





Higher Education - Making a Choice

This module will:

-  suggest points for consideration when choosing a course, bearing in mind students' individual needs;
-  highlight the features of Scottish universities and those of Oxford and Cambridge;
-  suggest points for consideration when choosing a place;
-  note additional resources that are useful in research.



DO SHOW THIS TO YOUR PARENTS OR GUARDIANS. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THEY ARE AWARE OF THIS INFORMATION SO THAT THEY CAN GUIDE YOU.

Choosing a Course

Points for consideration:

- a Your ability to cope with long-term intensive academic study. Do you possess genuine aptitude for a particular subject?
- b The depth of your interest in certain subjects. You may wish to start a 'new' subject e.g. Philosophy - how much do you know about it? You should do some research;
- c Vocational courses e.g. Architecture, Dentistry, Medicine etc. It must be remembered that vocational study may not qualify you to do a particular job professionally. Usually additional experience in the work and further professional examinations are required. This period of time may be protracted. For some courses an early commitment to a particular career may be required;
- d Teaching methods. Some courses may be taught mainly by lectures, others may be taught through seminars and tutorials where there is more active student involvement.
- e Method of assessment. You may prefer a course which is based on examination performance or one where coursework is taken into account;
- f What are the minimum entry requirements demanded for the course?
- g How difficult is it to get on the course? Some subjects are more competitive than others;



In general, there is a heavy demand for places in arts and social sciences, which means that grade requirements are likely to be high in these subjects. The following courses are especially popular: Psychology, English, History, Geography and (more recently) French and German.

Demand tends to be lower for less popular subjects such as Mathematics, the Physical Sciences and Engineering. Sometimes not all vacancies are filled and grades required may be lower. In some subjects, mainly Chemistry and Biology, however, demand has been rising recently.

Some vocational courses such as Law or Veterinary Medicine attract far more applicants than there are places and the grade requirements are therefore high.

- h It must be remembered that the grades required for a particular course are a reflection of the forces of supply and demand rather than necessarily its quality;
- i How long is the course? Most degree courses are three years (four years for a sandwich course and in Scotland), but commonly an extra year may be added to widen a student's experience;
- j The content of the course. Degree courses with the same title do not necessarily have the same content e.g. Modern Language degrees vary considerably in the emphasis given to the language itself or to the literature, or to history and institutions. Students may be required to study another subject alongside their main subject or they may be able to choose a particular specialism towards the end of their course. With Business Studies, for examples, students may specialise in marketing, accountancy etc;
- k The flexibility of the course. You may wish to start with a broad approach and choose more specialist areas as you proceed. Many courses now have a 'modular' structure, where the programme of study is broken into modules of standard length/study time etc and students may plan a course to suit their individual needs or preferences;
- l Is there a 'safety net'? One of the advantages of the new universities is that there may be degree and HND courses running side-by-side;
- m What are the criteria for selecting students? Examination results will obviously be very important, but other things may be as well e.g. performance at interview, work experience or achievements in other fields such as sport, the arts, or contributions to the community.



Which Institution?

This choice will largely be determined by the type of course being followed e.g. degree as opposed to a diploma. However, choosing a course and choosing a place to study is a *two-way* process. One may help to narrow down the options for the other e.g. do you want to live at home and travel in daily? If so, this will restrict your choice to institutions in the London area. Good hunting! Here are some considerations:

- a Usually older universities require higher grades than newer universities which, in turn, require higher grades than colleges or institutes.
- b Scottish universities have an excellent reputation and are worthy of careful consideration. Their main differences from English universities are:
- ✗ Entrance is to a faculty rather than a department. This results in considerable flexibility in the choice of course - quite diverse combinations are possible.
 - ✗ Students with very good A-Level results may obtain exemption from all, or part, of their first year curricula. In doing this they may lose some of the flexibility referred to above.
 - ✗ Courses are usually for four years.
 - ✗ Interviews are less common - there is greater emphasis placed upon the UCAS application form.
 - ✗ Entry to first- and second-year course tends to be less restricted than in English universities because there is less emphasis on highly specialised study in these years. There are few restrictions on entry to their first-year classes laid down by many departments. With the exception of subjects such as Mathematics and French, good advanced level grades are sufficient. It is not necessary, for example, to have prior qualifications in History or Geography or Economics or in the less familiar languages to study them at university.
- c Oxford and Cambridge Universities have high entrance requirements; normally the potential for three Grade 'A's at A2-Level is required for all courses plus signs of wider interests such as Music, though in the event they do admit applicants whose examination results fall short of this by one or even two grades.

Traditionally associated with the Establishment and the public schools, both universities have made considerable efforts to attract comprehensive school applicants, for instance, by dropping the seventh term entrance examinations. Deciding to apply to these universities requires much thought and advice, but no student should be reluctant to apply for fear of not fitting in; both universities attract undergraduates from the widest social, economic and educational background as well as having many students from overseas.

Both universities are organised into colleges which provide accommodation, catering and recreational facilities, usually of a very high standard, often in splendid architectural surroundings. Colleges organise the individual supervision of students' work, by senior members or dons. The universities organise lectures, practicals and examinations.

Oxford and Cambridge have generally the finest facilities for study in the country.

If you are interested in applying here, you must speak to Mrs Jones.

Choosing a Place

Personal Preference

This is very much an individual process. Your success and enjoyment will depend as much on finding a place that suits **you** as on finding a suitable course. Many students underachieve, or even drop out, because they are unhappy in the place they have chosen. It is worth considering a number of questions about a place where you will be living and studying for three years:

- ✂ How far is it from home? Do you want to come home for the weekends?
- ✂ Size. You may prefer a smaller community rather than one which has many thousands of students. Also, within an institution, departments vary considerably as regards size.
- ✂ The environment. Some institutions have a rural setting, others have an urban one. Many of the new campus universities are located just outside the nearest town or city e.g. York. Others may be located at the very heart of a conurbation e.g. London. It may be sensible to go and see the environment for yourself. Ideally weekends and holidays should be used for some of these visits in order to minimise absence from school.
- ✂ What are your interests? Does it matter if there are no mountains within easy reach, or a premier division football team?
- ✂ Does the area have particular advantages for the study of your chosen subject? There may, for example, be strong links with local industry or cultural life.



Where
shall
I go?