



University of Essex



# GUIDE TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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Your complete guide to  
understanding university

# UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR

(THE Awards 2018)

WE'RE RANKED  
**4TH** IN THE  
**UK**

FOR INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

(Times Higher Education  
World University Rankings 2021)

**TOP 30**

IN THE COMPLETE  
UNIVERSITY GUIDE (2021)

**7TH** FOR  
SPEND  
ON SERVICES AND  
FACILITIES PER STUDENT

(The Times and Sunday Times  
Good University Guide 2021)

OVER **140**  
SOCIETIES AND  
SPORTS TEAMS

**3** STUNNING  
CAMPUSES  
IN COLCHESTER, LOUGHTON  
AND SOUTHEND WITH  
EXCELLENT TRANSPORT  
LINKS TO LONDON

**GLOBAL  
COMMUNITY  
OF 16,000**  
OVER  
STUDENTS FROM OVER 130  
DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

# CONTENTS

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Welcome	<b>4</b>
Why Go to University?	<b>5</b>
Choosing a Course	<b>6</b>
Things to Consider	<b>7</b>
Choosing a University	<b>8</b>
Accommodation	<b>10</b>
Academic and Social Facilities	<b>11</b>
Student Finance	<b>13</b>
Open Days/Applicant Days	<b>14</b>
Like what you see? What's next...	<b>16</b>
University Terminology	<b>18</b>

# WELCOME

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**Welcome to your one stop shop for answers to all the most frequently asked questions about university and Higher Education.**

**This guide will take you through everything step-by-step and provide you with the information you need to know when looking at studying at university.**

**So sit back, relax and maybe put your feet up as we take you through the things to consider when thinking about Higher Education (HE)...**



# WHY GO TO UNIVERSITY?

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**Students who go to university can study subjects they enjoy. Most universities offer the opportunity to learn from and work with academics who are the leaders in their field of study and produce top quality research that has a national and international impact.**

- Some graduate jobs are obtainable with any degree – that’s right, any degree! So if you reach the end of your course and decide to follow a different career option than you originally planned you can apply for a graduate level position in another area.
- Entering at a graduate level means you can, on average, earn more across your working life as you can start at a higher level earlier. For example, on [graduate-jobs.com/gco/Booklet/graduate-salary-salaries.jsp](https://graduate-jobs.com/gco/Booklet/graduate-salary-salaries.jsp) the average UK graduate earns £21-25,000 (2020).

Students learn skills at university that transfer into employment, such as:

- Verbal and written communication skills
- Presentation and networking skills
- Organisational skills
- The ability to manage their time effectively; working to tight deadlines and under pressure

Higher Education is full of opportunities and new experiences that you won’t be able to find elsewhere. Such as the chance to study abroad, obtain one-to-one careers advice and meet people who may provide opportunities for employment at a later date.

University also teaches you useful life skills like washing, budgeting and cooking.

Universities are multicultural hubs, where you can meet and live with people from across the world. You can learn lots about other cultures, discover new languages and meet some fantastic people.

If you decide to live on campus at university you will be living independently, making your own decisions and making sure you meet all your essay deadlines. And if you decide to travel to university and live at home you won’t miss out on anything; it just requires a bit more time management to make the most out of the opportunities on campus.

“ I didn’t know how to cook when I went to University for the first time. Luckily for me two of my housemates were decent cooks and they took me under their wing and taught me different skills like how to make a roast. ”

# CHOOSING A COURSE

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**Whilst it's important to choose the right university, it's crucial to choose the right course for you. If you want a specific career – such as being an architect – you need to make sure you take the course which employers are looking for but which also matches how you learn.**

## **Don't judge a course by its title!**

For example, a Law degree at the University of Essex will have different content to a Law degree at a different university. Even though they both share the same course title the content will depend on the University's areas of research.

On average you will be studying at university between 3-6 years - depending on whether you are studying full time or part time and whether you choose to include a study abroad year or placement year.

Just because you are studying one subject doesn't mean you only have to choose modules from that course.

Some universities, like the University of Essex, will allow you to include a module from another subject area as one of your optional modules. But this is not always the case with all universities or courses so you should check with the university whether this is an option.

## **How many courses are there?**

There are over 50,000 courses to choose from in the UK alone. You're probably wondering how you go about making a choice from that many, so why not take a look at the UCAS website – [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)

The search tool will allow you to see every university course in the UK related to your subject. It even has links to individual websites so you can look into the detail of each course.

**If you are interested in courses at the University of Essex you can find them on:** [essex.ac.uk/subjects](https://essex.ac.uk/subjects)

## **What if I want to study abroad instead?**

If you are interested in studying at a university abroad you will need to look at the individual websites and contact the universities directly for information on how to apply.

It is worth remembering that the majority of UK universities offer study abroad options such as a term abroad or a year abroad – it will depend on the course you are studying and the university you are studying at as to whether this is an option.

## **Are there courses I won't have heard about?**

You can choose a familiar subject or something entirely new!

It is worth taking a look at the more unusual courses and those you may not have heard of before to see what is on offer. Prospectuses are a good place to start looking for these courses.

# THINGS TO CONSIDER

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## There are several things that you may want to consider when choosing a course or university.

### Entry Requirements

Universities usually ask for 5 GCSEs grade A\*-C/level 4 or 5 and above, including English and Maths. Whether you need a level 4 or 5 will depend on the university. Universities consider a wide range of different qualifications such as A levels/Level 3 BTECs/International Baccalaureate or international equivalents.

Universities may ask for specific grades in specific subjects for a course, and they may also ask for specific subject grades at GCSE level too.

Some universities may ask for UCAS tariff points without a subject or grade preference. Certain courses may also require a successful interview, portfolio, audition or work experience.

### Collect prospectuses/Research university websites

Take a look at a range of prospectuses if you attend any careers fairs. If you can't get a copy there then head online as prospectuses are on university websites or you can request a prospectus to be sent to you. Prospectuses don't just contain courses and entry requirements, they also tell you about the local town, student experiences and how to get there!

### Academic content

Look at the teaching methods and contact time – time spent with lecturers is usually between 8-30 hours per week depending on the course. The majority of your learning will be through independent study - about 20-30 hours a week if you want to graduate with a good degree.

Assessment methods also vary by modules - these include coursework, exams, group work or presentations. Some courses also involve field trips, interactive research, interviews and questionnaires as well as lots of reading.

### Reputation

When looking at university websites, have a look at their reputation. Remember that whilst there are good sources of information out there only you can decide whether a university or course is the right one for you. There are a number of sources you can explore for this:

The Times and the Guardian Good University Guides - not just for the university but for the subject as well. Just because a university is in the top 10 universities in the UK doesn't mean it is in the top 10 universities for your subject area. [theguardian.com/education/universityguide](http://theguardian.com/education/universityguide)

[thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/times-university-guide-and-league-tables/](http://thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/times-university-guide-and-league-tables/)

Teaching and Research Excellence Frameworks - these measure the teaching and research quality at universities on the national and international stage. [timeshighereducation.com/policy/teaching-excellence-framework-tef](http://timeshighereducation.com/policy/teaching-excellence-framework-tef)

Research Excellence Framework – this measures the quality of research that a university is providing on the national and international stage.

National Student Survey (NSS) – Each year every university student at an English university is asked for their feedback on their course, universities are then ranked accordingly for each area, including overall student satisfaction.

# CHOOSING A UNIVERSITY

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## Think about the following points when looking for a university that suits you

### What is the difference between a city university and a campus university?

A city university would be somewhere like Oxford or Cambridge where the lecture halls, library and student accommodation are located in different areas around the town/city so it takes a walk or bus ride to go between each facility, but it means you get a real flavour of the area.

A campus university on the other hand would be somewhere like the University of Essex where everything is in one place within walking distance of each other. Campus universities have a real community feel to them; you can even get your hair and nails done at our Colchester campus!

### Can I commute to university?

Think about whether you would like to be near home or commute, or whether you want to move far away? Really consider the location as it can affect how often you can visit home if you're a long distance away. It can also affect how long your journey home will be and how much it costs.

### How will I know which one is right for me?

The best way to see if you like a university is to go and visit, whether this is through an Open Day/ Applicant Day or a campus tour.

Alternatively you might consider attending a Taster Session or Summer School at a university you are interested in. This would be a great experience to add to your Personal Statement!

### Can I go to the same university as my friend?

Yes, you can apply to the same university as your friend, but it is worth bearing in mind that the university your friend goes to may not offer the course you want. Choosing the right course and university for you may mean going to a different university to your friend. The majority of people who go to university in their first year don't know anyone else there either so everyone is in the same boat and meeting each other for the first time. Whichever option you choose you will meet new friends in many different places like in your accommodation, in class and sometimes even when finding your way to the classroom!



# ACCOMMODATION

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## **Is university managed accommodation guaranteed in your first year?**

Some universities, such as the University of Essex, guarantee their first year students university-managed accommodation, but it's best to check with individual universities to see if this will apply to you and make note of any deadlines.

## **After your first year is there any help to find student accommodation off campus?**

Most universities offer some form of support in looking for private accommodation in your second and third year. Some universities are able to offer some university owned accommodation for both of these years, but it usually involves being put on a waiting list and is not usually guaranteed.

## **Do I have to share my room?**

The majority of university owned accommodation will have a bedroom for each individual student, but there are some accommodation choices where you can share a twin room - it's worth investigating.

## **What is the cost?**

That will depend on where your university is and the facilities you can access. London prices are usually higher, but you'll also need to consider whether the prices include all bills and Wi-Fi.

## **Will I have to share my bathroom/kitchen?**

There will usually be options for both en suite and shared bathroom facilities depending on the university. En suite rooms mean you have a toilet and shower to yourself, but this type of accommodation usually costs more.

If you are sharing bathroom facilities it is usually with the people on your floor/flat and is usually the cheapest form of accommodation.

Kitchens are usually shared areas and can be for between 2-20 students so it's worth going to an Open Day or Applicant Day and taking the opportunity to see the available accommodation. Shared facilities usually mean shared cooking (and therefore the bonus of shared shopping costs too!) and have a strong community vibe to them. It is worth bearing in mind this usually means shared cleaning duties too!

## **What if I have access requirements?**

Most universities will offer rooms with access for students who have mobility issues. It is worth contacting the universities to discuss your requirements and they will be able to advise you.

At the University of Essex we have ground floor flats and flats easily accessible by lifts which have en suite facilities and small kitchenettes in the room.

## **What if I want to live somewhere quiet?**

It is worth speaking to the individual universities about which of their university managed accommodation is located in the quietest area.

## **Do I need to bring everything with me – even cutlery?**

Yes. It is worth noting that some universities have the option for you to buy care packages for when you arrive at university, including things such as bedding and towels, or kitchen utensils.

# ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL FACILITIES

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**Take every opportunity to have a look at the facilities. Below are some areas to take note of or ask about:**

- Computing facilities and labs – How many computer labs are there? Are any of them open 24/7? What other digital facilities are there? For example film equipment hire and printing services.
- Art Galleries, Theatre and Cinema – Are they on campus? Can they provide workshops for students to take part in or run their own shows? Are there discounted rates?
- Talent Development Centres – They can provide one-to-one or group classes to develop your study skills in many different areas.
- Student Support – They can provide confidential advice, counselling, support and information for students. Can students access this support at any time of day whilst they are at university if they need to?
- Sports Centre/Gym – Are there discounted rates at nearby sports centres/gyms or is there a gym on campus?
- Health Care services – Do you need to register at a local GP and dentist, or are these services available at an onsite health centre?
- Multi-faith chaplaincies – Take a look at the support available and whether it is open 24/7 or at certain times of the day.
- Employability Centres – What careers support is offered? Are there workshops and careers fairs?
- Shops/cafes and restaurants – Look at the places to eat and ask current students what they think of the food or where the best places to eat/shop are.
- Nightlife and security – Does the campus have 24/7 security and first aiders that you can contact by phone? Is there a night bus that can get you home after a night out if you live close by for a discounted rate?
- Students' Union – The Students' Union is run by the students for the students and gives them a voice in the university. They also run the clubs, sports and societies on campus so it's worth asking what clubs they run. They usually run a Students' Union social facility where students can meet up and relax together outside of lectures.



# STUDENT FINANCE

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**Student loan information usually changes each year. We've only covered the basics, so it is important to do more research the year before you start university, which could include attending sessions run by your school, sixth form or college.**

The cost of university is split into two sections: the tuition fee which pays for the course, and the maintenance costs/living costs which might include your accommodation, food, course textbooks and other expenses. There are two types of loans available to UK students to help with these costs; a tuition fee loan and a maintenance loan.

You only fill in one student loan form for both the tuition fee loan and maintenance loan.

- The tuition fee loan is available for all UK students on a full-time undergraduate course which covers the full amount of the tuition fee no matter what your household income. The tuition fee loan is paid directly to the university after registration.
- Maintenance loans are available to all UK students to help towards living costs but the amount you can access depends on your household income, whether the university is in London or not and whether you will be living at home during your studies. If the amount of loan does not cover your living costs, you will be expected to provide the rest yourself.
- You are charged interest on what you've borrowed whilst you are studying and after you graduate. After graduation the interest rate depends on how much you earn.

- Repayments are based entirely on what you earn as an individual after you have graduated, not on how much you have borrowed.
- You apply through the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website 6-9 months before starting your course – there is a section for you as an applicant and a section for parents/carers.
- You must complete the form online by May to guarantee that you will receive the money at the beginning of the academic year.
- Care leavers can apply for Independent Student Status which means they should be able to access the loan based on their individual income.
- Student Loans do not factor into credit ratings. Students need to register at the university on their first day to start receiving payments.
- Universities offer financial support to students. However the amount offered, who they offer it to, and the form in which it comes is dependent on the university. The most common types of university funding are scholarships and bursaries. Bursaries are usually based on household income whereas scholarships are based on some form of excellence. If you'd like to take a look at the University of Essex's scholarships and bursaries then please see our website for further information – [essex.ac.uk/fees-and-funding](https://www.essex.ac.uk/fees-and-funding)

# OPEN DAYS/APPLICANT DAYS

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**Open Days are an opportunity for you and your families/friends to visit universities. You can find out more about its location, facilities, and speak to academics and current students.**

Applicant Days are something you might be invited to by the universities after you've made an application to them through UCAS. On an Applicant Day you get to find out more about the course to make sure it's the right fit for you. Some universities also include an interview as part of the day and this could be formal or informal.

Go to as many Open Days/Applicant Days as possible with parents/carers or friends to get another point of view.

Please ask as many questions as possible on an Open Day/Applicant Day. We're there to answer your questions and make sure you have all the information you need to make the right decision for you. We will do our best to provide an answer and if we're unable to help on the day we'll always point you in the right direction to find out.

If you're finding it hard to fit in an Open Day then why not contact the universities and see if you can book in a separate tour on a date that suits you? You usually won't have access to subject tasters or lecturers on a tour but you will be able to see around the campus, take a peek at the accommodation and speak with a current university student.

Here at the University of Essex we provide virtual tours of the campus for students that are unable to travel. We also provide an Applicant Day bursary to contribute towards the cost of travel to visit us.

It is worth checking with other universities as to whether they offer these too.

## University of Essex Open Days

We all know what an Open Day is right? Your chance to meet your department, look around campus, find out about student finance. You probably think an Essex Open Day is just the same. Of course, we'll show you the important stuff, but why stop there? You don't know open days until you've experienced an Essex Open Day.

## Want to find out when our Open Days are?

Why not visit our website at [essex.ac.uk/visit-us/open-days](https://essex.ac.uk/visit-us/open-days)

## Can't make an Open Day?

Don't worry - we offer campus tours so you can visit at a time that suits you. Please see our website for further information - [essex.ac.uk/visit-us/-tours](https://essex.ac.uk/visit-us/-tours)

## Need more information and advice?

Why not visit: [opendays.com](https://opendays.com)



# LIKE WHAT YOU SEE? WHAT'S NEXT...

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## Choose what to do and where to do it

UCAS allows applicants to choose up to five universities or courses before submitting their application. If you're still undecided in sixth form or college then why not check out our website for our Decision Making Guide which will give you top tips for finding a course and university.

[essex.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges/student-resources](https://www.essex.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges/student-resources)

## Applying during school, sixth form or college

- The first step is setting up a UCAS account, applicants then receive a personal ID or UCAS number which acts as the login and is an important reference number throughout the process.
- If applying through school or college you will receive a buzzword to attach to the application.
- Then you fill in personal details, education and employment history.
- Applicants write a personal statement and your sixth form/college provides a reference.
- Predicted grades are provided by the referring sixth form/college.
- You can apply for up to five choices – these can be a combination of universities and courses. UCAS charge a small fee based on the number of choices on your application.
- Application deadlines can be found on the UCAS website.

## Personal Statements

Students are required to write a personal statement with a strict limit of 4000 characters (including spaces) or 47 lines. Remember the personal statement applies to all the courses and universities you've applied to. Check out our Personal Statement Guide for more information.

[essex.ac.uk/undergraduate/applying-to-essex/personal-statement](https://www.essex.ac.uk/undergraduate/applying-to-essex/personal-statement)

## Offers

Some universities and courses require candidates to attend an interview and occasionally a test before an offer is made.

You will receive a response to your application from the universities:

- **Conditional Offer:** You need to meet the entry grade requirements to change your offer to unconditional on results day.
- **Unconditional Offer:** You have met the academic requirements.
- **Unsuccessful:** If you don't receive an offer from your selected universities you will get the chance to add a course, one at a time, through UCAS Extra. Further details can be found on the UCAS website.

If you are holding a conditional offer on results day and reach the grades required then the offer will be changed to unconditional on your UCAS account.

### Need more information and advice?

Additional Information can be found online.

[essex.ac.uk](https://www.essex.ac.uk)  
[ucas.com](https://www.ucas.com)

## When do I need to reply by?

Reply deadlines are listed on UCAS – [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)

## What happens if I didn't get the grades I wanted?

Hopefully you'll get the grades you want but if not, don't panic! There are many possibilities ahead. Firstly, you can check your UCAS 'Track' to see if you have a confirmed offer. Universities can still confirm a place, or offer a different course when entry requirements are not met. One possible course that might be offered is a Foundation year or Year Zero.

Year Zero or Foundation years are designed to develop your subject knowledge, academic and language skills. These courses then lead on to a Bachelors degree.

If you do find you haven't met the grades there are a lot of possibilities to consider, so head online and check out our Clearing pages where you can find out more information.

[essex.ac.uk/clearing](https://essex.ac.uk/clearing)

## What happens if I get better grades than expected?

If you have done better than expected you will have the chance to change your university choices. UCAS's 'Adjustment' process enables applicants who have exceeded the conditions of their offer to find a course at a different university. Hopefully you will have done the research beforehand and will have picked the university that's right for you, but there is the option of Adjustment if you should want it.

## Best wishes and good luck!

We hope this guide has helped answer your questions and inspired you to take a look at Higher Education. If there are still one or two questions that you'd like answered about the University of Essex then please take a look at our website – [essex.ac.uk](https://essex.ac.uk)

# UNIVERSITY TERMINOLOGY

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## I don't understand the language used to describe university and the courses. How will I know what all the terms mean?

Why not take a look below? We've covered the main terms we receive questions about:

### **BA – Bachelor of Arts**

These are usually courses based on Arts and Humanities subjects such as English Literature, Art History, Drama and Philosophy etc.

### **BSc – Bachelor of Science**

These are usually science or IT based courses that require some lab time, whether that is in a science lab or a computer one.

### **BEng – Bachelor of Engineering**

This covers all types of engineering degree.

### **LLB – Bachelor of Laws**

A law degree.

### **International Baccalaureate (I.B.)**

This is an A-level/BTEC Level 3 equivalent. A-levels are considered by all universities, most universities will accept BTEC or I.B. qualifications, but make sure you look at this before making your choice.

### **Universities and Colleges Application System (UCAS)**

If you want to study at university in the UK then you need to apply through UCAS. You can apply for up to 5 courses, 4 if you want to study medicine, veterinary science or dentistry. You then receive replies from the universities as to whether they will offer you a place and any conditions you need to meet to be accepted. Then you choose your firm and insurance choice from those you have received offers from.

### **UCAS Points**

Some universities will ask for grades, some will ask for UCAS points. Each grade you receive is worth a certain number of UCAS points, and you have to add together the points you have from your grades to meet, or exceed, the points requested by the university. Still not sure? Check out the UCAS website for further details.

## **Degree Apprenticeships**

There are increasingly more opportunities to apply for a degree apprenticeship where you will be earning money working for a company as an apprentice whilst also undertaking your degree at the same time. There is competition for these courses, but you are earning from the start and your degree is paid for you! Fitting in both working and studying requires commitment, excellent time management and organisational skills.

To find out about these opportunities you can either take a look at the UCAS website or head to the apprenticeships website.

## **Single honours**

This is a degree course where only one subject is studied in detail, such as Biological Sciences.

## **Joint honours**

This is a course where you study two subjects. If the course title has the word 'AND' in the middle it means that both subjects are equal in content. If it has the word 'WITH' then the first subject will have more content than the second.

For example: Politics and History, or Politics with History

## **Modules**

Each course is broken down into smaller sections called modules. There are core modules that you have to complete and then there are optional modules.

For example: BA Film Studies - Possible modules might include: Classical Hollywood, Sound in Film, Russian Cinema, Disney Films...etc.

## **Foundation Year/Year Zero**

If a student hasn't reached the entry requirements for undergraduate study for their course they may be offered a foundation programme which has modules where they can develop their subject knowledge and academic skills before embarking on their degree course. For example at the University of Essex we have Essex Pathways.

## **Sandwich courses**

These are courses that include a placement year or year abroad - which is usually after your second year of study - then you return to your university for the final year of study.

## **Undergraduate**

This is a student who is currently studying for their degree, which typically takes 3 years to complete.

## **Graduate**

A student who has finished their degree and passed.

## **Postgraduate**

A student who returns to university after their first degree to study at a higher level. A Masters Degree is usually the next step which typically takes a year to complete. After this a student can go on to study for a PhD which usually takes a further 3 years of study.

## **Dissertation**

A large-scale research project. An undergraduate course usually offers a dissertation module that takes up a large number of credits in your final year. Whether you have to do a dissertation will depend on the subject you study and the university.

