



**Next Steps  
South West**

# Higher Education **APPLICANT GUIDE**

Everything you need to know about the process,  
from research to application.



Part of the  
**National Collaborative  
Outreach Programme**

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# HIGHER EDUCATION APPLICANT GUIDE

If you are considering studying a higher education (HE) course at university or college, and don't know where to start, this guide will provide clear and unbiased information on how to approach the process.

From deciding where and what to study, to understanding student finance, we've got it covered with this step-by-step guide to the HE application process!

## ABOUT US

Next Steps South West (NSSW) is a collaboration of fourteen partner universities and colleges throughout Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, funded by the Office for Students (OfS).

As the region's National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), we help young people navigate their own personalised journey to higher education (HE). Throughout the region, we hold events and activities designed to inspire students aged 13-19 years old to fulfil their potential.

We aim to build aspirations, awareness and access to HE, helping target students make an informed decision about their future.

For more information on NCOP visit:

[officeforstudents.org.uk/  
adviceandguidance](https://officeforstudents.org.uk/adviceandguidance)



## CHOOSING A COURSE

Research is the key to finding the right course. Try looking into a range of courses you're interested in as many different universities and colleges will offer the same (or similar sounding) courses, but what and how you learn might be very different.

- **Modules** – What are the specific modules for this course, and how do they compare to others, even those that sound the same?
- **Entry requirements** – These may differ from one institution to another.
- **Type of assessment** – Some courses may put more emphasis on exams, others on coursework or practical assessments.
- **Facilities** – Work spaces, equipment, and study environments can vary. Ask if there are plans for anything new.
- **Contact hours** – The amount of 'contact time' can also be variable. Ask yourself honestly if more 'independent study' time is really better for you, or would you benefit from more structured timetabling?
- **Study opportunities** – Are there opportunities to study abroad, or work in industry for a year? Is this something you would want?
- **Length of the course** – Could you do it part-time if you wanted to, or could you do an integrated masters?

To help you decide on the right course for you, make the most of online comparison tools such as [whatuni.com](https://www.whatuni.com) and [discoveruni.org.uk](https://www.discoveruni.org.uk)

## ACTIVITY: HE MYTHS QUIZ

How much do you know about the choices you have at HE? Consider the statements below, are they true or false?

1. "You can study some higher education courses in local colleges".
2. "Every course with the same title has the same content and assessments, no matter where you study".
3. "All higher education courses last for three years".
4. "I can only apply to study for one course".
5. "If I study a full-time course, I'll have to be at university or college five days a week".
6. "All universities and colleges have the same method of teaching, so it really doesn't matter where you study".



Answers: 1. - Yes, 2. - No - they may all have different modules, 3. - No - some can be part time, some include sandwich years, and some like architecture and medicine are usually longer than three years, 4. - Not true, through UCAS you can choose up to five courses, 5. - Not true, all courses are different, most have elements of personal study, 6. - Not necessarily, all courses are taught in different ways with different

## VISITING A UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE

When exploring HE, we recommend visiting a university or college, because it can make or break your decision. It's best to attend with a clear action plan. From study options to student unions, consider what your deciding factors are.

### Finding Your Way

- Check nearby **carparks in advance** if you're driving, as many campuses operate a green travel policy with limited on-site parking.
- If travelling by train or bus, **check the distance from the station to the campus**. Also, check to see if the institution is running a discount fare for Open Day attendees.
- Note the **cost of a ticket** back and forth from your hometown to the university or college. How much would it cost you to visit home and other parts of the UK from this location?
- Is there a **campus map**? Most events will share a map with you in advance or have a printed guide ready for you upon arrival. You may even be shown an event app to download, full of easy-to-access info.
- **Tours & talks may be bookable in advance**, whilst some activities repeat throughout the day. If you're unsure of the time and location, or need help planning your day, simply ask a student ambassador or staff member to talk you through the event schedule.



### Take £40 off the cost of travel

Find out if you are eligible for a £40 Travel Card\* to help towards the cost of attending an Open, Applicant or Offer Holder Day by visiting:

[nextstepsw.ac.uk/higher-education-travel-card-application/](https://nextstepsw.ac.uk/higher-education-travel-card-application/)

\* Terms and conditions apply

### Before Your Visit

**Do your research** - you can easily compare elements of a course such as modules and assessment criteria online or in a prospectus. Use the time you're there wisely to **find out things that can only be done in person**, and to get a feeling for the place and its surroundings.



**"You get to see the facilities that the university has to offer... You also get to meet the lecturers that will be delivering content to you for the next three years. You don't get a real feel for the university without going to an open day and experiencing it for yourself".**

Lauren, BSc (Hons) Chemistry student

### Questions to Ask

- Is the campus all in one place or spread across multiple sites?
- Is it **close to local amenities**, e.g. supermarkets and shopping centres?
- What **facilities** do they offer students? **On-site GPs**? Bars and cafes? Recreational **sports facilities** and gyms? **Libraries**?
- Where is the **Students' Union** and what **clubs and societies** do they run?
- What kind of **accommodation** is available? On or off campus? Shared house or halls? Often, official accommodation providers will have stalls at Open or Applicant Days.
- What internal support, often known as **Student Services**, do students have access to? Knowing what's available, even if you don't need it now can put your mind at ease. Find out if there are **dedicated teams to advise you** on student finance, exam support, student welfare, study skills and careers, for example.
- Where can you get **IT support**, and is there a place to borrow other **equipment**?

### TOP TIP

Use the comparison chart on page 8 to help you compare courses.

# UCAS EXHIBITIONS

UCAS Exhibitions are large-scale events, hosting UK universities and colleges, HE experts, employers and voluntary agencies. It's a great opportunity for anyone who is unsure of their future, and those who have an idea but would like to explore their next steps.

You'll have the opportunity to sign up for inspirational talks, application advice, and subject-specific workshops, as well as getting the chance to explore degrees and school leaver options such as apprenticeships. Plus, discover various volunteer and gap year opportunities, and get first-hand feedback from real students.

You might feel overwhelmed by the event, but with a little preparation you can be sure to leave knowing you've made the most of it. There are various exhibitions throughout the year. To check the next or nearest one go to [ucas.com/ucas/events-exhibitions](https://ucas.com/ucas/events-exhibitions)

**A UCAS exhibition will focus your research and get you thinking about what you really want from your future".**

Charlotte, BA (Hons) English student

## In Advance

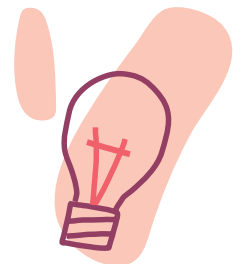
- Make sure you have a **sturdy bag** – you'll collect lots of information and materials.
- Check the **activity programme**. Will there be any guest speakers or interactive activities on the day? Which will be the most useful for you to attend?
- Make a **list of stands to visit**.
- **Visit the university or college's websites or comparison websites** to find the answers to some of your questions, freeing you up to ask the interesting stuff in person!
- Think of questions to ask that really matter to you. For example, "What kind of support services are there?" or "What sports can I take part in?". **Student ambassadors are great to talk to** as they've been in your shoes!

## On the Day

- When you arrive you'll be given a unique barcode to scan at each of the stands you visit. When prompted, **tick the 'send me info'** box and UCAS will share personalised information with you after the event, based on your visit.
- **Don't follow the crowd!** This is a chance to find your own calling, which might not be the same as your friends'.
- If you're waiting to speak to someone, **listen to other people's questions**. They may ask something that never occurred to you but turns out to be helpful.
- **Don't weigh yourself down** by collecting a prospectus from every university or college. Most of them are available digitally, or you can request a printed copy in the post.
- The staff on each stand may not be academics, but student ambassadors, so utilise their experience as an opportunity to learn about the institution's values or local area. **Course content is best discussed with the programme team at an Open Day or interview.**
- It's not about who's got the best freebies – **don't be dazzled by branded merch!**

## TOP TIP

Use the table on the next page to help you plan your day.



## What Next?

- **Read the prospectuses** if you have collected some.
- Visit the websites of any universities or colleges for extra information – some will offer **virtual campus tours**.
- **Keep researching** things like bursaries and scholarships that you might be eligible for.
- **Talk** to your friends, family, tutors or career adviser about what you found out – get their opinions too.
- Book onto **Open Days** – They will help you get the 'feel' for different universities or colleges.
- **Don't worry if you change your mind** after a visit; they are designed to help you narrow down your options.

## TOP TIP

When you know where and what you want to study, it's time to apply. Visit [ucas.com](https://ucas.com) to start your application.

# PLAN YOUR VISIT



Which Universities/Colleges would I like to visit?

What questions should I ask?

What factors are important to me?

Which activities can I attend? (Note time and location)



# COMPARE COURSES

University/ College	Course	Modules	Entry requirements	Course length	Tuition fees	Distance/ cost from home	Study abroad/ Employability rates

## APPLICATION TIMELINE

The HE applicant cycle begins in September each year. Most young people begin their application in their final year of A-levels, or another Level 3 qualification at school or college. These are the UCAS deadlines but your school or college may have their own deadlines, and support available.

**Early September** - The earliest you can submit completed UCAS applications.

**October (usually 15th)** - Application deadline for music, medicine, dentistry and veterinary courses, and for Oxford and Cambridge.

**November** - Finalise your personal statement and references, if you haven't already.

**December** - Use UCAS Track to monitor the progress of your application.

**January (usually 15th)** - Application deadline for most HE courses.

**End of February** - UCAS Extra opens, so you can add extra choices.

**March** - Application deadline for some Art & Design courses.

**April** - Universities and colleges usually make their decisions.

**May (usually the beginning)** - It's time to reply to offers received by 31st March (if you receive offers at others times, they will have their own response deadlines).

**June (usually the beginning)** - Applications received after June will automatically be entered into Clearing.

**July** - Last chance to apply through UCAS Extra, and Clearing opens.

**August (usually around the 15th)** - A-level results are released, and adjustment opens for two weeks.

**End of August** - Remaining offer conditions must be met and adjustment closes.

**September** - Last chance to apply for courses starting this year.

**October** - Last date to add Clearing choices, and for universities and colleges to make decisions.

For a full list of this year's dates and deadlines, visit [ucas.com](https://ucas.com) and search '**Exhibitions**'.

## UCAS TARIFFS

UCAS Tariff points are allocated to many Level 3 qualifications; however, some universities and colleges use grades instead, and some qualifications aren't part of the Tariff points system.

For a complete list of all qualifications, points and to calculate your Tariff points visit [ucas.com](https://ucas.com) and search '**Tariff**'.

Tariff points	AS-level	A-level	BTEC*
56		A*	D*
48		A	D
40		B	
32		C	M
28			
24		D	
20	A		
16	B	E	P
12	C		
10	D		
8			
6	E		

\* The BTECs listed are Nationals not Pearsons, the points awarded may differ.

## RESULTS DAY AND CLEARING

After completing your exams, avoid undue anxiety by weighing up the possible outcomes and have a back-up plan ready if things don't work out.

### Adjustment

If you meet or exceed the conditions of your firm choices, you could look at alternative courses - UCAS created Adjustment to help you do this. You'll see the option to register in UCAS Track (your original choice will be safe while you're looking at others).

**Once I started looking through the openings available, and saw how many there were, I started to relax. There are so many different options in Clearing".**

Ella, BA (Hons) History with English graduate

**16/24** Russell Group (top ranking) UK universities entered Clearing in 2018.

**60,000** students were accepted through Clearing in 2018.

**14%** of all 2018 applicants came through Clearing.

UCAS, 2018

### Clearing

Sometimes things don't go to plan, so you might be interested in Clearing - **Your final opportunity to apply for courses that still have availability.** You can use Clearing if you have not met the conditions of your offer, you didn't receive any offers, you declined a place, or you haven't already applied. Clearing applications can be made from **early July to late October.**

For more information, download our Clearing Handbook containing all the advice you need if results day doesn't go to plan:

[nextstepsw.ac.uk/resources/](https://nextstepsw.ac.uk/resources/)

For more information about all results day eventualities, visit: [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)

## STUDENT LIFE

Student life encompasses a range of experiences, from academic to social. There are a lot of things to consider, from where you'd like to live, what costs you need to factor into the cost of living, and how to manage your study and leisure time.

### Location

Where do you want to be?

- On campus or in the city?
- Transport links
- Local area and amenities?
- Distance from home
- Shopping?
- Clubs and societies?

### Accommodation

Where would suit you best?

- At home
- Halls of residence (the facilities and prices of student halls vary)
- Shared, independent or private accommodation.

### Academic

HE gives you more freedom and more choice in the way you study, but there are other significant changes you'll have to adapt to:

- Self motivation
- Time management
- Different teaching and assessment methods.
- Reduced contact time

### Costs to Consider

- Food and other essentials, e.g. toiletries and cleaning products.
- What's included in accommodation costs (i.e. bills, internet)?
- Travel between campuses if they are spread about.
- Travel around the area, and cost to get home.
- Books and other course equipment (there may be bursaries for this).
- Field trips.
- Is having a car necessary? Would you need a parking permit?
- Could you get a part-time job? (Go to a jobs fair or sign up to become a student ambassador).
- Food and basic living expenses.
- Insurance - what needs to be covered, and how much will it be?
- Entertainment, socialising and clothes.

### TOP TIP

Check what student discounts are available, e.g. student railcard and NUS card.



# STUDENT FINANCE

In the UK, tuition fees are currently £9,250\* a year. This sounds like a lot of money, but it is an investment in your future. In fact, according to government Labour Market Statistics, HE graduates enjoy higher employment rates and higher average annual earnings than non-graduates.

## Tuition Fees

Tuition fees are paid directly to the university or college before you start your course. Everyone is eligible for a loan to cover the full amount of the tuition fees, no matter how much your household income is.

## Maintenance Loans

Maintenance loans are paid into your bank account each term, so you'll get 3 payments a year. These cover your cost of living while you study. How much you get depends on where you study and how much your current household income is.

## Maintenance Loan

Living at home - up to **£7,592\*** per year  
Living away from home - up to **£8,994\*** per year  
Living away from home in London - up to **£11,672\*** per year

(If you're studying overseas as part of a UK course, maintenance loan support is still available – check online for details).

## Bursaries and Scholarships


You can access additional money that may not need to be repaid if you qualify for a bursary or scholarship.

**Bursaries** are usually awarded to students based on their personal circumstances, or if they come from a low-income family.

**Scholarships** are usually rewarded to students who are outstanding in a specific subject, sport or in music. They generally (but not always) need to be applied for, and are often competitive.

Contact the university or college themselves to enquire.

## Other Funding

You may be eligible for other types of funding outside the university or college you're studying at, such as: Disabled Student Allowance, Childcare or Adult Dependents' Grants, NHS funding for more information visit  gov.uk and search 'Student finance extra help'.



## Repaying Your Loan

- The student loan repayment comes out of your monthly pay once you **earn over £25,725** per year\* (before tax), and you **don't have to calculate it yourself**, so it's more like a tax than a loan.
- If your earnings drop for whatever reason, you don't have to keep repaying your loan at the previous amount. So you will **never have to pay more than you can afford**.
- You'll pay back 9% of what you earn over £25,725\*, so if you earn £26,725, you'll pay back 9% of the £1000 you are earning over the £25,725 threshold.
- Interest will be applied to the loan at a maximum rate of RPI + 3%\*.
- If, after graduating, you start off earning £26,725 per year, your monthly repayment as it currently stands would be **£7.50 per month\***.

**2018 employment rates:**  
- Graduate **87.7%**  
- Non-graduate **71.6%**

**Graduates earned on average £10,000 more than the average non-graduates\*.**

gov.uk, Graduate Labour Market Statistics, 2018

- If you never earn over £25,725, **after 30 years the debt is wiped off!**\* It's also wiped off if you don't fully pay it back over the course of 30 years.

The table below shows the approximate monthly repayments for a range of salaries.

Annual salary	9% deducted from	Monthly repayment
£25,725 or less	£0	£0
£27,725	£2,000	£15
£30,725	£5,000	£37.50
£35,725	£10,000	£75

\* Figures are subject to change, but correct as of September 2019. To see the most up-to-date and conclusive information visit:

 [gov.uk/student-finance](https://www.gov.uk/student-finance)

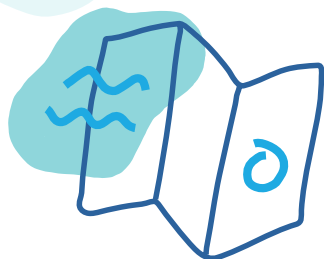
## USEFUL SITES

We recommend visiting the sites below for the most up-to-date and comprehensive information.

<b>ucas.com</b>	Universities and College Admissions Service
<b>gov.uk</b>	The most up-to-date student finance information
<b>whatuni.com</b>	University and college comparison site
<b>icould.com</b>	Inspiring stories from industry professionals
<b>discoveruni.org.uk</b>	Official information comparison tool
<b>prospects.ac.uk</b>	Job information and careers advice
<b>brightknowledge.org</b>	Need-to-know information about HE
<b>startprofile.com</b>	Explore career options
<b>careerpilot.org.uk</b>	Research job sectors and map your skills
<b>thestudentroom.co.uk</b>	Talk to current students and get real answers
<b>purepotential.org</b>	Produce guides on a range of HE topics, including the application process.
<b>startprofile.com</b>	Guidance on career options
<b>moneysavingexpert.com/students/</b>	Money advice from Martin Lewis

Visit [nextstepsw.ac.uk](https://www.nextstepsw.ac.uk) for impartial information and support on all things HE, including:

- **Why FE and HE matters to you**
- **Career paths and job sectors**
- **Courses subjects and qualifications**
- **Local events and activities**
- **Student stories**
- **Frequently asked questions**



## HE GLOSSARY

<b>Applicant day</b>	A chance to visit a university/college if you've already applied and received an offer. Often subject specific, it gives you a chance to see in more detail what studying would be like.
<b>Adjustment</b>	A two-week period for HE applicants to change to a different course after achieving higher A-level grades than expected.
<b>Campus university</b>	A university situated on one site with accommodation, teaching/research, leisure facilities all together.
<b>City university</b>	Normally distributed throughout a city/town with student accommodation, teaching/research, leisure facilities spread out.
<b>Clearing</b>	The process of applying to a university or college that still has places on its courses after receiving (level 3) results.
<b>Firm choice</b>	The HE course offer a student accepts as their first choice.
<b>Integrated masters</b>	A course that usually takes four years, incorporating a degree and a masters.
<b>Joint/Combined degree</b>	A degree usually made up of two or three areas of study.
<b>Lecture</b>	Large classes, often with tiered seating and a lecturer talking at the front while you take notes.
<b>Personal statement</b>	A statement describing your skills and experiences, and why you would be a good candidate for the course.
<b>Prospectus</b>	A guide produced by universities/colleges giving details about all their courses, and facilities, (also available online).
<b>Open day</b>	A day where you can visit universities and colleges to see the area and facilities and to ask questions.
<b>Seminar</b>	A small group of students who discuss what they've learned with an academic/teacher.
<b>Student loan</b>	Borrowed funding to cover the cost of tuition fees. It includes a separate maintenance loan to support living costs.
<b>Students' Union</b>	Run by students for students to support them, as well as promoting an active social life.
<b>Tuition fees</b>	The annual cost of studying at higher education. Student loans are available to cover these costs.
<b>UCAS</b>	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. When applying you will submit your application through UCAS.
<b>UCAS Tariff</b>	A system used by UCAS to allocate points to post-16 qualifications
<b>Undergraduate</b>	A student studying a Level 4 - 6 degree on a programme which normally lasts for three to four years.

# GET IN TOUCH



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