Changing or leaving your course

Every year thousands of students in the UK decide to change or leave their course. So if you’re considering it, remember that the situation is more common than you might think.

Common reasons for changing or leaving a course include financial difficulties, emotional problems, a change in personal circumstances, choosing the wrong subject or the wrong university.

Whatever your reasons, it is really important to seek advice to carefully explore and clarify all the different options available to you. It’s vital that you are in a position to make an informed, balanced choice about your next steps. There may be additional support (education, financial or employment related) available to you which could impact upon your decision.

It is likely there are more options than you might think so make sure you consider all your options. For example, are you able to study part time? Could you take a year out to earn money or resolve any personal problems? Can you transfer to another course or will you need to start again?

You also need to give yourself enough time to adjust. Remember going to university can be a very dramatic change and it can take time to settle in to the academic, social, and lifestyle aspects of university. Could perseverance and accessing additional support help to resolve the situation?

Equally, don’t back yourself into false corners. There is a misconception that leaving a course will damage future career prospects. This is not the case. It really doesn’t have to damage your CV in the future. Instead, consider the skills learned from the experience that will be of value to future employers such as practical problem solving, decision making skills and the ability to evaluate options.

Financial implications

There are likely to be important financial considerations. You could be liable for some or all of your tuition fees and accommodation payments, depending on when in the academic year you decide to leave. Any funding you have received in the past will be taken into consideration if you decide to take up another course of study in the future.

Your student advice and welfare service will be able to offer more detailed information on the financial aspects of your decision. Make sure you also contact your student loan provider for further information.

Take Time

Avoid making a snap decision in the heat of the moment. You need to really think this through. Consider the following questions and reflect on why some might be more difficult to answer than others:

- Are you finding the course difficult or just not as interesting as you imagined it to be?
- What made you originally choose your course/university? Are these reasons still valid?
- What are the (true) reasons for wanting to leave and what needs to change to address these?
- What do you want from a university course? This is really important if you are planning on changing course or university, rather than leave higher education altogether.
- What are the best and worst things about your course/university? Is there anything you can actively influence or change?
• Is your current decision being shaped by factors outside of university (e.g. financial, relationship or family worries)? Are there practical steps you could take to manage these?
• If you have received poor marks for a module are you able to retake the exam?
• What are the pros and cons for leaving the course?
• Who have you spoken with about your thoughts to change or leave your course?
• Are there options to transfer any completed modules, study part time or interrupt your studies (to earn money or take time out) and then return to university? Could you finish the year and then change?

Immigration implications
Under the immigration rules institutions are required to inform UK Visas and Immigration when students leave their course. It is essential to seek immigration advice from your college or university student advice/welfare service before you leave or transfer your studies.

Please note that if you have a Tier 4 visa, it is likely that you will require a new visa before you start a course at another institution.

See www.gov.uk/visas-immigration and www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa for more information.

Where can I access support?

Personal Tutor
They can offer advice on whether the course is suitable and whether you can change modules or mode of study. They may be able to refer you to a student mentoring or study support programme if appropriate.

Careers department
Gain impartial advice on how your course suits your future ambitions, guidance on alternative options and help with decision making. You can also get support on how to refer to a change of course on your CVs and applications.

Other students
Final year students taking your course can offer an insight into how the course develops. If you are changing subject, speak to students on the course you’re considering switching to (the department will be able to help with this) to compare it with your current course.

What next?
Discuss your situation with your department and preferably with a tutor. They will be able to explain the practical issues from the department’s perspective.

• Talk to staff in the welfare and finance offices to find out where you stand with your institution financially.
• Talk to a member of the careers department to talk through your ideas and decision making.
• When you are ready, formally notify the University of your intention to leave.

Once you have followed the university processes, you’ll need to inform your student loan provider in any of the following circumstances:

• You change your university or college.
• You change your course of study.
• You do not begin to study, leave your course or are expelled.
• You are absent from your course for more than 60 days because of illness.

Take notes at all meetings you attend, especially if you are feeling confused or overwhelmed as there is likely to be a lot of information to take in which you can use to review your situation and assist you in making a balanced, reasonable decision.

Finally, remember that you’re not alone. It’s easy to feel isolated if you are unhappy on your course or at your university so make sure you access all the support that is provided to help you make the right decision for you.