

Higher Education in the UK



Before university

Between the ages of 16-18, students choose to specialise in 3 or 4 subjects at A level based on the results of their GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) which are national exams in 8 or 9 subjects taken at the age of 16. Students take A levels if they want to go to university.



Applying to university

Applications open in September via an online application process called UCAS (University and Colleges Admission Service).

A student can apply to *any* university in the UK (not the university closest to their hometown) and will choose the best universities offering the course the student wants to study. Annual rankings help students choose the best universities for their future job prospects. (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-uk>).

There is a **selection process** for British universities: unlike the French system no student is guaranteed a place at university just for simply passing their A levels. Each university course in the UK sets its own entry requirements. Students can choose up to 5 universities and each university will study the student's application, and then make the student an individual **conditional offer**: for example, to study physics, the university will accept the student on a university course, provided the student attains certain grades at A level (2 A grades and 2 B grades: an A in Physics and Maths, and a B in Chemistry / Biology). The subjects the student chooses at A level are also taken into consideration and must be related to the university course.

An application through UCAS will consist of:

- Qualifications and expected A level results
- A personal statement
- A reference letter

Oxford and Cambridge – in a class of their own

Application to Oxford and Cambridge (known as Oxbridge) is different as you are required to take an admissions test (a written exam) and attend an interview.

Both Oxford and Cambridge universities are made up of individual colleges, as well as different subject departments. This is called the collegiate system. Personalised teaching (one-on-one tutorials) is the norm.

The standard A-level offer for Cambridge is A*A*A for sciences courses.

At university



Bachelor's degrees (an undergraduate degree programme) usually last 3 years (if there is a foundation course or year abroad for students studying languages, or a sandwich course with one year in the workplace, the course will last 4 years).

Bachelor of Science = BSc

Bachelor of Arts = BA

Bachelor of Engineering = B.Eng.

From 2017, universities in the UK can charge students from the UK and the EU up to £9,250 per year.

Students can expect to have between 15 and 25 hours of class-time a week.

A UK university education focuses in *depth* on one subject, as opposed to in *breadth* on a variety of subjects like in the US. While students can choose to study two subjects (called a "joint honours"), most will choose to study only one subject – for example, Biology.

In the UK, university grades are given on a percentage scale. Anything below 40% is a fail; 40-50% is a Third; 50-60% is a 2.2; 60-70% is a 2.1; and anything over 70% is a First.

Students who go on to study a Master's are called **postgraduates**. A postgraduate course costs in the region of £20,000 a year. Due to the financial expense, compared to France it is far rarer for students in the UK to go on and study a Master's

Student Life

As students generally apply to universities which are the best in their subject and so not in their hometown, students leave home for the first time. They generally all live in halls of residence in their first year and then in rented accommodation in houses with 4 or 5 housemates in the 2nd and 3rd year.

British universities have a large number of societies (clubs) which offer many different types of extra-curricular activities - like the Oxford and Cambridge debating societies or drama society.