

BridgeÜ

Studying at University in the UK



UK Universities in a nutshell

- High-ranking globally
- International cohorts
- Apply directly to the course
- Focused on specific subjects/disciplines
- World-leading research departments
- Life on-campus in first year, then shared housing
- Tuition fees are lower than US; higher than Europe

Careers & employment questions

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Application overview - 2024

October	<p>2 October Application deadline for conservatoire music applications.</p> <p>16 October Application deadline for Oxford and Cambridge.</p>
January	<p>31 January Application deadline for the majority of undergraduate courses. Offers will come in from the point of applying until before 1 May. Some university offers will require a response, so you should check UCAS regularly.</p>
May	<p>16 May University decisions usually back for applications submitted for 31st January deadline.</p>
June	<p>6 June If you receive all decisions from universities by 16 May, reply by 6 June.</p> <p>30 June Any applications received after 30th June are entered into Clearing.</p>
July & August	<p>IB and A-level results released.</p> <p>5 July Clearing opens.</p>

Why study in the UK?

- High quality education at internationally top ranked institutions.
- Curriculum that allows students to specialise in a selected subject.
- Popular with international students, with many campuses boasting student diversity.



Top quality education

The UK boasts top universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College London, University College London, Edinburgh and Durham. Three universities are in the global top 10, over 30 in the global top 200 and 90 in the global top 1,000. Considering the UK is such a small country, its university reputation is outstanding. A UK degree is recognised by employers globally.



Student satisfaction

Students report at least 90% satisfaction with their experience in the UK. The UK has the highest international student experience satisfaction ratings for English-speaking countries. The UK is popular with international students from all over the world.



International

As of 2022, 22% of UK undergraduates were international students. In fact, the UK recently met its targets for attracting new international students.

A Beginner's Guide to UK Universities

There are a diverse range of higher education institutions in the UK. Some were founded over 800 years ago, others recently as 80 years ago. The 'personalities' of different institutions are diverse and will suit some people much more than others.





Ancient universities (including Collegiate universities)

These refer to older institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, St. Andrew's, Durham, amongst others. They usually have more long-standing traditions and many have strong academic reputations across all departments. They are typically situated in smaller, more historic locations (although Cambridge and Oxford are cities, they are small in comparison to Manchester, for example). Oxford, Cambridge and Durham are 'collegiate' universities, meaning you live and socialise in a college within the university.



Red brick universities

These refer to institutions which were established in major industrial cities to meet the demand for university-level study in particular subject areas, often the central focus of a large city, such as Birmingham, Bristol, Southampton, Manchester, Cardiff and Leeds. Many of these universities are in the Russell Group (often seen as a badge of quality across all departments). They are often situated in larger cities, which will have an impact on the type of student experience you have. Cities are good for connectivity, social life and access to different experiences.



Plate glass or 'Campus' universities

These refer to newer universities, some of whom have excellent academic reputations. Examples include: York, Warwick, Sussex. The settings of these universities are typically more 'campus-style', set away from the city in greener, more remote areas. This will have a big impact on student experience: it can be positive to have a sanctuary away from the city, but also can be oppressive for people who prefer being in a buzzing city environment.

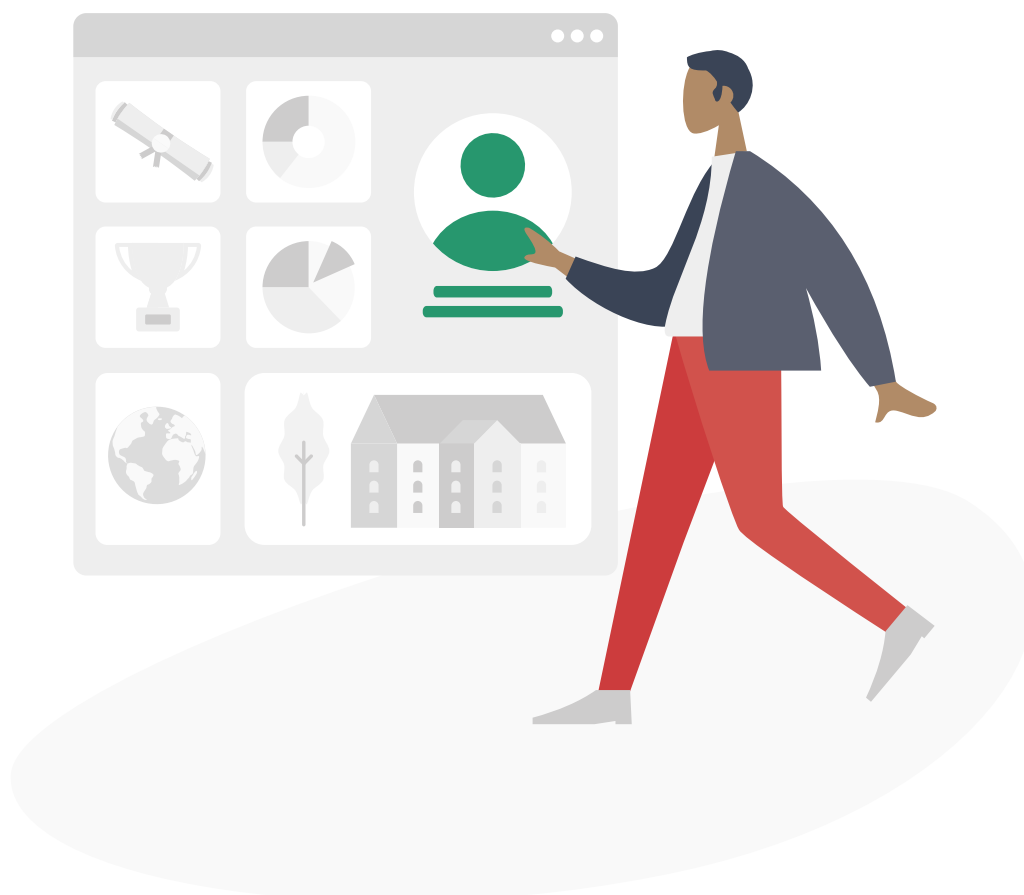


New universities

These are typically universities that were previously polytechnics or further education colleges. These universities are often near to, and therefore an alternative to, a larger or more famous university (e.g.: Sheffield Hallam university is in Sheffield). This doesn't mean these universities are low quality, some of them have specialised in certain subjects or departments much more than others.

The different types of UK degrees explained

When choosing a university in the UK, the most important consideration is the type of course you want to study. There are different types of degree offered in the UK: honours degrees, foundation degrees, and diplomas. Foundation degrees are training degrees of a less academic nature and relate to vocational areas. Diploma courses are at a lower level than degree courses; successful completion of the first year or two of such courses can lead to acceptance on to an honours degree.





Training

These are degrees that train students to do a particular type of work (such as medicine, education or engineering). Training degrees are often associated with higher employment rates and higher graduate starting salaries. The highest rate of employment, as reported by HESA (the Higher Education Statistics Agency) is for students graduating with a degree in medicine, subjects allied to medicine, biological sciences and veterinary sciences.



Sciences

Science at university goes well beyond biology, chemistry and physics: there are over 10,000 different science and engineering-based courses. Many courses offer a Masters degree as part of a 4-year program, which enable candidates to access a huge range of science related careers. E.g. you could be a forensic scientist with a biology/chemistry background, and physics is a smart option if you want to be a sound engineer.



Humanities/Arts

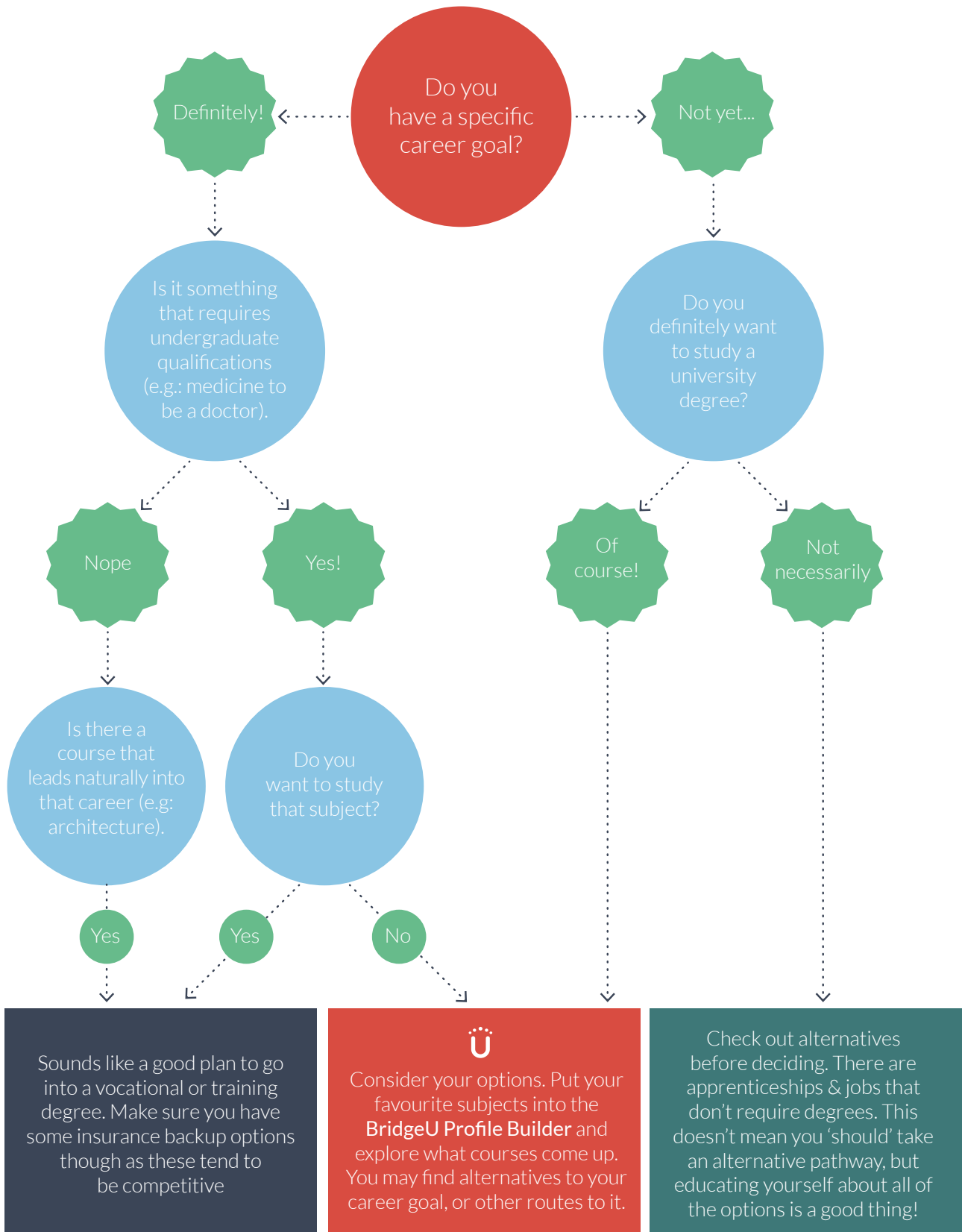
These degrees are widely considered to prepare students well for thinking and analysis. Humanities and social sciences subjects also may support development in negotiation, debate and research skills. These are all highly transferable skills and can lead to careers in many different areas, such as business, marketing, psychology and law.



Vocational

These degrees impart skills that are useful to a particular area of employment, but are not the only entry route to that type of work. Employment rates for graduates will vary according to subject area, course, and university. If a work placement is included in the course (this is often called a 'sandwich' course) this will almost certainly improve future employment prospects.

The different types of UK degrees explained



Understanding entry requirements

In the UK, universities will typically have specific ‘minimum entry requirements’. This means that these are the minimum grades they expect to be achieved by applicants. You can apply with lower predicted grades, but it is not advised.

Your grades	Entry requirements
A Levels	This may be expressed as either three grades (e.g. AAB), or have specific subject requirements. For example: “AAB, with A in Physics”. Some universities will express flexibility in their A-Level requirements, e.g.: “BBB. Candidates with ABC or A*CC also meet these requirements”.
BTECs	This may be expressed as either BTEC grades (e.g.: “DD” or “Distinction, Distinction). Your eligibility for the course may depend on whether you are doing the BTEC 90-Credit Diploma, Subsidiary Diploma, Certificate, National Diploma or Extended Diploma. Universities will specify what they accept. In some cases, BTECs entry requirements can be combined with A-Level entry requirement options to show flexibility from the university (e.g. “If taking BTEC Applied Science, A-Level Biology not required”).
UCAS Points	This is a points system that converts different grades into an overall mark (e.g. 280 UCAS Tariff points). In some cases, the university will ask only for the points, in others, they’ll specify where the points need to come from (e.g. “at least 2 A-Levels”).
IB	This may be expressed as an overall score (e.g.: 36), but often there will be requirements either on the subjects taken at Higher Level, or the grades achieved at Higher Level, or a combination of both. For example: “667 at HL” or “Must have Mathematics and Physics at higher level” or “665 at HL with at least a 6 in English”.
Other	In some cases, the university will express entry requirements for other curricula on their website but if not, you can do a UCAS points conversion to get a rough idea (UCAS has a calculator you can use: www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator). Alternatively, you can visit the university’s page or contact the university’s admissions team for specific entry requirements.

Beyond minimum entry requirements

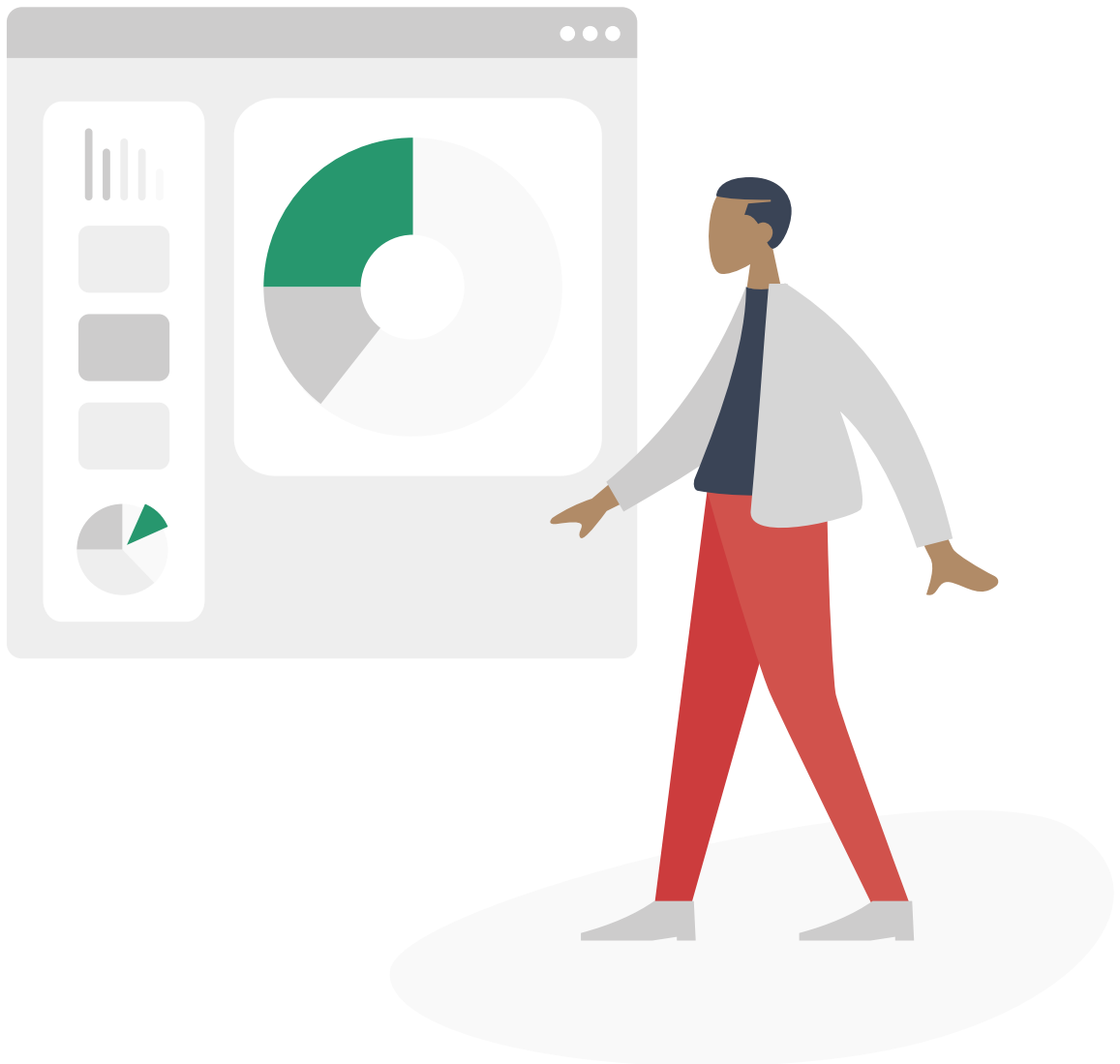
Minimum entry requirements can be useful, but when assessing how realistic it is to apply to a particular course at a particular university, you need much more information. Minimum entry requirements doesn't tell you anything about how popular the course is, what grades you will be compared to (i.e. your competition) or how flexible the university will be if you don't achieve the grades you were predicted.

Courses with the same entry requirements at universities can have very different offer rates! Even within the same university, 3 A's mean different things. Law at Oxford and Theology at Oxford require the same grades (3 A's), but theology has an offer rate almost four times higher.



How courses are different

You will often read the UK courses referred to as undergraduate courses, leading to a Masters (postgraduate) and subsequently to a PhD (doctorate). The two most common types of undergraduate courses carry the exit award title of a BA, Bachelor of Arts or BSc, Bachelor of Sciences. For example, BA (Hons) History with French, and BSc (Hons) Geography.



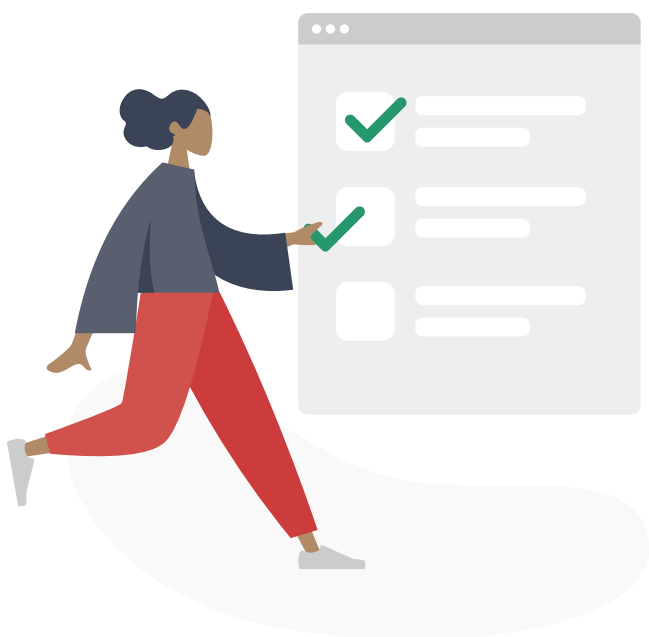
Single Honours courses

The courses focus on the same subject throughout their entirety. Courses can differ markedly in length – from two years for a ‘condensed course’ to six years for a professional course such as Architecture. Single honours means that students typically choose one subject from one faculty to study when they apply and the award title refers to one main subject area, for example, BA (Hons) History. This varies from the American model of majoring/minoring in a faculty after 1–2 years of study. However, the UK is beginning to offer more liberal arts programmes (and Scotland is leading the charge on this!), based on the American model of building your own degree.

Joint Honours courses

Reflecting something akin to the US ‘major and minor’ system, the joint honours degree allows a student to study two subjects with them either being 50/50 split in terms of credits, or having a leaning towards one of the two. In the naming of the degree, when the two subjects are joined by ‘and’, they are very likely to be 50/50 split, whereas if ‘with’ is used (e.g.: “Economics with French”), it indicates that there will be more weighting on the first subject; in this case Economics.

The two subjects do not have to be related, although most students do pick subjects in the same faculty (e.g.: both are humanities). Usually, joint honours degrees have higher requirements for entry than a single honours degree, requiring the approval of both departments concerned. The two subjects are then taken at the same levels and at the academic standards as those taking either subject as a single honours major.



Sandwich Courses: a vocational choice

A sandwich course enables students to have periods of academic study as well as periods of paid work experience as part of their undergraduate degree. Work experience is typically in commerce, industry or the public sector, and can be in the UK or overseas. The work experience typically lasts a total of 12 months and can be either one or more placements making up the total duration. Sandwich courses are offered in a wide range of subjects at some universities in the UK, including: Bath, Brunel, Cardiff, Loughborough and Surrey.

What are the advantages of taking a sandwich course?

- You can apply your academic studies to real-life working situations.
- You get valuable, practical work experience before entering the job market.
- You can start to build a network of potential employers and possibly secure a job offer when you graduate.
- You will have the opportunity to gain work experience and develop skills that will help you to stand out from the competition. This will positively impact your employment prospects, as you will be able to demonstrate sought-after skills in a workplace context (technical, communication, teamwork) and you will be more likely to have maturity and confidence in an interview setting.
- Your period of work experience may count towards a professional qualification.
- You may have the chance to work abroad and consolidate/learn a foreign language.
- You will earn while you learn. It is also possible that the company you work for will decide to sponsor you during your fourth year at university.



The Scottish system

Scottish universities have some of the highest rates of satisfaction and employment in the UK. There are a range of different types of institutions in Scotland, some of which are world famous, such as University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, and University of St. Andrews.



The four year experience

Here's how the University of Edinburgh summarises the benefit of the four year degree.

“Scottish degree programmes are designed to include four years of study to give you a broader and more flexible education. They allow you to try a range of subjects before specialising. Even if you know exactly what you want to do, you can study additional subjects and add depth to your education. By the time you graduate your breadth of knowledge will be highly prized by employers, giving you the best chance of success in your chosen field.”

Advantages of the Scottish system

- It may enhance your career prospects by giving you more breadth of skill and knowledge.
- You can gain experience of new subject areas without committing long-term.
- You may discover new areas of interest or strength and can then tailor your degree to those.

Foundation courses

What is a 'Foundation year'?

A foundation is a one-year preparatory course designed for international students to be able to succeed at university level and an alternative route to enter to universities which you may have not met their entry requirements.

Entry requirements

- Usually a min. IELTS score of 4.5 or equivalent (with no single component less than 4.0).
- Secondary school transcripts.
- Sometimes universities ask for academic qualifications (e.g.: 1 or 2 A-Levels).
- Reference letter from your high school.
- Personal Statement.
- Scanned copy of passport and visa.

Advantages of a Foundation course

- Foundation degrees are designed for international students to help fill gaps in skills (particularly English language and study skills).
- They help to build confidence alongside academic readiness.
- Education methods are different all over the world. Foundation courses in the UK are designed to level out the differences and get all students up to the same standard. This can be in an academic subject, or in language skills.
- You can tailor your course to suit the degree you want to study. Often, foundation courses are offered with a goal to support particular degrees. This involves studying core modules common to each route, plus a set of subject-specific modules that are chosen to focus on the academic areas most useful to your degree.
- They allow you to get familiar with university-style teaching (with lecture, tutorials, and seminar-style classes), which gives you an advantage over other students who come straight from secondary school.
- If you haven't lived in the UK before, you benefit from a bit of time to adjust and settle into everyday life, not just academic life. You get an opportunity to familiarise with cultural differences, as well as practical things like finding your way around. It puts you in touch with other students who are experiencing just the same thing, giving you a firm foundation when you begin your undergraduate course.
- In many cases, successful completion of your foundation year (achieving the required grades) will guarantee you a place on a degree linked to that foundation course.

Worksheet: Compare your courses

If you already know what you want to study and have a shortlist of universities you like, it's worth comparing them to understand their similarities and differences (even if they're single honours courses with the same title, like 'English Literature' or 'Engineering'!).

	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3
Course name			
Opportunities to study abroad?			
Frequency of seminars/ tutorials?			
Size of seminars/ tutorials?			
Mode of assessment (coursework vs. exams)?			
Frequency of lectures?			
Frequency of practicals?			
Fieldwork assignments?			



Don't forget to shortlist these courses on BridgeU, and add your notes too!

Special subjects: Medicine

Medicine is very competitive, so if you're not certain of gaining top grades (and standing out from the crowd of other people who got top grades!), think about potential back up plans! For UK applications to medicine, you are allowed to enter only four medical schools on the UCAS form (in most applications you can enter 5 options), but you are also allowed to enter a non-medical 'insurance' course if you wish to.

Subject & grade requirements

Most medical schools demand Chemistry as an entrance requirement, and the vast majority also require Biology. Excellent GCSE results are needed: many medical schools automatically reject candidates with fewer than six grades at A or A* (some require at least eight A*s at GCSE). Finally, very high A level/IB predictions are also necessary.

Out of school commitment to medicine

Successful applicants will need to demonstrate their interest in, and commitment to, medicine. In order to achieve this, it's advisable to have at least one period shadowing/observing a medic at work, and one volunteering for one of the 'caring professions' such as helping in a hospice or a care home. It is also compulsory for all medical students to have been vaccinated against hepatitis before being admitted to the course.

UCAT

The clinical aptitude test (UCAT) was introduced by medical schools including Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham and Sheffield, and has to be taken by anyone applying to these schools (amongst others). This exam lasts for 90 minutes and aims to test the candidate's mental abilities and how they might respond to patients. Scientific knowledge is not tested.

The UCAT tests include:

- Verbal Reasoning (22 minutes)
- Decision Making (32 minutes)
- Quantitative Reasoning (25 minutes)
- Abstract Reasoning (14 minutes)
- Situational Judgement (27 minutes)

BMAT

The BMAT stands for the BioMedical Admissions Test and is for applicants to Medicine, Biomedical Science and Dentistry courses at certain universities. Candidates for Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial or UCL will need to take the BMAT test.

Other courses at other universities may also accept or require the BMAT. This tests amongst other things, scientific knowledge. This is the most important difference between the BMAT and the UKCAT.

This exam lasts for 2 hours and is divided into 3 sections:

Aptitude and skills (60 mins)

This section tests problem solving, understanding arguments and the ability to analyse and draw inference from data sets.

Scientific knowledge and applications (30 mins)

This section tests the ability to apply scientific knowledge to a real world context.

Written communication (30 mins)

This section tests the ability to develop and organise ideas and to communicate them clearly and effectively with eloquence and concision.



Special subjects: Law

Please note that in the UK, you do not need to study law as your first degree to become a solicitor or barrister. It is possible to study an alternative but well-respected discipline (e.g.: History) at undergraduate level and then complete a law conversion course. Entry to undergraduate law courses is very competitive, particularly at the more prestigious institutions.

Subject & grade requirements

You will need high predicted A level/IB grades, together with excellent GCSE results. Successful applicants will also need to demonstrate their interest in, and knowledge of, the courses applied for. Appropriate work experience will also be an asset and demonstrating critical thinking skills will be essential.

LNAT

The National Law Aptitude Test doesn't test your knowledge of law or any other subject. It is designed as an aptitude test to assess whether you will be successful in studying law at university.

It is a two-part test: multiple choice questions based on passages of text, and an essay:

- **Section A:** Computer-based multiple choice exam in which you read passages of text and answer questions that test your comprehension of them.
- **Section B:** You write one essay from a list of three proposed subjects. This section is not marked automatically, and does not contribute towards your LNAT score, but it allows you to show off your reasoning and argument skills.

Special subjects: Music

There are various options available to students who want to study music at degree level. This ranges from focusing on technical/industry aspects, to an academic study of the subject, all the way to focusing on performing, conducting and composing. The main differences are explained below:

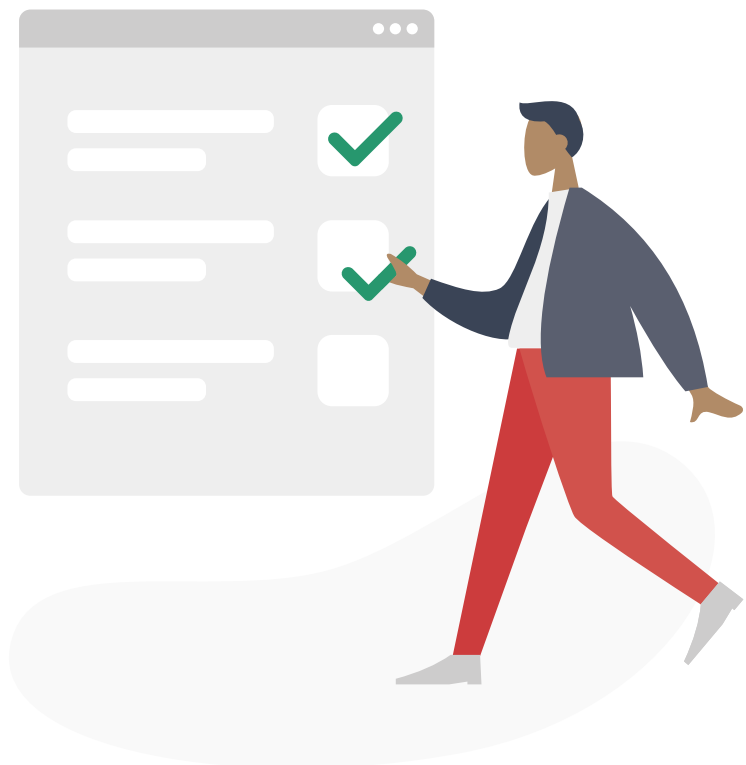
Technical	Academic	Music Conservatoires
<p>There are an increasing number of courses offered in the technical aspects of music, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physics and music performance • Sound engineering • Audio recording and production • Sound and music for games • Computing and music <p>To study music at degree level, it is typical for music to be required as an A Level or IB subject, and/or for the student to have achieved a minimum grade in their ABRSM (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music).</p> <p>For engineering or sound technology focused degrees, maths or physics may be required.</p>	<p>The academic study of music can include music theory, or looking at music in the context of other disciplines, such as sociology, english literature or archaeology.</p> <p>You don't have to take a joint honours degree to get variety in music study, however.</p> <p>For example, music at Cambridge is described as:</p> <p><i>"...ranging from medieval plainchant to the blues, and from advanced analysis to the study of music and science. It has a strong academic component, particularly focusing on history, analysis, composition and performance, but also offers a range of other topics."</i></p> <p>Courses such as these will typically require you to have studied music and to have advanced achievements in ABRSM.</p>	<p>This route might be right for you if you want to be a professional musician, conductor or composer. Music conservatoires are very competitive, and the application process can feel very high pressure if you're not very experienced with recitals.</p> <p>Requirements:</p> <p>You'll need to be a confident and accomplished performer, ideally with at least a distinction in an instrument at Grade 8, if not a diploma.</p> <p>Application process:</p> <p>For most conservatoires, you can apply to up to 6 through UCAS Conservatoires. You can apply directly to some institutions (notably the Guildhall School of Music and Drama).</p> <p>Audition process:</p> <p>The audition process varies between conservatoires. Performers will usually be invited to give a live audition at the conservatoire. In some cases they may be allowed to send a recording or video.</p>

Organ or choral scholarship applications

Cambridge and Oxford are the most famous examples, but there are many others. For choral scholarships, you do not need to have studied music, but you will need good sight-reading, aural skills and Singing Grade 8. It's advisable to join a chamber choir to gain experience before applying. For organ scholarships, ABRSM Grade 8 is required, as well as good sight reading and transposition skills. Ideally, applicants have been involved in playing for a chapel/Sunday services. This helps develop confidence performing and accompanying choral singing.

Checklist for researching Conservatoires:

- Reputation – what is their area of strength as an institution?
- Links – are they connected to any orchestra apprentice schemes?
- Graduate success – research what other graduates have gone on to do.
- Freelance opportunities – can you work while you study?
- Building networks – what other music institutions are there nearby?
Are their orchestras/choirs you can join?
- Type of degree – how much flexibility? Are there exchange programmes?



Special subjects: Drama

There are two ways you can study drama or performing arts in the UK. You can either study an undergraduate degree in the normal way, or apply to a drama school.

Honours degrees offered by different UK universities can range from highly practical to being heavily theoretical in focus. You're probably a good fit for a drama degree at a university if you enjoy drama but don't necessarily want to go into a career in the performing arts.

You're probably a better fit for a course at a drama school if you want to be prepared vocationally for a career in performing arts or technical theatre. The training offered by drama schools is comprehensive and professional and has an emphasis on practical work and working in the industry.



Drama school: frequently asked questions

1. Will I apply through UCAS?

Generally speaking, no. You'll apply to each drama school separately and directly. However, some schools are applied to through UCAS (e.g.: Guildford School of Acting, LIPA, East 15 Drama School etc). It can be even more complicated: for Birmingham School of Acting and Mountview, some courses are applied for through UCAS and others via independent application form. There are other exceptions, such as ones that are also Music Conservatoires (e.g.: the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama), in which case you will apply through UCAS Conservatoires.

2. Which drama schools are respected?

Look at graduate outcomes and what alumni drama students say about their experience, but as a starting point you can use The Federation of Drama Schools as a guide for accredited and recommended drama schools.

3. Can I take on acting projects while I'm at drama school?

Generally speaking, no. Students are typically not allowed to take acting work for the duration of their degree course. Students will be trained by staff with professional experience and have the opportunity to work in professional theatres and studios, but they will be required to work long hours and immerse themselves in their work.

4. What will I end up with at the end of a drama school course?

Most drama school courses will lead to an academic qualification (in most cases a BA Hons degree). However, the emphasis will be a practical training for future work (unlike university drama course).

5. How do I choose between drama schools?

They may seem similar at first glance, but they will offer different courses and focuses, for example more television acting, more classical theatre, more voice work etc. Do your research, read student blogs or read about alumni.

Top tip:

It's also worth remembering that you can use the Federation of Drama Schools to research drama school options if you can't find courses on UCAS.

Auditions and interviews: What to expect

The audition panel will not necessarily be looking for a polished performance. They will be looking for an understanding of text and character: the ability to connect with the text with intelligence and feeling. You may be asked to perform your speech again in a different way to see how well you respond to direction.

Some schools may have several rounds of auditions so applicants may be called back. This can be a long and gruelling process which also tests a candidate's determination, commitment and flexibility. Typically you will be expected to perform one or two short speeches of about 2–3 minutes in length from memory. These pieces should be contrasting in mood/tone. You may also be asked to present contrasting classical and modern pieces. Some institutions set pieces for audition or have a list of banned pieces so check individual requirements. You should try to pick pieces that suit your age and type that you could potentially be cast as. You may be asked to take part in improvisation, movement and voice sessions.

Musical theatre:

Those applying for musical theatre courses will also be expected to sing and may also be asked to participate in a dance/movement workshop.

Technical theatre:

If you are applying for a technical theatre course, you will likely be interviewed and asked to bring a portfolio of relevant work. This may include sketches, models, photographs, prompt books, costume designs, light, sound and set designs. Interviews may last all day and could include group exercises and discussions. You may be asked to prepare for an exercise in advance.



Special Subjects: Art

Art foundation courses have processes which differ from UCAS and there may be earlier deadlines. Make sure you know the requirements and deadlines to avoid disappointment!

Art Foundation overview

An art foundation course comprises of one year of intensive study at a local art school. This is needed prior to a degree because your pre-university study will usually be focused on Fine Art (painting and drawing), which does not prepare you for the industrial aspects of fashion, graphics and advertising. To study Fine Art at university, applicants may not have to do a foundation course, but if you are unsure about the area you want to specialise in, then the foundation course is necessary. Universities and higher education institutions offering art foundation courses typically follow this structure:

- In the first term you take a range of workshops in various art disciplines;
- In the second term, you're likely to specialise in the area you will choose for your degree application
- In the third term, you'll do a project in your specialist area, which may be exhibited at the end of the foundation.

Interviews & portfolios

The University of the Arts London (UAL) gives the following definition of a portfolio: *"A portfolio is a collection of your work, which shows how your skills and ideas have developed over a period of time. It demonstrates your creativity, personality, abilities and commitment, and helps us to evaluate your potential."* Universities assessing your application will take very different approaches, including (but not limited to!):

- E-portfolio (photos of your work), followed by interview with real portfolio
- Interview with one or two members of the department
- Interview presentation to staff and other applicants
- Just reviewing your portfolio

Top tips for your arts portfolio:

1. *Research carefully, and record the art portfolio requirements for the courses that interest you.*
2. *Plan your art portfolio to demonstrate your originality, your skill and creativity.*
3. *Exhibit a range of modes, mediums and techniques in your portfolio – don't be a one-trick pony!*

Your open day/research guide

Before you visit/kicking off your research

Find out what students think

- Find out what you can about what other international students think of the campus and teaching.
- Look at the student reviews on www.whatuni.com
- You can also chat to current UK undergraduates on the UCAS website.

Ask yourself these questions

- What am I looking for in my course?
- What am I looking for in my university?
- Do I want to be close/more accessible to home?
Think about ease and cost of getting to airports, trains etc.
- Do I want to be in a campus or a city environment?
- How important is a vibrant nightlife/theatre or orchestral opportunities /major sporting venues?
- What will the cost of living be? Costs vary but university websites usually indicate the annual costs of living, excluding tuition fees.
- How safe is the environment? It's worth looking into the crime levels in the area compared to the UK in general.
- How do I want to learn (e.g.: more practicals/smaller lecture sizes)?

Example questions to ask in open days

- How would you describe the 'personality' of this university? How do you think it is different from other universities?
- What is the staff/student ratio?
- What proportion of students live onsite? How do student residences work? What's the typical cost?
- How easy is it to travel to and from the campus (what public transport links are there?)
- Does it feel safe at night? Is there 24-hour security?
- What is the social life like?
- What student support is there? (e.g.: Health, Welfare, Tutorial support)
- What is the typical cost of living in this city/area?

Understanding league tables

League tables/rankings are an indicative form to gain a university overview based on a set of criteria, and many have built a reputation over time. Some have got a reputation for excellence in certain subject areas/courses, but this can also mean they have higher entry requirements.

These rankings/league tables are a good way to start your research (if it's important to you!) but it is advisable to not heavily rely on them. League tables, as aforementioned, are based on a set criteria such as student/staff ratios, entry levels etc. But, they don't provide you an exact overview of what you will be doing for your course; for example, the modules you will study. In summary, there's more to seek to your ideal university than just a number in rankings!



What do league tables consider?

University league tables, although they do need to be treated with some caution, do offer some very useful information to help you make an informed choice. There are various different league tables available and they use a range of different indicators.

The main indicators taken into account are:

- Average grades of first year students
- Application vs. places: the total number of applications against the total number accepted.
- Student/staff ratio: on average the number of staff in relation to the number of students.
- Teaching: the marks received in teaching assessments by individual department.
- Research: the research rating received by each department.
- Degree classifications: 1sts and 2:1s as a percentage of all classified degrees.
- Employment: the percentage of graduates entering full-time employment
- Drop out rate: the percentage of students failing to complete courses.
- Library, computer and student resource spending.
- Student satisfaction.

Independent resources

- There are a couple of independent resources that you can use for your research:
- The Complete University Guide.
- The Uni Guide.
- Student Crowd – for reading student reviews.

What is UCAS?

UCAS stands for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. And, you guessed it, it's the UK's centralised university admissions platform.

UCAS is students' one-stop-shop for applications to UK institutions. You can register your account and profile, search for courses, submit your application, and keep track of their offers and enrolments – all in one place!

How does UCAS work?

Once you've set up your account, you'll write one application which you'll use to apply for up to five university courses.

Once every university you've applied has responded, you'll be able to pick one 'firm' choice (your top pick) and one 'insurance' choice (your 'safety school' in case you don't meet the grades required for your top choice).

Top tip:

As you probably already know, the UK university system is fairly unique in that you have to select a subject before you apply. Students don't apply to a university, they apply to a course. In some cases, you could even apply to two separate courses from the same university.

What universities can I apply to through UCAS?

Pretty much all of them! In fact, it's the way most universities prefer to receive applications. Though some let you apply independently, we wouldn't necessarily recommend it, as admissions officers themselves are used to receiving applications through UCAS.

Top tip:

Certain courses and universities have separate application processes. Though these can be done through UCAS, your requirements and deadlines will defer from your peers.

Notable exceptions include Oxford and Cambridge, the medical, dental, and veterinary sciences, and music conservatoires.

For example, deadlines for Oxbridge applications are in October, and you can only apply to one of the two (so you have to pick between either applying to Oxford or to Cambridge – you can't apply to both!).

Each year, UCAS confirms deadlines so ensure to check the key application deadlines for the year you are applying for.

Creating a UCAS application: what are the different sections to fill in?

To register on UCAS, you'll need the following information to hand:

- Your most up-to-date high school/secondary school transcript.
- Information about your current curriculum, including your subjects & exams and predicted grades.
- Relevant personal information.

Your personal details

As you'd expect, this is a pretty straightforward section to fill out: it's all about you!

Make sure you register with the email address you check the most regularly: universities will contact you using the email address you provide, and you don't want to miss anything important!

Top tip:

Helpful information regarding the 'residency status' question can be found on the UKCISA website: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/>

It's also important to fill in your name exactly as it appears on your travel documents and/or birth certificates.

Your education

Another relatively simple section, here you'll have to fill in basic information about your current school, as well as information about schools you've attended in the past.

You'll also have to list the subjects you're taking (if they aren't listed, add them to the 'other' box) and any final and predicted grades.

Your employment history

This section is only for paid work which students have done. Volunteering, internships and unpaid placements shouldn't be listed here – although they could be valuable additions to your personal statement!

Top tip:

If you haven't yet had a paying job, simply leave the section blank. It will not negatively impact your application.

Your course choices

Remember that in the UK you apply to a course, as opposed to the wider university as a whole? Well, this is the fun part where you get to choose what you're going to study on the UKCISA website.

Top tip:

At this stage, there's no preference order or rankings, so you don't need to worry about the order in which you list your courses.

Your personal statement

Now this is where things get a little daunting: this is the one essay that every university you apply to will read about you. It's your chance to showcase who you are and what makes you stand out as an applicant for your chosen subject.

Top tip:

Because every university will read the same statement, we recommend being confident about the subject you're choosing to study — even if your selected courses vary slightly from one another.

For example, it's one thing to write a personal statement about your passion for forensic psychology if you're applying to psychology & sociology at one university, and criminology at another, but it's going to be difficult to write a statement that is appealing to both the Geography and Fine Art departments!

Your personal statement has a length limit of 4000 characters or 47 lines (whichever you reach first), so you'll have to be selective about what you choose to write about.

Here are some example ideas of topics to touch on:

- Passion for the subject.
- Aptitude for the subject.
- Positive attitude toward education.
- Relevant extracurricular experiences.
- Skills related to the field of study (e.g. independent research, teamwork, critical thinking).
- Motivation for pursuing higher education in the UK.



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