



I want to go on to higher education but...

Here are some tips from a careers adviser to help you decide what subjects to study and where to study higher education. You might also want to read the article 'Choosing the right course and right university'.

... I don't know what to study

Step 1 – What's the appeal for you?

As a starting point, it can be helpful to review your reasons for wanting to go into higher education.

- What particularly appeals to you about this option?
- Have you considered all the possible different pathways you could take?
- What are the advantages of this pathway for you at this stage – and what are the possible disadvantages? Consider the pros and cons (see the 'Higher education pros and cons' resource).

Step 2 – Does a career give you a steer?

If you feel confident that HE is still the way forward, the next consideration is whether you have any ideas around the type of career or career sector that you wish to pursue.

Yes – Check out your career ideas further to see if there are any particular qualifications or higher education subjects required or preferred. You can find more information about different careers on [the UCAS website](#), or job profiles sections of your national careers website (such as [National Careers Service](#)).

No – If you are undecided about the area of work you would like to enter, don't worry – many people are at this stage. The general advice in this situation would be to take a course that will keep open the widest range of options and avoid anything too specialised or niche. (**Did you know** 40% of graduate employers will accept a degree in any subject?)

Step 3 – Review your current subjects / courses or those you have studied in the past

Here are some key questions you need to ask:

- Which subjects or topics do you find most interesting and where have you achieved your best marks?
- Does this give you any clues about the broad type of course you might like to study – such as something maths based, science related, or humanities focused?
- Consider whether you are more interested in studying a traditional academic subject (such as maths, history, French, or chemistry) or would like to study something that has a more vocational link, such as retail, travel and tourism, hospitality, or engineering.
- Are you interested in performance-based courses? If so you may be required to attend auditions or submit portfolios.
- Are you confident that the subject and course will keep you motivated and interested for three years or more (if taking a degree).

Good to know

- Remember, you can take a huge range of courses at HE and you don't necessarily need to have studied the subject / course previously.
- You can [browse by subjects](#) in UCAS' search tool to have a look through some different subject areas and courses to get a feel for the type of courses on offer. If you're interested in performance-based courses, use the [UCAS Conservatoires search tool](#).
- It is possible to combine a vast range of different subjects and courses together.
- Some more vocational or work-related courses offer work placements for up to a year with an employer.

Step 4 – Draw up a shortlist

Draw up a list of your top five courses – the ones you want to explore further. You can use the UCAS website to start your research and your thinking from step 3 can be applied.

You can use the 'Doing your research' template and the Research Resources which have suggestions and sources for your research. Once you have completed some initial research, you may find it helpful to discuss your findings with a careers adviser.

See also:

Pros and cons of higher education'

Tips from students and questions to ask

How do you make decisions

... I'm not sure where to go

Step 1 – What's the appeal for you?

As a starting point, it can be helpful to review your reasons for wanting to go into higher education.

- What are the advantages of this pathway for you at this stage – and what are the possible disadvantages?
- What do you hope to do with your course?
- Have you considered all the possible different pathways you could take?

Step 2 – What subjects are you focused on?

- How confident are you that you know this is what you want to study?
- What particularly appeals to you about this subject area?
- Are there other courses you could consider that link to your interests?

Step 3 – What's on offer?

Here are some key questions you need to ask yourself:

- How far away you are prepared to study from home?
- Do you have any particular areas of interest or topics you would like to study which might be offered as options or modules?
- How do you prefer to be assessed (methods vary between course providers)?
- What type of course providers' would you like to study at – a traditional research-based provider, a more modern vocational provider, small or large, in a busy city or a quieter area?

[Use our search tool](#) to find out:

- which course providers offer courses in your subject area
- which courses have entry requirements that match your grades – if you have predicted grades, it is advisable to apply for at least one course with lower entry requirements to have as a reserve



- the full range of mandatory and optional topics or modules on offer – do these match your interests? (Remember there is no national curriculum for Higher Education so every course will be different)
- costs – tuition fees can vary between institutions and living expenses will be dependent on where you study in the UK
- what's appealing to you about the different course providers and faculties providing the courses? Do they have a particular focus or specialist area of research, do they have links with employers, and what graduates do after their course?

Step 4 – Draw up a shortlist

Draw up a list of your top five course providers – the ones you want to explore further. You can use the UCAS website to do more in-depth research on each, check out the website and prospectus for each university or college, and it's really worth attending open days if you can.

- You can get the student viewpoint at [Unistats](#) for subject and course provider reviews. You can also read provider reviews from [The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#).
- League tables that rank course providers may provide useful information but make sure you check the sources as some are biased. (The Guardian, The Times, and The Complete University Guide are some of the more impartial places to look.)

Timescale: Complete your research by the start of Year 13

Good to know – applications for the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and for courses in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine / science need to be made by 15 October, most undergraduate courses by 15 January, and some art and design courses by 24 March.



What next?

You can use the 'Doing your research' template and the Research Resources which have suggestions and sources for your research. Once you have completed some initial research, you may find it helpful to discuss your findings with a careers adviser.

See also:

- Pros and cons of higher education
- Tips from students and questions to ask
- 'How do you make decisions' resource.