

Higher Education - Its Structure

What is Higher Education?

Higher Education consists of courses which are available at post A-Level and equivalent standard, leading to Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education, Higher National Diplomas or Certificates, college diplomas and certificates and professional courses leading to exemption from some professional institution examinations.

The exact requirements for entry vary depending on the level of course studied and the type of institution offering the course.

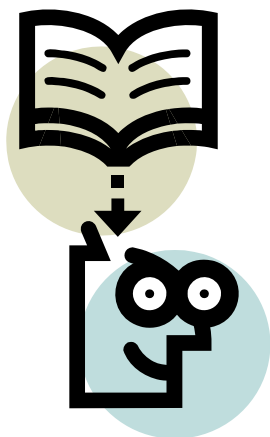
Depending on ability and advanced level achievements, there are two main levels of course in Higher Education, degree and diploma.

Degrees are available at universities, colleges and institutes of Higher Education. A degree can be taken in one subject or a combination.

'First degree' courses may vary in length, the minimum being three years (except at University College, Buckingham which is two years - this is an independent university). Sandwich and language courses can last four years (with one year abroad for the latter). In some subjects a degree is awarded after five years' study e.g. Veterinary Science, Medicine, Architecture and Dentistry.

Degrees are awarded at Honours or Ordinary Level. Honours degrees may be sub-divided into first, upper second (2:1), lower second (2:2) and third class degree levels.

Diplomas should not be confused with post-graduate Diplomas or 'Advanced Diplomas' which are taken after obtaining a Bachelor's degree. They might best be regarded as equivalent to a pass degree i.e. without honours. They are usually in very specific fields with the exception of the Diploma in Higher Education, details of which are given under the next section.



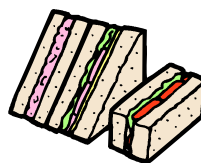
Entry Qualifications for Higher Education: Degrees

Degrees

The stated **minimum** qualifications are a vocational double award at grades A-E or three A-Level passes A-E and three GCSE A-C or three A-Levels A-E and 1 GCSE in different subjects. Often universities will require much more than this.

Some institutions express their requirements in points, according to the following system: AS 'A' grade = 60; AS 'B' grade = 40; AS 'C' grade = 20; A2 'A' grade = 120; A2 'B' grade = 100; A2 'C' grade = 80; A2 'D' grade = 60; A2 'E' grade = 40. **New for 2009 is an A* grade at AS level in the Extended Project. This is worth 70 points.**

Most institutions demand more than the minimum, often requesting a good spread of GCSE subjects, specifying subjects at both GCSE and advanced level and setting grade requirements at A2 Level. Increased competition for places on some course has served to raise the entry standards. In addition each university has a general entry requirement which should always be checked.



Oops! Not this kind of sandwich!

Sandwich Degree Courses

These include one or more full-time periods of supervised practical experience and training away from college and are usually a year longer than normal full-time academic courses.

There are three patterns of sandwich courses now available:

Thick: Two years in college followed by one year in industry then a further year at college.

Thin: Alternating periods of six months at college and six months in industry spread over four years.

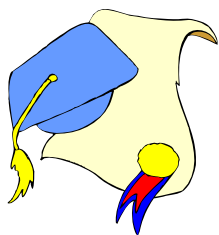
Mixed: The first and last years are spent at college and the middle two years follow the pattern six months in industry, six months at college.

Students on sandwich courses are either college-based or sponsored by an employer. The sponsored student is paid a salary during the periods in industry and this may also be paid whilst at college.

Entry Qualification for Higher Education: Diplomas

Diploma of Higher Education

The minimum entry requirements are identical to those demanded for degree courses, although there may be more flexibility in the A-Level grades accepted. The course lasts two years and is available at some universities and Colleges of Higher Education.



Higher National Diploma Courses (HND) or Vocational A-Level at Level 4

These are available at some universities and a large number of further education colleges. They cover a wide range of scientific, technical and Business Studies courses.

The minimum entry requirement is four GCSE A-C and one pass at A-Level (if the minimum qualifications are offered, these should be in different subjects; in addition to one A-Level pass, another A-Level should normally have been studied).

The final qualification is lower than degree level, but candidates can often transfer from these courses onto the second year of a degree course.










Types of Establishment



A Universities

These have history, tradition and a continuing reputation for academic study and research, but with some striking differences between them:




-  **Oxford & Cambridge** are the oldest universities (organised on a collegiate basis), offering courses to the most able applicants;
-  **Redbrick** are younger universities which have developed in, or near, large cities offering a diversity of degree courses. Examples are London, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, Southampton, Durham;
-  **Technological universities** have a strong tradition of Applied Science and Engineering degrees with more recent developments into courses in the Humanities. Some examples are Aston, Bath, Brunel, Loughborough, Salford;
-  **Modern campus type** of universities were built in the era of Higher Education expansion in the Sixties, usually a few miles removed from the nearest town e.g. York, East Anglia, Sussex, Warwick, Lancaster;
-  **The Open University** demands no formal entry requirements, but the minimum age is 18. Study via correspondence course is assisted by local study centre and media broadcasts;
-  **University College, Buckingham** is an independent university which has been granted a royal charter and offers a limited range of specialist degrees;
-  **The Scottish Universities** are part of the normal UCAS system. However, these institutions retain many traditional features which distinguish them from English universities.

B The 'New' Universities (former Polytechnics)

These were formed in the 1960's in response to the demand for more highly trained personnel in vocational subjects and the corresponding growth in the number of school leavers requiring Higher Education. All are centred on urban sites and have developed good links with local industry and commerce. Most still have a bias towards vocational subjects such as Business Studies, Engineering, Surveying and Hotel Management, but in addition now offer the whole range of arts and social science subjects like the older universities. Many courses may be studied on a part-time or day-release basis. Courses include vocational Courses. The age range of students tends to be very wide.



The Further and Higher Education Bill, 1992 introduced important changes.

-  It abolished the distinction between universities and polytechnics;
-  It enabled the polytechnics to award their own degrees and, if they wished, to call themselves universities;
-  Created single Higher Education funding councils in England and Wales, to support all Higher Education institutions, universities, polytechnics and colleges.

The extension of degree-awarding powers and the option to take a university title recognise the equal standing of the polytechnics and the existing universities. These 'new' universities offer the full range of courses, vocational and non-vocational, at degree, diploma and certificate levels. They have

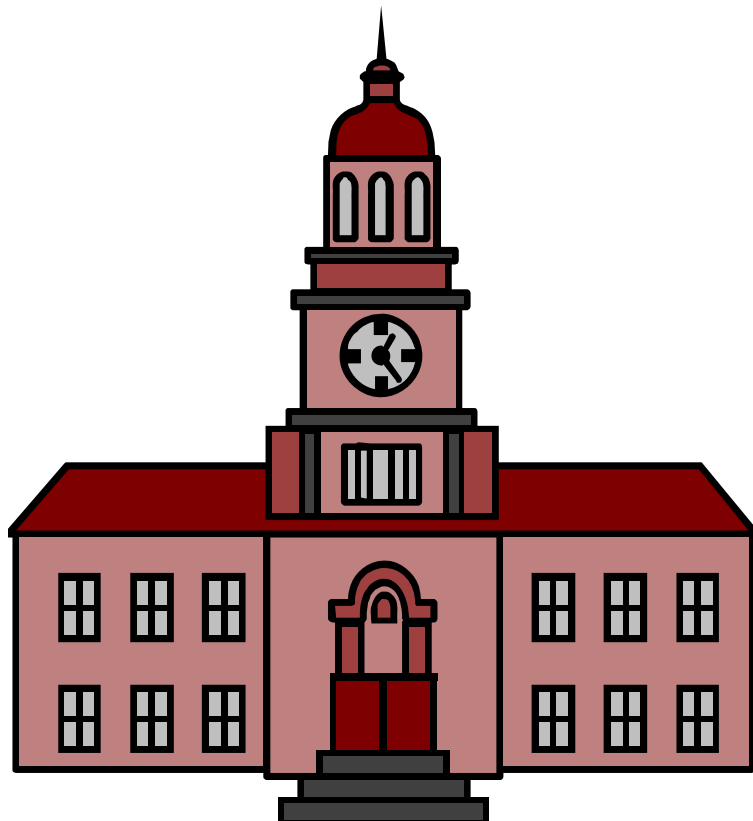
close links with employers and local communities. Procedures followed by all degree-awarding institutions are monitored in order to ensure that degrees are of the same quality.

C Colleges & Institutes of Higher Education & Colleges of Technology

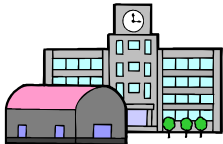































These have evolved from mergers between Technical or Further Education Colleges and Colleges of Higher Education. The Colleges of Higher Education continue to provide teacher training courses via the BEd Degree, but have diversified their courses to include professional diploma courses (e.g. Certified Qualification in Social Work - CQSW), degrees and diplomas in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Colleges of Technology range from the largest, which are indistinguishable from the new universities to the small specialist institutions akin to Technical Colleges.

D Specialist Colleges

These include Colleges of Art, Colleges of Technology, Colleges of Music and Colleges of Agriculture. Specialist colleges of 'schools' also train for certain specific careers e.g. Radiography or Chiropody.



Higher Education - The Institutions

	The Traditions	The Differences (There are always exceptions)
<p>Universities</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  System very old (Oxford dates from 12th Century)  All over 20 years old  Inherited traditions e.g. research, teaching & learning styles  Varied in size  Varied locations: industrial cities large market towns smaller towns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Tutorial teaching central part of teaching & learning programme  Lectures an important feature: you are there to learn rather than the lecturer there to teach  Likely to be working on your own with lecture/tutor for guidance  Staff likely to be involved in research and writing papers etc.  Subject mix varies: larger ones cover all including medicine and dentistry; smaller, more specialised (40% Arts and Social Sciences, 47% Science-based)
<p>New Universities (Former Polytechnics)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Established in 1960's: grew from existing colleges of technology, trades and professions  None older than 30 years  Career-oriented  Specific, applications for what is taught  Usually found in city centres  Close contacts with industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Learning likely to be lecture based  Staff more likely to have teaching as central rôle  More industrial research/contacts  Large number of sandwich courses  45% following courses in Science, Technology and related subjects  Also Art & Design, and teacher training  Some post-graduate students
<p>Colleges of Higher Education (HE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Established in 1970's: grew from teacher training colleges expanded into mainly arts  Some linked with polytechnics and universities  Teaching styles and ethos often a hybrid of polytechnic and university  Often in pleasant locations: small towns, outskirts of cities, country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Hybrid of lecture and tutorial system  Teacher training, Art & Design  Degrees in Humanities, Modern Foreign Languages, and arts-based subjects  some post-graduates (mainly in post-graduate teacher training)

Reading List

The following publications, amongst others, should help in making decisions about courses. These are available at most Careers Offices, schools and colleges and in some public libraries. You should also consult up-to-date individual prospectuses produced by the institutions. Some Student Unions also produce their own versions:

- 🏰 **‘Decisions at 17/18+’ (CRAC):** outlines options and suggests how to decide;
- 🏰 **‘University Entrance - the official guide’ (Sheed & Ward):** lists university degrees under subject headings, with minimum requirements;
- 🏰 **‘How to Apply for Admission to a University’ (UCAS handbook):** explains application and admission procedure for university first degree courses. Copies will be made available in tutorial;
- 🏰 **‘Applicant Handbook’ (NCCH):** lists all nurse training courses in England & Wales;
- 🏰 **‘Compendium of Advanced Courses in Colleges of Further Education’ (RACTEC):** comprehensive list of advanced courses outside the universities;
- 🏰 **‘Which Degree’ (Newpoint Publishing Co):** considers institutions and courses;
- 🏰 **‘Degree Course Offers’ (Trotman & Company Ltd):** guide to conditional offers given in preceding year, also covers interview and selection policies. **Note:** offers and grades actually received by new students are now published in the University Entrance guide (see above);
- 🏰 **‘Choosing a Degree Course’ (Careers Consultants):** an aid to subject choice;
- 🏰 **‘The Student Book’ (Papermac - Macmillan Press):** Compilation of extracts from Higher Education students’ personal experience;
- 🏰 **‘Sponsorships’ (COIC):** a guide to companies offering sponsorships to students intending to enter Higher Education;
- 🏰 **‘Sandwich Courses’ (CRAC):** a guide to Higher Education courses which combine full-time study with training and experience in industry and commerce.

