



# Differences between studying at **school** and **university**

It's important to go into higher education study with an open mind, so you can get a good return for the time and money you will be investing. To help you, here are some of the key things you need to be prepared for.

## Expect to do much more independent study

Ask university staff what they are looking for in new students, and right up there will be the ability and motivation to self-direct their studies. At university, the formal teaching you receive will often only give you the background knowledge. To succeed, you will be expected to complete your own reading and research around topics, to fill in the detail and develop your thinking further. You won't be prompted or hassled by tutors.

After years of structured learning in school, with teachers setting homework for you and helping you to plan project work, this might be a bit of a shock to the system! You will need to adjust to this new, less directed way of studying, and be motivated to study a subject at degree level for three or more years.

## Variety of teaching methods

Apart from lectures, you may also have:

- **seminars** – small groups which offer more opportunity for discussion and development of ideas / thinking. These often have a more informal and facilitative learning style, where you may get to prepare and present your own work
- **tutorials** – one-to-one meetings with your tutor where you can focus on your understanding, progress, and goals

Depending on the subject and course, there could be:

- **practical workshops and laboratory sessions** – the chance to put theory into practice and learn skills
- **field visits** – an opportunity to further learning outside of the lecture hall and university campus
- **work placements** – to gain real experience

## Different course content

Remember there is no national curriculum at HE level. This means that courses with the same title can be very different, reflecting the particular specialism of a university department and research interests of its staff. This really shows the need to research your courses fully so you know what you are signing up for!

## You'll need to manage deadlines

With the greater reliance on self-discipline (and no teachers to prompt you), it is vital to note deadlines for submission of work and, of course, stick to them. In all likelihood, your final degree award will include assessed performance from your first two years and not just your final year exams.

## It's bigger!

- Higher education providers differ in terms of their size and scale. They can have multiple buildings spread over different locations, for over 20,000 students. Don't forget your map!

- Class sizes can be much bigger. If you are used to small class sizes in your school, then you'll immediately notice that most degree courses have much bigger student year groups. This is often reflected in the capacity of lecture theatres – 250/300 seats at some universities – so with much bigger student numbers, you will not always have the same opportunity to ask questions.

### **It's more diverse**

University life offers a unique opportunity to get to know a diverse range of people and cultures. You will encounter students of all ages and nationalities studying full and part-time courses in UK higher education. While most students are aged 17–19 years old, last year, more than 240,000 applicants were over 20 years old, and more than 68,000 EU and international students started in UK higher education.

### **New interests and new life skills!**

Higher education providers offer a huge range of extracurricular activities and societies you can join. It presents a real opportunity to try something new and develop different skills and interests.

For many students, university life also provides the first taste of independent living away from home and with it, the chance to develop new life skills, including money management.

### **Last but not least, you need to pay!**

Degree-level study, unlike taking A levels in a UK state school, involves tuition fee costs of thousands of pounds for many students. However, applicants from the UK and the EU do not have to pay these fees upfront as they can be covered by a student loan. This means that the money you have been loaned will only be repayable after you have completed your degree and are earning above £21,000 a year (before tax).

As a degree student, you will be automatically covered by consumer law. This will help ensure you get the information you require when choosing a course and provider, and help to protect you if things go wrong. You can find out more about your rights on the 'Competition and Markets Authority website.