

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two young people jumping joyfully against a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The person on the left is a young man with dark, curly hair, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants, with his arms raised and a wide smile. The person on the right is a young woman with dark hair, wearing a red top and a dark jacket, also with her arms raised. The overall mood is one of happiness and freedom.

Thinking about

HIGHER EDUCATION?

An introductory guide to university and college entrance for young people in Scotland

HELOA
Higher Education Liaison Officers Association



What? Why? When?

How? Where?

How much?

What if?

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ARE YOU:

- About to choose your Standard Grade options?
- In the first year of your Standard Grades?
- Starting to think about what you might do when you leave school?

IF SO,

THIS IS FOR YOU!

This booklet is designed to answer many of the questions you may have about Higher Education and to help you plan ahead.



WHAT IS HIGHER EDUCATION?

Higher Education is the term used to describe courses of study in universities and colleges that are at a “higher” level than you can do at school, which lead to qualifications called **degrees** or **diplomas**.

Most people start Higher Education courses at age 17 or 18, after studying in the fifth and sixth year at school. Some students may decide to take a “year out” first or may even come back to studying later in life as a mature student.

Higher Education courses are available at a wide range of universities and colleges all over the UK, and there are currently more than 50,000 courses and 300 different places to choose from!

IS IT FOR ME?

Why not? About a half of all school leavers in Scotland currently go on to Higher Education.

WHY GO TO UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE?

For a variety of reasons:

- **To study a particular subject in more depth**

You may already enjoy a particular subject at school - like English, French, Chemistry, Maths or Music, or you may want to branch out into a new area – e.g. to study Surveying because you like Geography, or Zoology because you enjoy Biology.

- **The career you are interested in may require a degree level qualification**

– to become a doctor, dentist, architect, town planner, teacher, lawyer or chartered engineer for example. Or you may be interested in one of the many high-level (and more highly paid!) jobs that are open to people with degrees or diplomas – in management, marketing, banking, administration etc.

- **For the “University Experience” – Higher Education isn’t just about studying!**

Being a student at university or college widens your experience of the world - you meet new people from all over the UK and overseas and from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. You are also offered a range of exciting opportunities for your social life as well as your studies, and you have the opportunity to leave home if you want to! This makes your time in Higher Education an all-round experience as well as a chance to develop a range of skills, which are highly valued by employers.





WHAT'S LIFE LIKE AS A STUDENT?

Ask 10 different students that question and you'll almost certainly get 10 different answers!

Most students will probably tell you that at university or college you have a lot more freedom than you had at school, and that this makes you more independent and self-confident.

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- **Studying:** For a start you'll have chosen the subject(s) that you really enjoy, which makes a big difference from school! You'll have a weekly timetable, with a number of "lectures" where large numbers of students listen to information given by lecturers and take notes; and "tutorials", which are in smaller groups and probably more like the lessons that you are familiar with. In some subjects there will also be more practical sessions, in laboratories or design studios for example. But a lot of the week is likely to be "private study time" where you are expected to do work on your own, preparing for a group discussion or an essay by reading about a topic, or working through some problems.
- **Accommodation:** You may also be living away from home. Many students, even if they go to a local university or college, choose not to live at home in order to be more independent.

Most universities and many colleges of Higher Education make this easier by providing accommodation for many of their students, especially in their first year. Accommodation could be in a "hall of residence" with places for large numbers of students, or in a shared house or flat, normally with a small group of other students. You usually get your own study-bedroom and pay rent to the university or college. In halls of residence meals may be provided at set times or you may cook for yourself; in a flat or house you will have to do your own cooking. You can of course choose to live at home whilst studying at a local university if you want to.

- **Social activities:** Universities and colleges have lots of social activities going on all the time. Every university and college has a Students' Union, which provides places to meet, eat and drink, as well as organising regular entertainment such as club nights and live music. They also run a huge variety of clubs and societies, which range from sports clubs, community action groups, student newspapers and radio stations, to Star Trek societies, political and religious groups and Abseiling clubs! There are also student drama societies and music groups of all kinds (from choirs and orchestras, to helping out backstage as a "roadie" at gigs), which anyone with interest and enthusiasm can join. Sometimes it feels as if the biggest problem is finding time to do some work!

- **Support:** Being independent doesn't mean that there's no-one to turn to for help. If you do find it difficult to organise your new routine – for example balancing your social life and work, or managing financially on the money available to you – you can get advice from people like your personal tutor in the department where you're studying, the warden in your hall of residence or the welfare officer at the university.

WHAT ABOUT THE COURSES?

In most subjects, a degree course in Scotland lasts four years. A few courses such as Medicine and Dentistry last even longer. At the end of the course you are awarded a **degree** in the subject that you have studied. A person who has a degree is called a **graduate**.

Some people choose instead to follow two-year higher national diploma (HND) courses, which are available at some universities and in many colleges. In many, but not all, circumstances it will be possible to transfer to a degree course once you have been awarded an HND.

Most universities and colleges offer courses in a very wide range of subjects, and there are literally thousands to choose from!

You can study any subject that you have already studied at school, or you can try something new.

- For example if you are good at **Biology and Chemistry** you might like to study Medicine, Microbiology, Physiological Sciences, Marine Biology, Environmental Science, Agriculture or Human Nutrition, to name just a few!
- If you enjoy **History** at school, you might choose a course in Archaeology, Ancient History, Egyptology, Classical Studies, Politics or International Relations.
- Skills in **Maths or Physics** could prepare you to study Engineering or Astronomy.
- Other subjects include, Computer Science, Travel & Tourism, Media Studies, Music Technology, Architecture, Physiotherapy, Sports Science, Law and Business Management.

You don't have to choose just one subject. Joint or "dual honours" courses let you combine two subjects (e.g. History and Politics, Business and French, Physics and Maths) and some "combined studies" courses can be even more flexible. In many Scottish universities students will take a number of different subjects in their first and second years before finally deciding what subject(s) they wish to specialise in at

"Honours" level. Many universities and colleges now use a "modular" structure for many of their qualifications. This means that their courses consist of units called modules, which are combined to make up a complete degree, diploma or foundation degree programme, which often makes it easy to study a selection of modules from different subjects within your single qualification.

The University year is in most cases split into two semesters, which are usually made up of 12 weeks teaching and three weeks for revision and exams (e.g. September/October to December and January/February to May/June). Many courses are also assessed by course work and assessments throughout the semester and the number of exams you have will depend on the course that you have chosen.

Some courses include a whole year or a number of shorter periods working in industry or business. These are often known as

"sandwich" courses. Other courses, like Modern Languages usually include a year working or studying abroad. Many courses in a wide variety of other subjects also offer you the opportunity to study for some of your course at another university in Europe or somewhere else overseas, as part of an exchange programme.

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS WILL I NEED?

Most people stay on at school in the fifth and sixth year or go to a local college for one or two years after doing their Standard Grades or equivalent. Many of them take a number of Highers in the fifth year or perhaps a combination of Highers and Intermediates whilst others may opt to study for an equivalent vocational qualification at college. In sixth year they may opt to take more Highers/Intermediates or move on to some Advanced Highers.

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WHAT'S LIFE LIKE AS A STUDENT?

Specific subjects:

Each course at university has its own specific entry requirements. For example, you would normally need to study mathematics at Higher in order to study mathematics at university and the same principle applies to subjects like modern languages where you would normally have to study the specific language or at least another language other than English before being admitted. If you want to study medicine you will need to study a couple of science subjects, usually including chemistry and/or biology and for many Engineering courses you may need both Maths and Physics.

You may often be surprised by the subjects universities and colleges require for entry and indeed the subjects they do not require. For example you do not necessarily need to have studied history at school to study it at university. Many subjects available at university or college are not available in school so it would not be possible for you to have taken them before.

There are also many courses that do not require any particular subjects and this is because you will start the subject from scratch at university. For some courses, such as psychology, a science or maths background may be helpful. For others, a mixture of arts and science Highers may be desirable. For all these courses you will need good grades in whatever subjects you have taken and you will have to show that you really are the right sort of person to do well in that subject.

Standard Grades

In general, it is helpful if you have passes in a good range of Standard Grade subjects at grade 3 or above, as this gives universities and colleges a good indication of your academic ability. Most universities and colleges will require you to have gained grade 3 or above in English at Standard Grade or equivalent as part of their general requirements for entry. Some courses may also require at least a grade 2/3 in Standard Grade Maths (e.g. for

Economics or Business Studies). If you are considering a career in teaching you will need to have gained a Higher in English plus a Standard Grade mathematics.

Grades needed

The grades that you will need vary depending on the subject and the university you may be interested in. Some universities will ask you to achieve specific grades in the Highers you are taking, whilst others may use the "UCAS tariff points system", where you get points for each grade you achieve which contribute towards an overall total. Using either of these methods, the university may still set certain grades for you to achieve in particular subjects.

Some courses are extremely popular and may have very high entry requirements. Before you apply, you will need to find out the current typical requirements for the courses you are interested in and make sure that you are expecting to achieve the necessary results.

You will be able to look in official guidebooks and university prospectuses/websites to find out about entry qualifications and the Admissions Office at each institution will be able to provide you with information about specific courses.

What else do universities and colleges look for?

When you apply for a place at a university or college, admissions staff will also look at what you have done outside your studies – your hobbies and interests both in school/college and outside. They take notice of experiences such as part-time jobs, work placements or voluntary work and any positions of responsibility that you may have held either in school or elsewhere. Additional background information, like work experience or whether you will be the first in your family to go to higher education, helps to build up as complete a picture of you as possible, and contributes to decisions whether to offer you a place on your chosen course.





WHERE WILL I STUDY?

That will be up to you. You'll have to choose not only what subject to study but also which universities or colleges to apply to.

- Some are in the centre of large cities, and some are set in the countryside.
- Some are split between several sites, and others are on purpose built self-contained sites or campuses.
- They vary in size and style and each has its own special atmosphere.

You can choose to apply anywhere in the UK, regardless of where your home is. Many students make the most of the opportunity to leave home, but others will decide to continue living with their family.

HOW WILL I CHOOSE?

Each university and college produces a book (free of charge) called a "prospectus" which gives details of all its degree and diploma programmes, entrance requirements and other important things like accommodation, sports and social facilities and what the nearest city is like. This information will also be available in greater detail on the university or college's website. By reading prospectuses/websites and visiting universities and colleges for open days, you'll be able to work out what you want to study and where. You'll also find out what grades you will normally need to get in. Your school or college and your local Careers Scotland Office will also offer further help and guidance.

WHEN WILL I CHOOSE?

It's never too early to start thinking about Higher Education. You'll have the chance to speak to guidance teachers and advisors in S3 & S4 to discuss what you might do when you leave school, including the possibility of going on to university or college. You may find it helpful to look at a few prospectuses in S4 when you are deciding what subjects to take after Standard Grades. However, you should remember that courses and entry requirements can change from year to year, so if you look at

a prospectus several years in advance, the details will almost certainly have changed by the time you apply to university or college.

Once you're in S5, you will need to do some serious research by consulting Higher Education directories, guides and individual prospectuses, as well as visiting universities and colleges and attending a Higher Education convention. Prospectuses are kept in most school careers libraries, but you can also get your own copy by contacting any university or college. You can of course also access most of the information you will need by logging on to the university or college website, where you'll probably also have the option to order a paper prospectus on-line.

WHERE
WILL
I STUDY?



WHEN AND HOW WILL I APPLY?

You'll usually apply during the autumn of S6, the year before you want to start your course. Some candidates will apply from S5. If you want to apply from S5 then make sure that there is no age restriction for the courses you wish to apply for. There is only one application form, but you can use it to apply for up to six choices of course/institution. You apply through a centralised system, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and you'll be given plenty of help and support through your school or college when the time comes!

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WHAT STANDARD GRADES SHOULD I TAKE IF I WANT TO GO TO UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE LATER?

This is a sensible question, but it's a difficult one to answer because it can depend on what you will want to study in several years time. Obviously there's a big difference in what you will need to study Music and what you need to study Microbiology! However, there is some general advice we can offer.

- Remember that to get into university or college you'll need good results at Standard Grade, or Intermediate 2

followed by good grades at Higher – and you're likely to do best in subjects you enjoy and are good at.

- Try to take subjects that will give you a good general education – a broad base from which you can choose what you want to study later on. Your school curriculum will ensure that you can study a wide spread of subjects: e.g. English, Maths, Science, a Foreign Language, History/Geography.

- If you already know what you're likely to want to study in Higher Education, it would be sensible to check with your teachers to see if there are any particular Standard Grades that you need for that course.

AND AFTER MY STANDARD GRADES?


When you come to choose your subjects at Higher, you may already know what you'll want to study later. If so, you should check in university or college prospectuses to see what subjects it is most appropriate for you to take. If you don't know what you want to do later on, it is probably best to take the subjects you do best in and enjoy most. You should also ask your teachers if you are choosing a sensible combination of subjects. You might like to look in a number of university or college prospectuses as well, to see what a balanced choice of subjects would enable you to do later, and what sort of grades you'd need to get.

Remember it is not always obvious which subjects are required for entry to degrees at university so it is best to check if you have any idea what you want to do.

You'll find that a lot of Biology courses require Chemistry as well as Biology, and courses like Physics or Engineering often need both Physics and Maths, so you may need to be a bit more careful with your choices if you might be interested in this type of subject area.



You may also be able to take extra subjects to follow your particular interests and abilities (e.g. Music, Drama or Art). You can't keep all your options open, but this should give you a good choice of subjects at Higher, and later on when applying for a place at university or college.



WHAT IF I CHOOSE THE “WRONG” SUBJECTS?

If you take one group of subjects at Higher – for example, Geography, History and English- and later realise that you should have done science subjects, don't despair! You always have S6 to take some of the subjects you should have taken before and some universities run foundation year courses to help you “convert” to science or engineering and even to Medicine and Dentistry if you have done the “wrong” Higher subjects.

And of course many degrees may not require any specific subjects at Higher, so for these it will not matter which subjects you have taken.

So, while you should try and plan ahead sensibly, you'll probably be able to find a suitable university or college course, whatever school subjects you choose. This also means that you don't have to worry too much if your interests and ideas change over the years.

WHEN
AND HOW
WILL I
APPLY?

WHAT ABOUT THE COST?

In the last few years there have been a number of changes in the way that university and college students are financed, and there will almost certainly be more before you leave school.

There is much confusion particularly about what university or college will cost but the good news is that the financial help available does enable the vast majority of students to get by. What's more, the long-term benefits of gaining a higher education qualification still hugely outweigh any short-term difficulties that are sometimes experienced.

Will I have to pay tuition fees when I am a student?

If you are a Scottish student studying at a Scottish university, you won't have to pay tuition fees. The Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), will pay the full amount each year on your behalf, regardless of your family income.

If studying elsewhere in the UK you may be required to contribute to your tuition costs. For further details, please refer to the SAAS website (see back page for web address).

Do I have to pay anything else?

Although you are not asked to pay tuition fees when you start your Higher Education course you may have to pay the Graduate Endowment after you have completed your studies. This will only be paid once you have started work and can be paid back in installments.

It is also important to recognise that there will be costs associated with some of the courses available. For example art or architecture students will have to buy some materials and science students may have to buy some basic equipment or pay some of the cost of field trips. Almost all students will buy some text books.

• What about my living costs?:

Scottish students on full-time higher education courses at Scottish institutions can apply for a **bursary** (which you do not have to pay back) as well as a student loan, to cover some of your living costs. The Student Loan is not like a bank loan, as there is a low rate of interest and you only have to start paying back the loan when you finish your course and are earning a good salary (at least £15,000 a year).

• Other sources of money:

Some health-related courses are funded by NHS Bursaries, and those students have their living costs paid for by the NHS.

There are also a range of bursaries, scholarships and other funds available from individual universities, which you may be eligible to apply for to help with your living costs and any fees.

Some students also choose to work part-time whilst studying, to earn some extra money and there are student employment schemes in many universities and colleges, which can help you to find suitable work.

WHAT ABOUT THE COST?

If you want more information now, you can ask your guidance teacher or look on the internet (see back page for some useful addresses), but you must also obtain up-to-date information in the year when you apply to university or college.

You have to look at Higher Education as an investment in your future. As a graduate you should find that there are a much wider range of interesting and better paid career opportunities available to you, and you should remember that you only start paying back your student loan when you are earning more than £15,000! On top of that, if you make the most of your time in Higher Education, "student life" should be worth every penny!



How can I find out more about Higher Education?

Your school guidance staff or your local Careers Scotland office will be able to give you lots of help and advice about applying to university or college. Also all universities and colleges arrange activities and events to help school pupils find out more about Higher Education (for example workshops, master-classes, campus tours, visits to schools, student shadowing, taster courses etc). You may also find that your school or college will arrange for someone from your local university to come and talk to your year group about Higher Education choices and the application process.

When you get to S5 you may want to visit a university to see for yourself what it's like. Most universities and colleges organise open days and details are sent to all schools and colleges. You should also have an opportunity to attend a Higher Education convention in your region, where you will be able to talk to representatives from a large number of universities and colleges and find out details about their degree and diploma courses.

Your school careers library probably has copies of all university and college prospectuses, as well as a range of general guides such as "University and College Entrance: The Official Guide". There are also some useful websites listed on the back page.

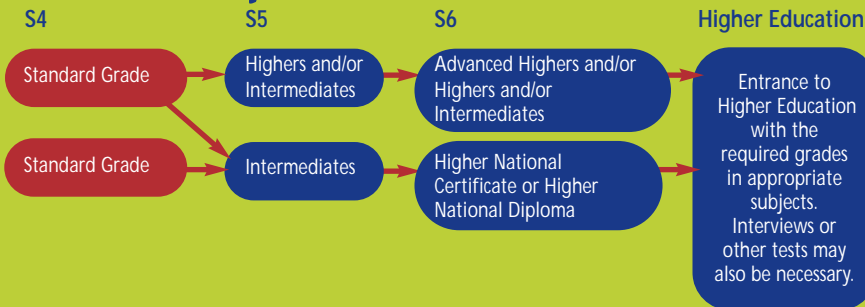
If you'd like your own copy of a prospectus or further information about individual courses, you should contact the Schools Liaison or Student Recruitment and Admissions Office at the relevant university or college, or you could log on to their website.



Please remember

– this booklet is only a general guide and the information provided is correct at the time of going to press. Individual institutions may have different requirements, and the entrance requirements of all universities and colleges are likely to change from year to year. So, if you are aged 13 or 14 now, the student funding arrangements, entry requirements and course descriptions may be different by the time you are ready to apply to university or college.

MAIN ENTRY ROUTES TO HIGHER EDUCATION



USEFUL WEBSITES

<http://wwwucas.com> - The official site for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

Find out what courses are available, where they are and how to apply.

<http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk> or <http://www.ceg.org.uk/> for impartial careers advice and guidance.

<http://www.student-support-saas.gov.uk/> - The official government information about current student funding



With over 50,000 different courses and over 300 institutions to choose from, choices regarding progression into University or College can be difficult to make. And what are the reasons for going on to Higher Education in the first place?

The Higher Education Liaison Officers Association (HELOA) is an organisation that deals specifically in the provision of this kind of information and guidance, with members from Universities and Colleges throughout the UK. We offer free and impartial advice and can advise students, their families, careers officers and teachers about the range of options available, welfare issues and the latest developments in Higher Education.

For more information about HELOA and the services that our members offer, please visit our website www.heloa.ac.uk

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