Choosing a Course

With over 37,000 courses at 395 higher education providers in the UK (Source: UCAS) choosing which degree to study can be difficult! It is best to start your research as early as possible so you can get a shortlist together of courses and institutions that interest you.

Choosing your subject

There are 3 main options:

- A course based on what you are currently studying – consider which of your current subjects you enjoy and are good at. Remember not all courses with the same name will have the same content so research the module options carefully using the university website. There is usually a mix of compulsory and optional modules available.

- A course based on a career idea – explore your career ideas using job profiles available on websites such as Prospects, Plotr, National Careers Service and research whether a particular degree is necessary for that career. Examples might include Nursing, Speech and Language Therapy, Teaching, Medicine, Engineering and Veterinary Science. Don’t forget to investigate “sandwich courses” which offer a year in industry placement (usually in the third year of a four year course) and provide a great way to get some experience on your CV. Some employers are also now offering degree apprenticeships or school leaver programmes where you would complete your degree part-time whilst working.

- A new course not related to a career idea – many universities offer new subjects which you may not have had the option to study before. Examples include Criminology, Philosophy, Forensic Science and Anthropology. It’s a good idea to read around the subject beforehand to ensure you understand what the course is about before committing. Many universities will indicate an introductory textbook which would be useful background reading.

Universities also offer the option to study two or more subjects together as a joint honours degree or as a major/minor combination.

If you are still stuck you can try the “Study Interests Questionnaire” on the UK Course Finder website to generate some ideas.

Choosing your university

Once you have decided what subject you would like to study you will need to think about which institutions to apply to. You should consider the following:

1) Location – you will want to investigate aspects such as distance from home, what it like is to live in that place, cost of living in that location, would you prefer a campus or city based university. Push, Which and WhatUni provide university reviews.

2) Grades – consider your predicted grades and what grades are realistic for you to achieve. UK Course Finder enables you to search for courses requiring high, medium and low UCAS tariff scores (visit the UCAS website to learn more about the UCAS tariff).
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3) League Tables – universities are ranked by the Guardian, Times and Complete University Guide on factors such as:
   - Entry standards (average UCAS tariff of new students)
   - Student satisfaction (measured by the National Student Survey)
   - Research quality (measured by Research Excellence Framework where researchers are rated on the quality of their research. The best rating is 4* or "world leading")
   - Employment prospects (the percentage of students going on to graduate level employment or further study)
   - Student/staff ratio
   - Spend on facilities and academic services

The Unistats website allows you to compare the above criteria

Visiting the university on an open day will give you a better idea of the look and feel of an institution. You can also speak to current students to get their opinion of the university.

4) Course content, options & assessment methods – some institutions may offer the chance to take optional modules in other subject areas. Some will offer placement years or study abroad options. Research the mix of coursework or exam based assessment.

5) Facilities – for some courses specialist equipment may be required, for example, laboratories. Consider the age of the buildings and what the library, sports, social areas and accommodation are like.