)

UK. Members include career guidance practitioners, managers, researchers, trainers and students.

**The Matrix Standard:** [www.matrixstandard.com/](http://www.matrixstandard.com/)

- The matrix Standard is a quality framework for the effective delivery of information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work. The matrix Standard is useful for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance to external clients as part of their business and also for employers who are committed to developing their people.

**Sector Skills Councils:** [www.sectorcareersinfo.co.uk/](http://www.sectorcareersinfo.co.uk/)

- This site includes a separate section for each Sector Skills Council, explaining which area of industry or service they cover, what careers resources they offer, and who to contact.

**Unionlearn:** [www.unionlearn.org.uk/](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/)

- Unionlearn aims to help unions to become learning organisations, with programmes for union reps and regional officers and strategic support for national officers. It also helps unions to broker learning opportunities for their members, running phone and online advice services.

## 7.2 IAG Guides and Resources

Find below a list of Adviser resources and their links.

**Advice Resources:** [www.advice-resources.co.uk](http://www.advice-resources.co.uk)

- A wide range of resources and guides including funding directories, skills and interests assessments and careers values tools.

**Cegnet:** [www.cegnet.co.uk/](http://www.cegnet.co.uk/)

- A wide range of IAG resources aimed primarily at young people, including 14-19 diplomas. Links to other resources include DCSF Choices Publications - Which way now?, Its your choice and the Parents & Carers: guide to options 14-19 booklets.

**Guidance Forum:** [www.guidanceforum.net/](http://www.guidanceforum.net/)

- Includes a useful list of internet resources for IAG professionals.

**IAG Workforce:** [www.iagworkforce.co.uk/](http://www.iagworkforce.co.uk/)

- This web based resource was commissioned by the DCSF to support the IAG workforce in the context of the roll-out of the 14-19 reforms.

**NAEGA:** [www.naega.org.uk/](http://www.naega.org.uk/)

- NAEGA aims to bring together individuals and organisations providing adult guidance across the UK. It aims to promote the provision of adult guidance services and encourage high standards of practice.

**NIACE Catalogue of Resources:** [www.niace.org.uk/](http://www.niace.org.uk/)

- A catalogue of resources supporting professional development.

**NICEC Information Briefings:** [www.nicec.org.uk/](http://www.nicec.org.uk/)

- National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling produces information briefings on topics relevant to adult guidance which can be downloaded free of charge.

**Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities:**

[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

- A range of factsheets on supporting learners with disabilities.

## 7.3 Useful Adviser Web Links

### 7.3.1 Introduction to Higher Education

**Directgov:** [www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning)

**Uni4me:** [www.aimhigher.ac.uk/Uni4me](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/Uni4me)

**UCAS:** [www.ucas.ac.uk/students/wheretostart](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/wheretostart)

### 7.3.2 HE Qualifications

Overviews of HE qualifications and routes into HE:

**Directgov - About Qualifications:** [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

**UCAS - About Qualifications:**

[www.ucas.ac.uk/advisers/curriculumandquals/](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/advisers/curriculumandquals/)

### 7.3.3 Awarding Bodies

**Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA):**

[www.qca.org.uk/](http://www.qca.org.uk/) - Includes information on vocational qualifications, workforce development, adult learning etc

**The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA):**

[www.aqa.org.uk/](http://www.aqa.org.uk/) - Information on 14-19 qualifications including 14-19 diplomas.

**City and Guilds:** [www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com)

- Key provider of vocational qualifications in the UK

**Edexcel:** [www.edexcel.org.uk](http://www.edexcel.org.uk)

- Edexcel look after a range of recognised qualifications in the UK including BTECs NVQs and 14-19 diplomas.

**National Open College Network:** [www.nocn.org.uk](http://www.nocn.org.uk)

- An accreditation service through a national framework of local Open College Networks

**Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations:**

[www.ocr.org.uk/](http://www.ocr.org.uk/)

- UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications, both academic and vocational.

#### 7.3.4 HE Finance

**Student Finance:** [www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk](http://www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk)

- Comprehensive information on tuition fees, bursaries and scholarships, including online applications forms for student loans and grants.

**Student Money:** [www.studentmoney.org](http://www.studentmoney.org)

- It covers sources of funding from the academic, charity and commercial sectors as well as other useful tools such as a budget planner and a loan repayment calculator.

**Student Loans Company:** [www.slc.co.uk](http://www.slc.co.uk)

- The Student Loans Company makes loans to eligible higher education students. The website contains information on loans for both full and part time students.

**Uniaid:** [www.uniaid.org.uk](http://www.uniaid.org.uk)

- Student friendly interactive website aimed at helping learners overcome financial barriers to HE and manage their time and finances effectively.

#### 7.3.5 Making HE Choices

**The Starting Point:**

**Careers Information:**

**Jobs 4 U (Occupations):** [www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u](http://www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u)

- Careers information on over 800 occupations.

Search facilities available include an A-Z search of careers and a search by different job families.

**NEXT STEP:** <https://nextstep.direct.gov.uk>

- Information on over 700 occupations and related careers information including funding and childcare.

**Graduate Prospects:** [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

- While aimed at graduates, this site provides a wealth of information on a wide range of careers and graduate destinations.

**Careers A-Z:** [www.careersa-z.co.uk](http://www.careersa-z.co.uk)

- Provides links to information on a wide range of careers.

**Sector Skills Councils:** [www.sscalliance.org](http://www.sscalliance.org)

- This site includes a separate section for each Sector Skills Council, explaining which area of industry or service they cover, what careers resources they offer, and who to contact.

**Target Jobs:** [www.targetjobs.co.uk/careers-intelligence](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk/careers-intelligence)

- Aimed at graduates but useful for all learners with information, employer case studies and links to further information.

**E-Portfolios**

**myprogressfile:** [www.myprogressfile.com](http://www.myprogressfile.com)

**Careers Wales:** [www.careerswales.com](http://www.careerswales.com)

**PebblePad:** [www.pebblelearning.co.uk](http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk)

**Choosing What to Study and Where to Go**

**The complete university guide:** [www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk](http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk)

- Information on the whole process of researching, applying and going to HE

**Direct Gov:** [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

- Comprehensive information on higher education

aimed at learners

**Uni 4 me:** [www.aimhigher.ac.uk/uni4me](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/uni4me)

- Clear and concise information on higher education aimed primarily at younger learners seeking an overview of HE

**Push:** [www.push.co.uk](http://www.push.co.uk)

- Student friendly site providing information on and casting a critical eye over UK HEIs

**Unistats:** [www.unistats.com](http://www.unistats.com)

- Includes results of the annual National Students Survey. Packed with useful information.

**Unofficial University Guides:** [www.unofficial-guides.com](http://www.unofficial-guides.com)

- Students views on universities in the UK  
**Independent Newspaper: A-Z of Degrees:**

[www.independent.co.uk/student](http://www.independent.co.uk/student)

- Degree course subjects and what they are like

**Open Days:** [www.opendays.com](http://www.opendays.com)

- Information on open days in the UK

**London Taster Courses:** [www.london.ac.uk](http://www.london.ac.uk)

- The London Taster Course Programme provides students looking towards attending university the opportunity to experience life as a university student, in the subject area of their choice. Administered by the The Careers Group, University of London with many of the Colleges of the University of London participating, as well as several other Linking London Lifelong Learning Network HEIs in the London area.

**Ideas Generators**

**Push Guide:** [www.push.co.uk](http://www.push.co.uk)

- Uni chooser facility helps learners produce a shortlist of HEIs based on personal preferences  
**Stamford Test:** [www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/whattostudy](http://www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/whattostudy)

- A short questionnaire which can help to match learners interests and abilities to possible higher education subjects

**UK Coursefinder:** [www.ukcoursefinder.com](http://www.ukcoursefinder.com)

- this site includes a questionnaire that helps learners identify the right course for them.

### *7.3.6 League Tables*

**The Times newspaper:** [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk)

- Includes The Times newspapers university league tables. (Please note that this is now a subscription website).

**The Guardian newspaper:**

[www.guardian.co.uk/education](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education)

- Includes The Guardians newspapers university league tables

**HE Admissions Tests UCAS - On Admissions tests:**

[www.ucas.ac.uk/students/beforeyouapply/admissions](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/beforeyouapply/admissions)

### *7.3.7 Full time HE Study*

**UCAS:** [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

**Foundation degrees:**

[www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk/](http://www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk/)

### *7.3.8 Part Time and Full Time Undergraduate Course Information*

**Hot courses:** [www.hotcourses.co.uk](http://www.hotcourses.co.uk)

- Users can search for part time and distance learning courses by region

**Foundation Degree Forward (fdf):** [www.fdf.ac.uk](http://www.fdf.ac.uk)

- Aimed at employers and students, also contains resources for advisors

**Open University:** [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)

- The Open University is the UK's largest university providing part time courses by distance learning

**Birkbeck, University of London:** [www.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.bbk.ac.uk)

- London's specialist provider of evening higher education

**The National Extension College:** [www.nec.ac.uk](http://www.nec.ac.uk)

- The National Extension College (NEC) was set up over 40 years ago as a charity to help people of all ages fit learning into their lives. Many of the courses are at pre-degree level.

ICS: [www.icslearn.co.uk](http://www.icslearn.co.uk)

- The ICS courses allow people from all backgrounds study from home in their own time to gain qualifications.

### 7.3.9 Applying to HE

UCAS: [www.ucas.com/advisers](http://www.ucas.com/advisers)

- Advisers Guide to supporting learners

Uni4me/Aimhigher: [www.aimhigher.ac.uk/Uni4me](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/Uni4me)

Directgov: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

- Information on, and examples of, personal statements

### 7.3.10 Preparing for HE

Getting ready to go

The site.org: [www.thesite.org](http://www.thesite.org)

- Information on going to HE, settling in and developing effective study skills

Directgov: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

- A wide range of information on going to and settling in at HE

BBC RaW: [www.bbc.co.uk/raw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw)

- Online activities aimed at helping learners brush up their study skills

BBC Webwise: [www.bbc.co.uk/webwise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise)

- IT refresher courses

Open University short IT courses:

[www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses)

Learn Direct: [www.learndirect.co.uk/](http://www.learndirect.co.uk/)

- Courses at all levels in IT numeracy and literacy

Student Life & Student Support

National Union of Students (NUS):

[www.nusonline.co.uk](http://www.nusonline.co.uk)

- Information and advice on going to university and settling in and the range of services that the NUS provides.

London Student: [www.londonstudent.co.uk](http://www.londonstudent.co.uk)

- London student university forums and student discussion

Real Uni: [www.realuni.com](http://www.realuni.com)

- Alternative UK Prospectus written by students.

The Student Room: [www.thestudentroom.co.uk](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk)

- Student forum enabling learners considering HE to chat with current students

You go Further: [www.yougoofurther.co.uk](http://www.yougoofurther.co.uk)

- Yougo connects UCAS applicants and students at university

Childcare

The Daycare Trust: [www.daycaretrust.org.uk](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk)

- A charity promoting childcare facilities within higher education. The trust can also help with details of benefits and grants available to students with children.

Student Health Services

BBC Surgery site:

[www.bbc.co.uk/switch/surgery/advice](http://www.bbc.co.uk/switch/surgery/advice)

- Contains information on things like stress, drugs and sexual health for young people

NHS Direct: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

- Contains a comprehensive self-help guide

Information for Refugees and Learners with Overseas Qualifications

International Comparisons: [www.naric.org.uk](http://www.naric.org.uk)

- Provides information about the comparability of UK and international qualifications and the educational and qualifications system in over 180 countries.

UCAS:

[www.ucas.ac.uk/students/wheretostart/nonukstudents](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/wheretostart/nonukstudents)

- For information on entry to UK universities with overseas qualifications.

Council for International Education:

[www.intstudy.com/articles/ukcosa.htm](http://www.intstudy.com/articles/ukcosa.htm)

- UKCOSA is the Council for International Education. They provide free advice and information to

international students.

English Language Testing: [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)

- International English Language Testing System  
(necessary for entry to UK universities if English is not  
the first language).

UK Council for International Student Affairs

[www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)

Guides for Advisers and Refugees and Asylum

Seekers: [www.advice-resources.co.uk](http://www.advice-resources.co.uk)

London Metropolitan University Refugee Assessment

Guidance Unit (RAGU): [www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu)

- RAGU has an excellent reputation for its work with  
supporting refugees into and through HE and into  
employment.



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If you found this guidance document useful or would like to discuss our work in area of vocational learning, please contact: [info@linkinglondon.ac.uk](mailto:info@linkinglondon.ac.uk) or phone the progression advice line on 020 7380 3226.

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