



# Post 16 Guide to higher education

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I had always planned to go to university, but I was undecided about the best path for me. However, my university offers a range of support to help me find the right path and alleviate any concerns I have. The tutors are also fantastic and offer regular meetings and individual support whenever I need it.

It was a big change to move away to a new city but I found it easy to make friends and the university always has events running that give you the opportunity to meet new people. The course itself provides plenty of new challenges and learning opportunities, which will provide me with the skills to start me on my chosen career path.

**Michael**

BA (Hons) Business Management (HRM) student

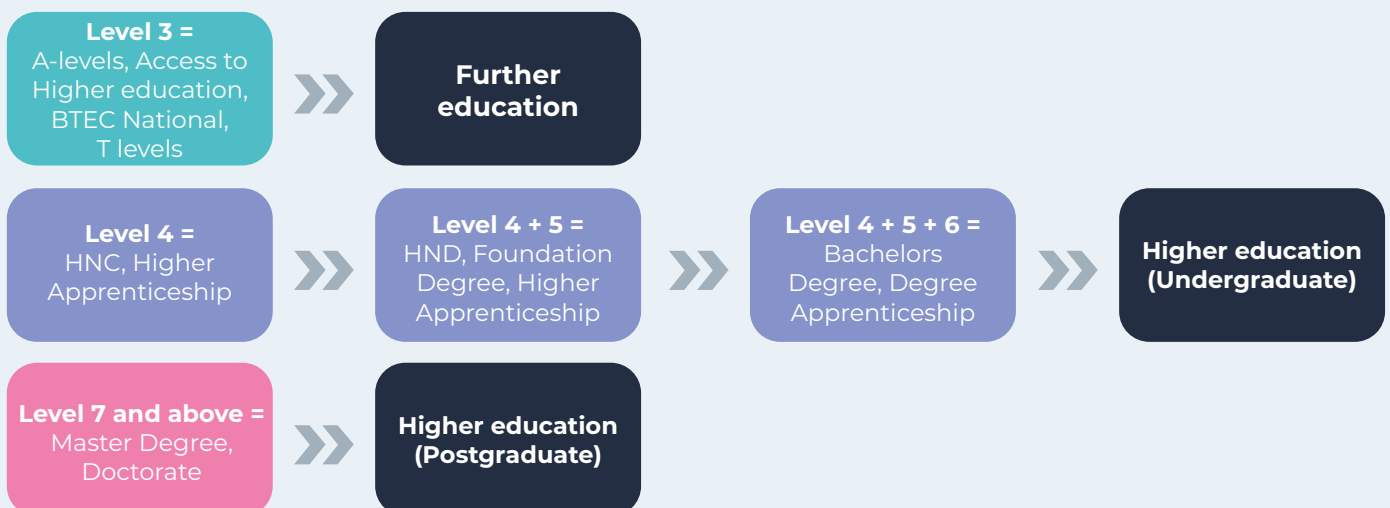
## What is higher education?

Higher education (HE) is studied after college or sixth form and offers a wide range of courses and qualifications available at a variety of different places. You can study HE at a university, college, the workplace, other training provider, or even online through distance learning.

In addition to the variety of places you can study, there are also different types of courses and qualifications to choose from. Courses available at HE include; degrees, higher national diplomas and certificates, foundation degrees, higher and degree apprenticeships and professional courses. The type of course you choose will depend on the subject you want to study, where you want to study and the grades you achieve at GCSE level and at college or sixth form.

Higher education can be split into undergraduate (before graduating) and postgraduate (after graduating). From school or college, you would usually start with undergraduate studies.

## Levels of education





# Why should I progress to higher education?

If your idea of university is being bored stiff in a lecture theatre, you couldn't be further away from the truth.

Higher education is all about making the most of the opportunities available to you and exploring your new-found independence - it's not just about your studies, it's about the whole experience of being in a new environment, meeting new people and developing your skills.

You don't have to go to university to gain higher-level qualifications - if you study a qualification that's level 4 or above at a college, or take a higher or degree apprenticeship, you're still progressing into higher education. Higher education might not be for everyone, but it's important to make sure you've considered all of the options before you make your decision.

## There are a number of reasons people decide to study at HE, including;

- It can give you an opportunity to study something you care about and are interested in at a deeper level
- You will develop skills in a number of areas that will help you in the future and within employment
- It's a great opportunity to meet new people and make friends with similar interests

## There are also benefits for your career:

- People who have studied a degree (graduates) earn on average **£10,000** a year more than those without a degree\*
- Many careers will ask for a degree or equivalent – it doesn't always matter what subject you studied, but they recognise that a degree gives you valuable skills
- You must have a specific degree to enter some professions, such as being a nurse, teacher, psychologist or solicitor.

## How do I know where to go and what to do?

Choosing your next steps after college or sixth form can feel like learning a different language. There are many different course types, subject options and pathways into careers, so it's important that you have the right information so you can make an informed choice. Don't forget - you don't have to make this decision on your own, and you can speak to your teachers, careers advisors and friends and family for advice. Ultimately, it is up to you, and when it comes to making choices, knowledge is power.

There's not a "one size fits all" approach to higher education - every course, every college or university and every apprenticeship will have different benefits and drawbacks. Think about what you want and how you work best.

# Some questions to get you started...

### **Do you have a specific career goal in mind?**

Some careers might need you to study a specific qualification to be able to work in that area. For example, if you want to be a Midwife, you will need to study a degree in Midwifery that is recognised by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Similarly, some careers might not have an apprenticeship route just yet - you can check on the Institute for Apprenticeships website.

### **Are you passionate about a particular subject?**

If you're not sure what you want to do but are interested in a specific subject, it's a great place to start! You're more likely to achieve well if you're studying something you're interested in and care about and doing well will set you up for a range of different careers when you've finished your studies. Don't forget that most universities and colleges have careers teams who can help you work out your steps after graduation.

### **Do you prefer exams or coursework?**

Some courses will be assessed entirely through exams, and some will be through coursework. If you know you prefer one over the other, look at each course to see how you will be assessed.

### Do you like to be in a big city, or do you prefer everything in one place?

Some universities and colleges are based in the centre of large cities (“city universities”) with buildings spread out across different locations. Others are based in one place, often just outside the city centre, and have everything in one place (“campus universities”). You might prefer the hustle and bustle of a big city, or you might prefer the convenience of facilities being within walking distance. Be aware that living costs do differ from city to city so do some research around rental costs. Try to visit different a range of different universities to get a feel for them and work out feels right for you.

### Do you want a course that includes an industry placement/ work experience?

Look at sandwich courses or degrees that specifically offer work placements. Higher/Degree Apprenticeships could also be an option if gaining industry experience is important to you.

### Do you want to move away, or stay close to home?

Going to university or college doesn't mean you have to leave home just yet. In the East Midlands we have a range of local providers in commuting distance:

- **Loughborough University**
- **Nottingham Trent University**
- **Sheffield Hallam University**
- **University of Derby**
- **University of Leicester**
- **University of Nottingham**
- **University of Sheffield**
- **Buxton and Leek College**
- **Chesterfield College**
- **Derby College Group**
- **Newark College**
- **Nottingham College**
- **Vision West Nottinghamshire College**



# Which higher education Pathway is for me?

Type of qualification	Definition	How long does it usually take?	Example
Bachelors Degree Level 4, 5 and 6	What most people mean when they say "degree". Available in academic (discipline specific) and vocational (career specific) subjects.	3-4 years	BA (Hons) English Literature BSc (Hons) Biology LLB (Hons) Law BSc (Hons) Adult Nursing
Foundation Degree Level 4 and 5	A course combining academic and work based skills. Equivalent to 2/3 of a full bachelor degree.	2 years	FdSc Animal Behaviour and Welfare FdA Art and Design
BA Top Up Level 6	Converts a foundation degree into a full degree.	1 year	BA (Hons) Business Administration (top-up)
Degree with Foundation Year Level 4, 5 and 6, plus a "foundation" year	An undergraduate degree with an extra year of study at the beginning, to help you prepare to study at a higher level.	4 years	BSc (Hons) Psychology with Foundation Year BA Politics with Foundation Year
Higher National Certificate (HNC) Level 4	A work related qualification in a vocational subject, focusing on the skills and knowledge you need for a particular career.	1 year	HNC Computer Games Design
Higher National Diploma (HND) Level 4 and 5	A work related qualification in a vocational subject, focusing on the skills and knowledge you need for a particular career.	2 years	HND Business and Management
Higher Apprenticeship Level 4 and/or 5	A work-based qualification that allows you to gain a level 4 or 5 qualification while you work.	Varies by employer	Apprentice Software Developer (higher) Engineering Apprenticeship level 4
Degree Apprenticeship Level 4, 5 and 6	A work-based qualification that allows you to gain a bachelors degree (or equivalent) while you work.	Varies by employer (minimum 3 years)	Laboratory Scientist Degree Apprenticeship Police Officer Degree Apprenticeship

## Other types of qualification:

**Integrated Masters** – a qualification that generally takes four years to complete and allows you to go all the way to level 7 (most degrees finish after level 6) and study your subject to greater depth. These generally have higher entry requirements than 3-year degrees. Examples: MSci Biomedical Science, MEng Civil Engineering, MLit English.

### **Certificate of higher education and Diploma of higher education**

– the qualifications you receive if you finish after one year (CertHE) or two years (DipHE) of a degree. These are sometimes offered as standalone qualifications. Examples: CertHE Health Sciences, DipHE Marketing.

# How do I apply?



UCAS is the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and this is where you apply for undergraduate courses (like bachelors degrees, foundation degrees and HNDs).

## **UCAS Application Form**

Your UCAS application form is completed online, and has the following sections:

### **1. Register with UCAS**

When you register, you'll add your name and some other personal details like your date of birth. Make sure your name appears exactly as it is on your birth certificate or passport - so if you're Rebecca Smith, you shouldn't put Becky Smith, even if that's what you use most of the time.

### **2. Personal details**

Once you've signed in, you'll also be asked for an email address - we wouldn't recommend using your school/college one in case you lose access over the summer after you finish your exams.

### **3. Additional information**

This section is there to make sure that universities and colleges are doing their best to make sure that everyone, regardless of their personal circumstances, is able to access higher education. See the UCAS website for information about how this works.



#### 4. Student finance

Depending on your answers in personal details, you may be asked some additional questions about student finance in this section.

#### 5. Course choices

You can choose up to five courses, in no particular order. For some courses (e.g. Medicine) you might only be able to apply for 4 courses and one in a different subject - this is to make sure you've not got all of you have a back-up option.

#### 6. Education history

You must enter all of your qualifications from secondary school onwards - whether you have the results or not. You still have to include courses where you didn't get the grade you were hoping for (including ungraded!).

#### 7. Employment history

If you've had any paid jobs, you can enter the details here. Any voluntary work can be mentioned in your personal statement.

#### 8. Personal statement

This is your chance to show universities or colleges why you want to study the subject you've chosen, and why you'd be great at it. Start early if you can and get it checked over by different people - friends, family and teachers are a great place to start.

#### 9. View your details

Check them once, check them twice, and check them one more time! Make sure that everything is accurate and correct so you don't have to send any embarrassing emails correcting the spelling of your own name.

#### 10. Pay for your application, get a reference, and send it off!

Your reference should be from a teacher, advisor or professional person. If you're applying through school or college, it's likely to be your form tutor or one of your subject tutors, or perhaps a careers advisor. There are likely to be deadlines that need to be met for submission of applications - check with your school or college when these are.

#### What does *nominated* access mean?

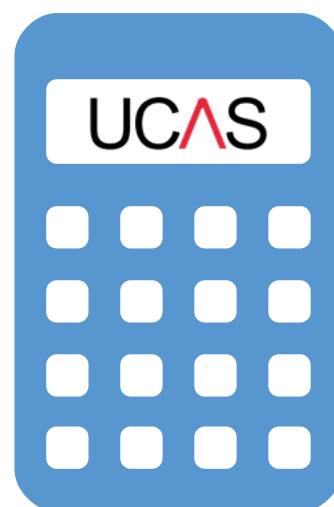
Nominated access means you can tell UCAS that they're allowed to speak to someone else about your application - if you don't nominate anyone, they will only discuss it with you. Bear in mind that this only applies to UCAS - the universities and colleges you've applied to won't be able to speak to anyone else.

## What are UCAS points?

UCAS points are given for **level 3 qualifications** like **A Levels** and **BTEC Nationals**. The higher your grade, the more points you get. When you're applying for courses, the entry requirements will either be listed as grades (e.g. AAB at A Level/DOD BTEC National) or UCAS points (**136 UCAS points**).

This shows you what you need to aim for to be accepted onto the course. Some courses may ask for a particular grade in a specific subject as an entry requirement. Some other qualifications, like music and drama exams, may also give you UCAS points. Take a look at the UCAS tariff points calculator, following the link below.

[www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator](http://www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator)



## Personal statement top tips!

- Give yourself plenty of time - don't leave it until the last minute and send something you're not happy with. Check out the deadlines on the UCAS website or with your school/college and plan ahead.
- You can only write one personal statement, but you're applying for up to 5 institutions - the University of Liverpool might not be thrilled if you've put "I want to study English at the University of Manchester" in your personal statement!
- Focus on the course you're applying for and why you'd be good at it - this should take up 75% of your personal statement. They want to know why you want to study it, be sure that you're really interested in it and that you've made an effort to make yourself ready to study it at a higher level.
- Don't be tempted to lie on your personal statement or copy anyone else's work - your application will be processed through a system that can tell if you've copied something and UCAS will inform universities and colleges of this.
- Make sure you don't fall into the same traps as everyone else! Thousands of applicants every year start their personal statement with "From a young age I have always been interested in" (or something similar) - be original and think of something interesting to say!

# UCAS process and timeline

January  
-  
February

Applicants decide what they want to study and where they would like to go, you should register with **UCAS.com** during year 12 or the first year of level 3 studies.

Summer is a great time to attend Open Days. They will continue throughout the year but make sure you allow enough time to go to those you are interested in before making final choices.

September  
-  
December

Schools/colleges usually set an internal deadline for all UCAS information, choices, and personal statements to be submitted by students. This is so they can support students with reading personal statements and providing additional advice and guidance and writing references for UCAS applications.

Make sure you use the correct 'buzzword' in your application so it links with your college or school.

You will need to check to see if the courses you wish to apply for have any other entry requirements e.g., SMAT/LNAT tests, portfolios etc and the deadlines for some courses will vary.

3<sup>rd</sup> October

Deadline for conservatoire music course applications. Check with the organisation regarding what will be required for your application as the process can differ from typical university applications

15<sup>th</sup> October

Deadline for applications to any course at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, and for most courses in medicine, veterinary medicine/science and dentistry.

Some courses have earlier deadlines. This is often true for Conservatoire subjects like Drama, Music and Dance. Check the university websites to be sure.

25<sup>th</sup> January

Deadline for most undergraduate courses to UCAS. Schools need time to check applications and write references – check your school/college internal deadline date. Applications made after this date will only be considered once those that have met the deadline have been processed. Some courses may close at the deadline.

## January onwards

Offers can arrive from the moment an application is received. You will need to choose one offer as your 'firm' choice and one as your 'insurance' option.

Universities will usually start to send information to the applicant immediately after their offer has been accepted at the 'firm' choice.

Once these are selected, any other offers are automatically declined.

## 25<sup>th</sup> February

UCAS Extra opens. Visit [www.UCAS.com](http://www.UCAS.com) for further information.

## February - June

The Student Finance application process can be started online from February and there is no need to wait for offers to start this process. There is a 'funding guarantee' deadline of late May. If the deadline is missed, financial support may not be in place by the start date of your course.

Apply online Student Finance England at [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)  
Students should apply for accommodation at their firm choice university.

## July

Clearing/Clearing Plus vacancies will be listed on [UCAS.com](http://UCAS.com) and are updated regularly by universities and colleges. If you don't find the courses you are looking for straight away, try again later. Clearing/Clearing Plus is available from July to September.

## August

Results Day – results are published via the school or college and offer outcomes are made on UCAS Track. Students who meet expected results must confirm their choice. Those that didn't may still be able to get an offer, or they can go into Clearing/Clearing Plus.

## September/ October

Courses start either towards the end of September or the beginning of October. Good Luck.

[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) for further information

\*Information correct at time of publishing February 2023.

## Your next steps

So now you know more about higher education, your options and how you are going to fund it – congratulations! Now it's time to put everything you've learnt in practice.

### Speak to an advisor

Speak to a teacher, tutor or advisor at your school or college about what you'd like to do and how you think is best to get there. They will be able to provide information and advice about the options you have, the best way to achieve your goals and what steps you can take to get closer to them.

### Look at courses

Go to **www.ucas.com** and search for subjects that you might be interested in – it'll give you a really good idea of what's out there and you can see which universities and colleges offer the courses you want to do. From there, you can look in more detail at what subjects are covered on which courses, what the entry requirements are and see if it's something you might want to apply for.

### Attend an open day – or as many as you can

It's important to get a feel for an institution and see if you can imagine yourself studying and living there. An open day is a great opportunity to meet students who are already at the institution, get to know some of the lecturers and tutors who could be teaching you and explore the different buildings and facilities that make up the university or college. You can find information about open days on the websites of different institutions – and if you can't make it there in person, see if they have any virtual open days that you can view online.

## Where to go for more information

- **DANCOP** ([www.teamdancop.co.uk](http://www.teamdancop.co.uk))
- **UCAS** ([www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com))
- **Which? University** ([www.university.which.co.uk](http://www.university.which.co.uk))
- **The Student Room** ([www.thestudentroom.co.uk](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk))
- **National Union of Students** ([www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk))
- **Not Going to Uni** ([www.notgoingtouni.co.uk](http://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk))
- **Amazing apprenticeships** ([www.amazingapprenticeships.com](http://www.amazingapprenticeships.com))
- **Student Finance England Student finance for undergraduates: Overview - GOV.UK** ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

# DANCOP Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Partnership

A partnership of universities and colleges from across the two counties, working together to support young people to consider their futures. We aim to inspire and inform learners about their options and provide targeted outreach activities. We work with learners, teachers, advisors, parents, and carers, to break down the barriers that might prevent young people from progressing to higher education.

