The power to choose is yours: make the right choice and the possibilities are endless

GUIDE 2 UNI
Welcome to our young person’s guide to university, a sort of mini-prospectus to give you a taster of what university life is like.

We offer advice and information on a range of issues including:

- Choosing your options in Year 9
- Making choices about what to do after you finish your compulsory education
- What courses you can study in higher education and what careers these might lead to
- How to finance your studies and deal with debt
- What university life is like
- Qualifications and pathways into higher education
- How some of our current undergraduates made their journeys from school to university
- How our former students (alumni) – some of them famous – have made their journeys from university to where they are today

We encourage you to think a lot about yourself because that is where you really need to start – with who you are, what you’re like, what you’re good at and what you want to do in the future.

As you go through the guide, if there are words you don’t understand look them up in the jargon buster at the back.

Your teachers also have some additional fun quizzes that you can try.
Thinking about options
Choosing your options – the subjects you will be taking in Years 10 and 11 for your GCSEs or courses you will be taking in Years 12 and 13 – may be one of the biggest decisions you will have to make in your school life.

GCSE choices can be quite important for future university study. It is important to get a balance of subjects, as this gives you more choice later on when you have to decide on future careers.

Some university courses will ask for a specific number of GCSEs at specific grades; eg, some medical courses ask for five or more GCSEs at A* or equivalent. Some courses, eg, Economics or Accounting, may ask for a Grade A or B in Mathematics, if A level Maths is not being studied.

At sixth form, it is important to choose the right courses for your future higher education study and career. If you already have an idea what you want to do, make sure you check out what subjects particular university courses require. If you're not really sure yet what you'd like to do, try to keep your options open with the subjects you pick to study at sixth form or college. Certain subjects – like Maths, English, History, and Geography – are useful across lots of different university courses.

If you are in Year 9 or Year 11, it's a really important time for you. The decisions you make now could affect your future and what you will be doing over the next two years – so you need to think carefully and make the right choices.

What is a university?
A university is a place of higher education where you continue to learn after you have finished your secondary education, it has the authority to award degrees at Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate levels. The word is also used as a noun to describe the buildings and grounds occupied by the institution.

What is higher education?
Higher education is the term we give to the learning that takes place once you have finished your A levels or equivalent qualifications. A university is just one of the places you can go for higher education study; you can also go to a college or higher education in a college or further education where they offer higher education qualifications.

What should I think about first?
Think about:
- Yourself: know yourself as a person – your likes, dislikes, skills, aptitudes and attitudes
- What you want to do: further study, go to university, have a career or get a job and earn some money
- How you learn best: through exams, coursework or practical work
- The options available for you to take: the compulsory and optional ones as well as other opportunities other than GCSEs and A levels
- Specific GCSE requirements: those needed for any course at university, which you are already interested in
- Where to get help and advice: there may be people to help and guide you as well as printed and online resources that you will find useful

What is the difference between further education and higher education?
Further education is study in the sixth form at school or sixth form college where you take courses to further your education after taking your GCSEs. Higher education colleges and universities offer you the chance to study for higher-level qualifications such as degrees.

As a rule, you can think about this in terms of your approximate age as well; further education is something you might do post 16 – between the ages of 16 and 18; higher education is something you might do post 18 – after the age of 18 and after your further education studies.

University life
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In school your teaching is probably highly structured and well organised for you. When you study at university you make the transition from this structured approach to the independence and self-motivation that you will eventually need for your professional working life.

**Why should I go to university?**

You don’t have to go to university if you don’t want to but here are five reasons why you should consider it if you want more out of life.

1. **More choices and better chances** – It’s a fact of modern life that most employers want their new recruits to have a university degree; sometimes the subject of your degree matters and sometimes it doesn’t – it depends on the nature of the job. So having a degree gives you more career options and better chances in the jobs market.

2. **More money in your pocket** – Once you have your university qualification you are more likely to find that great job with the terrific salary, so you will have more money in your pocket. Don’t forget to pay back your student loan though!

3. **More freedom and independence** – Everyone needs to be able to look after themselves sooner or later and being at university gives you the skills to do just that, looking after your diet, health and fitness, money, relationships and general ability to cope with modern life. So there is some freedom here and you will become much more independent.

4. **More thinking and decision time** – Going to university will help you find out more about your chosen subject but equally, it will help you find out more about yourself and what you really want to do with your life, especially in terms of your career path. So going to university will give you three or four years in which to think and make better decisions.

5. **More social life, friendships and opportunities** – Most people make loads of new friends from all walks of life and from many different countries, and some of these friendships last a lifetime; you also get the chance to explore hobbies and interests you may never have dreamed of before. So this could be the best time of your life with opportunities not to be missed.

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**Teaching and learning**

In school your teaching is probably highly structured and well organised for you. When you study at university you make the transition from this structured approach to the independence and self-motivation that you will eventually need for your professional working life.

You will be expected to take responsibility for organising your own work, for working in groups, meeting deadlines and seeking help when you need it. You will need to manage your time so that you have a balance between your leisure activities and time spent in personal study. You will have to do lots of independent research using books and computer-based learning, the internet and original sources of material in the university’s library.

Don’t worry though; you will be guided by your tutors to work in teams on group projects, and to talk about your work and make more formal oral and written presentations.

**Teaching methods**

Teaching methods used might include:
- Formal lectures (about an hour in length)
- Smaller group seminars
- Practical classes
- Personal study in libraries or elsewhere
- Personal projects lasting from a couple of weeks to a term
- Group projects which can last a term or more
- Laboratory-based work
Our students have access to one of the UK’s largest academic libraries at the heart of our Edgbaston campus, containing over 2.5 million books and 3 million archives and manuscripts. A further ten libraries and resource centres cover every subject offered at the University, ensuring you have the opportunity to develop expertise in your chosen field.

All students have free access to email and the internet, with dedicated computer facilities on campus.

Library facilities

At Birmingham, you are expected to take a more active role in managing your learning, as most of your time will be spent undertaking different forms of research to help you discover solutions and answers for yourself. We call this ‘enquiry-based learning’. It develops skills sought after by graduate employers who value creativity and independence as well as leadership and problem solving. We will support you to become an enquiry-based learner and use a range of teaching methods to encourage you to develop your own ideas.

Active at Birmingham

As a student here you have a personal tutor, who will help you to monitor and reflect on your progress and provide help and advice with any study-related issues. You have regular meetings with your personal tutor in an informal and supportive environment. An additional range of support is available, from the welfare tutor based in your school or department, to members of the library academic liaison teams who can help you find what you need from our extensive libraries, archives and other information resources. Specialised learning support services are available for students with disabilities.

Learning support

Lectures and seminars

Lectures are intended to give you food for thought, and are an opportunity to listen to academic staff sharing their knowledge and discoveries with you. You are expected to build on this, carry out further reading around the subject and use your analytical skills to critically examine the information you are being given.

Seminars offer the opportunity for you to discuss your ideas in smaller groups and listen to other people’s opinions. Tutorials are carried out on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, and you can discuss your written work with your tutor.

Visit: www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/support
Where will I live?

Different universities will offer different types of accommodation: so where you live while you are a student will depend on many factors, including what the university has to offer and what you want.

What do you want?
- Do you want to live away from home?
- Do you want to live at home?
- Do you want to live on your own?
- Do you want to share a flat with one other person?
- Do you want to share a house with several people?
- Do you want to be in a hall of residence?
- Do you want to self cater?
- Do you want to be catered for?
- Do you want en suite facilities?

What the University of Birmingham has to offer:
- It is a campus university with accommodation on site
- It has halls of residence
- It has access to rented accommodation nearby
- It has accommodation available within travelling distance of the campus
- Some accommodation has en suite facilities

New kids on the block
As a first year undergraduate student, if you choose to live away from home, you are usually put into a hall of residence on or very near the campus; so you get to meet lots of people in the same situation as you.

Some halls are catered and some are self catered. The self-catered halls are obviously cheaper because you will be in charge of buying and cooking your own food. If you pay a little extra for a catered hall, your meals will be provided for you as part of the rent.

If you really don’t want to go into halls, most universities will help you find alternative housing in privately rented accommodation.

Accommodation at Birmingham
Our student villages (halls of residence) provide a secure and comfortable environment. There are student mentors at each site to help you settle in, as well as all the facilities you will need, such as launderettes, shops and cafés.

All study bedrooms have a telephone, which can be used to make internal calls to friends across campus, free of charge. To give you flexibility in the way you study, 100% of study bedrooms give unlimited access to the internet and University computer network.

With this in mind the University guarantees a place in University accommodation to all first-year undergraduate home and EU students.

The guarantee scheme is subject to conditions, however, which you will learn about if you apply.

Having your own space
Settling down to university life can be a challenging time, and it is important you have your own space where you feel safe and supported. We aim to provide you with the right accommodation where you can study, eat, sleep and socialise in informal surroundings.

Living at home
Some students may choose not to move into university accommodation due to cost or family commitments. Living at home and commuting to university is a good option if you live locally. It certainly doesn’t mean your student experience should be any different from that of students living in halls of residence. You will still have access to all the same academic, social and sporting facilities. The Freshers Off Campus Society (FocSoc), run by the Guild of Students, offers a tailor-made support service for students living at home in the local area. Like residence-based committees, it organises sports teams and social events such as cinema trips and club nights out.

Private sector housing
If you are not eligible for University accommodation under the guarantee scheme, or choose to live off campus, you may decide to share a house with other students. Accommodation Services at the University of Birmingham will help you find suitable accommodation in the private sector, from the wide choice of properties in the local area. We also operate a successful flat search scheme, which enables students to get in touch with one another before they arrive, allowing them the opportunity to rent houses as a group.

The campus
As Birmingham is a campus university, the campus itself becomes your own back yard. The campus has all the facilities of a busy town: bars, cafés, shops, banks, a hair salon, and its own railway station.

Help and advice
All University of Birmingham Villages have a site manager, assistant manager and site co-ordinators; so if you need to report that something needs repairing, require help or have a problem, there is always someone there to listen and lend a hand.
Most universities want you to make the most of your time with them; so what you do in your spare time is just as important as what you achieve during your lectures and seminars.

The best you can be
Your future employers aren’t just interested in your academic qualifications – they’ll be looking for a well-rounded and experienced person who can contribute in many positive ways to their organisations.

That is why the other really big features of university life are things that help you develop as a person, like sport, the numerous clubs and societies run by students, music and the arts, and the activities and events organised by the student unions.

Sporting life at Birmingham
As at many universities, sport is definitely a big part of life at Birmingham, from inter-varsity competitions (that means we compete against other universities) to taking part in sport just for fun or to keep fit.

We have a School of Sport and Exercise Sciences (SportsSci) for short) where you can study the subject in great detail, which works closely with University of Birmingham Sport (UBS). This means that we are pretty good in the sports arena. Our teams compete at a consistently high level in inter-varsity sports and UBS is recognised as a centre of excellence for a range of sports, especially hockey, badminton, squash, golf, rugby, netball and athletics.

Great facilities
Our high levels of achievement require excellent facilities and we have some great ones for you to enjoy, including:

- A 25-metre swimming pool
- Seven squash courts
- Grass pitches for rugby, football, cricket and other sports
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- Great outdoors

The great outdoors
Birmingham also has its own outdoor activities centre in an idyllic location on the shores of Coniston Water in the Lake District; any student can visit.

And that’s just a few of them!

If you can’t find a club or society that matches your interest, you can always get a few other like-minded people together and start one of your own!

Music, arts and entertainment
We continue to invest in music through a number of music scholarships open to promising musicians but we also have:

- Two symphony orchestras
- A Big Band
- A number of choirs
- A symphonic wind band
- A brass ensemble
- A chamber choir

We even have our own art gallery – the Rubicon Institute – which houses an important collection of major works of art, ranging from the 13th to the 20th century and paintings by artists such as Monet, Manet, Renoir, Degas, Rubens, Picasso and Turner.

Learn more

Sports
- American football
- Handball
- Surfing

Arts
- Dance, drama and theatre
- American dance
- Cheerleading
- A chamber choir

Science, technology and politics
- Community Action
- People and Planet
- Student Industrial Society

Get involved

The Guild of Students
Run by students for students, the Guild of Students is the hub of undergraduate student life.

The Guild at Birmingham was one of the first student unions in the country and its mission ‘to enhance the student experience’ is achieved through providing a wide range of activities and services.

Your first contact with the Guild is likely to be during Welcome Week – a week of activities to introduce new undergraduates to student life. The week is designed to make sure you take advantage of the discounts available to students, get to know the campus and the city, make friends, join clubs and get through the process of registering as a student as easily as possible.

The Guild’s Community Action Scheme (ComAc) gives you the chance to get involved in over 40 student-led community projects, such as working with homeless people and helping refugee children to develop their reading skills.

The ARC
The Guild’s Advice and Representation Centre (ARC) is another service run by students for students. Services range from advice on housing, student rights and the law, to individual support and campaigns on housing, finance, sexual health and study issues. Students are welcome to drop into the centre to chat about issues in a safe, relaxed environment.
Why? Because it’s fun being a student!

Here are 20 reasons why it really is fun to be a student and why going to university can truly be the best time of your life.

1. It’s not like going to school at all – it’s different and much better, especially your relationship with your teachers.
2. You have a really good reason to be away from home and no one tells you what to do, when to get in, when to go to bed and when to get up.
3. You really feel like a grown-up – an independent person with a life of your own.
4. You are studying subjects you love and are really interested in.
5. You have the option to study abroad for a whole year.
6. Lectures and seminars are fun and inspiring and you share them with people who like the same things that you do.
7. You make lots of new friends from all over the UK and abroad.
8. There’s always someone to talk to and go out with.
9. The social life is fantastic – there are so many things to do and see.
10. You can see for the first time what your future might be like – and it looks good.
11. You can learn lots of new skills that will help you throughout your whole life.
12. There are lots of people on hand to help you out personally and professionally.
14. You gain loads of confidence in yourself and your abilities.
15. You find out about all the careers that are now open to you.
16. You become part of a great community of people and really feel that you belong somewhere.
17. You are exposed to all kinds of exciting experiences and get the chance to do things you would never have done anywhere else.
18. Even after you finish your studies, your university stays a part of your life.
19. You may meet your future husband or wife!
20. You collect fantastic memories and good friends to last you a lifetime.

Don’t just take our word for it!

Laura, Bachelor of Commerce

‘The University has given me so much… you can learn new things, try new things, work on your personal and professional development outside the boundaries of your course and change yourself for the better.’

Stefan, Computer Science and Software Engineering

‘One of the best things … is the network you develop, the people with whom you come into contact and the ideas you can bounce around.’

Nicola, MEng Mechanical and Automotive Engineering

‘I have learned so much over the past few years, while gaining a great rapport with the lecturers and making friends that I will keep for life.’

Peter, BA in African Studies and Development

‘It’s great to be able to study something you’re passionate about.’

Nicola, MEng Mechanical and Automotive Engineering

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Peter, BA in African Studies and Development

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Peter, BA in African Studies and Development
Don't worry – not everyone knows what they want to do or finds a career straight away. If you take a general degree with a broader sweep, you will find that they cut across a range of professions and can often be a key way into a future job. They can last anything from a week to a year and are a good way of gaining experience during university holidays.

Careers and Employability Centre

At Birmingham, the Careers Network has a variety of services that will help you identify options, and develop and work towards your career goals. They can also help you prepare your CV (curriculum vitae) and find internships. Internships give you practical experience in a wide range of professions and can often be a key way into a future job. You can last anything from a week to a year and are a good way of gaining experience during university holidays.

Careers - What can I study and where can it lead?

There are so many subjects to study now in further and higher education and so many places it can lead that it can be confusing unless you know where to start – and where to start depends on whether or not you know what career you want to do.

I don't know what I want to do

That's okay – no problem:

- You need to talk to people who can help you, like your careers advisor at school/college or your Connexions advisor.
- With your advisors, put together a list of subjects you like and ones you are good at as well as noting your personal strengths and abilities (skills); then see what careers might be suitable for you.
- When you have found a career you might like, start looking at courses and qualifications: if you want to keep your options open, go for more general courses and qualifications that would suit several different career paths rather than very specific ones that only lead in anything from
- Find the right course for you and look at the entry requirements (list of subjects, grades and sometimes other criteria) you need to get.
- Keep it broad – don’t forget to look at vocational qualifications and apprenticeships or on-the-job training opportunities as well as degrees
- Aim to get those subjects and grades and start applying for the course you want at the place you want
- Start looking at ways to finance your study, too

I don't know what I want to do

That's great:

- Your study, too
- Get on the course or courses you want at your chosen institution.
- Tailor-made for certain professions, if that's what you want.
- Find the right course for you and look at the entry requirements (list of subjects, grades and sometimes other criteria) you need to get.
- Keep it broad – don’t forget to look at vocational qualifications and apprenticeships or on-the-job training opportunities as well as degrees
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Careers - Subjects, careers and qualifications

You might find that subjects are grouped differently at university from how you are used to seeing them at school. Individual universities may also group the subjects they offer in ways that are different from one another, which may be confusing but don’t let it worry you!

Here’s how we do it at Birmingham.

Arts and Law
- English, Drama and American & Canadian Studies (includes Film and Creative Writing, and Linguistics)
- History and Cultures (includes African Studies, Classics, Ancient History and Archaeology)
- Languages, Cultures, Art History and Music (including an optional year abroad in Music)
- Law (includes Criminology, and Law with Business or a Modern Language)
- Philosophy, Theology and Religion

www.birmingham.ac.uk/cal

Life and Environmental Sciences
- Biosciences (includes Biochemistry and Human Biology)
- Geography, Earth Sciences (Geology) and Environmental Sciences
- Psychology (includes Neurosciences)
- Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences (includes Physiotherapy)

www.birmingham.ac.uk/les

Medical and Dental Sciences
- The College of Medical and Dental Sciences offers a range of undergraduate programmes spanning:
  - Biomedical Sciences
  - Dentistry
  - Medicine
  - Nursing
  - Pharmacy

www.birmingham.ac.uk/mds

Social Sciences
- Business (includes Accounting, Finance, Economics and Marketing)
- Education (includes Initial Teacher Training)
- Government and Society (includes Political Science and Sociology)
- Policy, Politics and Economics (includes Social Policy and Social Work)

www.birmingham.ac.uk/socialsciences

Engineering and Physical Sciences
- Chemical Engineering
- Chemistry
- Civil Engineering
- Computer Science
- Electronic, Electrical and Systems Engineering
- Mathematics
- Mechanical Engineering
- Metallurgy and Materials
- Physics and Astronomy

www.birmingham.ac.uk/eps

There are many other areas within these subjects that you can study and you will find a complete list of the undergraduate courses on offer at the University of Birmingham at: www.birmingham.ac.uk/student/choose

But, as we’ve said before, you should also remember that 60–70% of graduates go on to find jobs that are not related to the degree they studied. Next we will try and show you how subjects link to careers.

Key factors

What you can study and where it can lead is not going to depend on a number of key factors:

- The subjects you like and are good at
- Your choice of career
- The qualifications you need to achieve it
There are some subjects that you have to study for GSCE, but after this it is for you to choose the ones you want to do. However, further study of English, Mathematics and Science can lead to a range of careers; some of which you may not have considered before.

**ENGLISH, MATHS AND SCIENCE: WHERE CAN THEY LEAD?***

If you love Maths, here are just some of the jobs you might consider:
- Accountant
- Banker
- Business manager
- Economist
- Financial consultant
- Statistician
- Tax inspector
- Teacher

**ENGLISH**

If you would like a career involving English here are some of the jobs you might consider:
- Actor
- Advertiser
- Archivist
- Broadcaster
- Curator
- Editor
- English teacher
- Journalist
- Librarian
- Proofreader
- Publisher
- Writer

English is such a broad subject that it has an application for almost any job because it involves written and spoken communication and most jobs have an element of these in them. So a degree in English could be extremely helpful.

**MATHEMATICS**

If you enjoy Science find out more about the following jobs:
- Biochemist
- Marine biologist
- Physiotherapist
- Psychologist
- Dentist
- Psychologist
- Dental hygienist
- Psychologist
- Dentist
- Doctor
- Earth scientist
- Engineers
- Environmental scientist
- Geologist

**SCIENCE**

If you enjoy Science find out more about the following jobs:
- Biochemist
- Biological
- Chemist
- Dental hygienist
- Dentist
- Doctor
- Earth scientist
- Engineer
- Environmental scientist
- Geologist
- Marine biologist
- Physiotherapist
- Psychologist
- Sport scientist
- Surgeon
- Teacher
- Vet
- Zoologist
It’s good to be able to choose the subjects you want to study and there are lots of them to choose from. You can do a degree in most of the optional subjects you will find on your school curriculum, too. You can study them on their own or with another subject. Here are just a few examples.

**Geography**

This is a huge subject and an extremely popular one at that because it is so varied and relevant to our world today. With a degree in Geography, you could go into any of the following professions:
- Cartography (map making)
- Climatology
- Environmental management
- Land management
- Social services
- Health services
- Law
- Planning
- Teaching
- Tourism
- Water management

**History**

History has always been a popular humanities subject and like Geography it has many potential areas of study from archaeology and ancient history to the present day. With a degree in History you could be any of the following:
- Archaeologist
- Archivist
- Curator (in a museum)
- Economist
- Historian
- Professor
- Researcher
- Teacher
- Writer/publisher
- Tourist guide or manager
- Heritage/historical site manager
- Writer/publisher

**Modern Foreign Languages**

Modern foreign languages are also incredibly popular and linguistic skills are very highly valued by employers. The entry requirements for many university courses often stipulate that you need at least a GCSE in a foreign language, but if it is your favourite subject and you are interested in Learning a level in several languages, then you might want to become one of the following:
- Civil servant
- Interpreter
- Linguist
- Financial advisor
- Foreign correspondent
- Language teacher
- Lawyer or solicitor (European law)
- Local government officer
- Public administrator
- Translator

**Computer and Information Technology**

The computer industry is not only one of the most popular but it is one of the fastest growing, with new technologies emerging all the time. If you are interested in IT, you could study degrees like:
- Computer engineering
- Computer/IT management
- Computer programmer
- Electronic or electrical engineer
- Graphic designer

**Additional Subjects**

To help you choose the best course for your interests and skills – and to find which subjects you are best suited to study and at what level, check out the UCAS website below. Here you will find some great advice and useful tips.

www.ucas.com

Happy hunting!
Many people worry about how much it will cost to go to university. However, help and assistance is available. The other good news is that you don’t have to pay your fees up front either.

Support, loans and awards

There are two types of loans to help new students cover the costs of university or college: tuition fee loans and living cost loans.

Tuition fee loans are available to help pay the cost of your tuition fees and contribute to the cost of your learning at university. They are paid directly to your university or college by the government.

Living cost loans – sometimes called maintenance loans – are available to full-time students to help pay for living costs, such as food, travel, and accommodation.

Disabled Students’ Allowances

Students who face extra costs as a result of a disability may be eligible for help from their local authority in the form of a Disabled Students’ Allowance.

Supporting yourself at Birmingham

Birmingham has both a bursary and scholarship scheme. There are also scholarships for studying particular subjects. For more information on all financial help available visit: www.birmingham.ac.uk/ugfunding

Money Matters

The University of Birmingham has a great website for you to visit to make sure that you have the right financial knowledge before coming to the University. Have some fun and play the Money Matters game where you can experience a virtual life as a first-year student at Birmingham.

Will you make the right financial choices?

Come and find out at: www.cashclever.bham.ac.uk
I have a disability: can I still come to university?
Yes you can and our Disability and Learning Support, and Counselling and Wellbeing services are there to give you a hand. They provide support for all disabled students at the University; support that meets your individual needs. Their aim is to help you to achieve your potential while you are studying. We have teams of people trained to help and offer support and advice: the Counselling and Wellbeing team (visit: www.as.bham.ac.uk/studentlife/counselling), and the Disability and Learning Support team (visit: www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/support).

I love both History and English and really don't know which one to study at university. What should I do?
It is important to make the right choices about what subject or subjects you want to study and what degree you want to take at university, especially if it is specifically linked to your chosen career. However, if you can't choose between two favourite subjects and you want to keep your career options open, apply to do a Joint Honours degree (see page 36) where you study two subjects for 50% of your time – or a Major–Minor degree where you study one subject for 70% of your time and the second subject for 30% of your time.

My family don't have very much money but still want me to go to university. Is there any financial help available for us?
The short answer is 'yes'. Financial support is available from the government and from universities to assist with paying your tuition fees and your living costs. Student loans can be used to pay for your fees and a maintenance loan is available to cover your living costs while you are studying. You only have to start repaying the loans once you are earning more than £21,000 a year. You could also get sponsorship, take a health-linked course with NHS funding, and get yourself some part-time work to help support yourself through your studies. See our finance section on pages 22–23 and visit our website at: www.birmingham.ac.uk/ugfunding.

I want to be an engineer but don't know which area of engineering to go for. How do I find out which area of engineering is best for me?
You should visit the University on undergraduate open days (visit: www.birmingham.ac.uk/opendays) so that you can meet staff and existing engineering students. You can ask questions, get advice and see which of the engineering disciplines really appeals to you. You can look at our undergraduate courses and masterclasses (visit: www.birmingham.ac.uk/masterclasses) to make sure that you have chosen the right engineering discipline for you – and we have a lot to choose from. You may also like to visit our engineering website: www.birmingham.ac.uk/eps.

>>>QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS>>>
I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life when I left school. Just over three years later, I had started work for Channel 4 and my TV career had begun. By taking a chance at uni, I met all sorts of people, experienced all sorts of things and was able to figure out what I most wanted from life. It’s a big commitment choosing what I most wanted from life.

My experience at uni also taught me so much about getting on with people from completely different backgrounds to me – being able to communicate with people with whom I have nothing in common – and also allowed me to re-assess to really work out what I wanted to do career-wise.

Ben Shephard

Living and studying in Birmingham beat lived up to my expectations in the excellent education that the University provided. The knowledge, enthusiasm and friendliness of the personalities in my time there was really infectious and made study a really enjoyable experience.

My education has no obvious link to my sporting career as it was a different subject area. However, it provides you with the important skills such as time management, goal setting and working towards deadlines. In addition, being self sufficient in your general life or career becomes a lot easier after spending three or more years getting through your studies.

Paul Manning

Bearing in mind it is over ten years since I left University you realise that getting where I am today hasn’t been an overnight success! A lot of dedication and focus on the goals in mind has allowed me to fulfil my ambitions; while the support of a well-funded and structured sport has undoubtedly made it easier for me to achieve so much.

I have really enjoyed the challenge of working with a team of riders aiming to perform to the best of our ability in major championships over the years.
Four of our former undergraduate students speak about how they made their journeys from school to university.

Bethany – English
Bethany graduated with a first-class degree in English and then chose to stay on at the University to study to become a primary school teacher. Bethany came from Baverstock Academy.

Participating in both the Academic Enrichment Programme (AEP) and the Access to Birmingham (A2B) scheme has made an enormous difference to my life. Without it I am uncertain that I would have applied to higher education, and now three years on I have a first-class degree from a Russell Group university. Furthermore, even if I had decided to apply to Birmingham, without the alternative offer of the A2B scheme I would not have met the standard entry requirements and therefore would have missed out on the incredible experience that the University of Birmingham has provided.

‘As the first generation in my family to attend college let alone university, AEP had a significant impact upon my future career aspirations. Before attending the AEP I was uncertain that a Russell Group university would be for students with no experience of higher education at all; however, the week residential soon made me realise that a redbrick university education was and should be accessible for students like me. I was apprehensive about spending a week away from home, but the mix of academic taster sessions and social activities made it one of the most enjoyable weeks I had spent prior to attending university.

‘While at University I was keen to get involved as a student ambassador to provide younger students with the inspirational role models I had experienced on both Open Days and the AEP. In this role I have worked on two further AEPs, where I have not only mentored applicants who have successfully secured places at the University, but who have gone on to become student ambassadors who I have had the pleasure to work alongside. This has been an extremely rewarding experience.’

Jodie – History
Jodie (a former President Kennedy School and Community College student) was on the Academic Enrichment Programme (AEP) and applied through Access to Birmingham (A2B) in 2008, successfully gaining a place to study History.

She then completed a Law Conversion course and has since gone on to qualify as a barrister. Jodie will shortly be commencing her Pupillage which is the final year of practical on-the-job training for barristers in London. Her focus as a barrister will be primarily on human rights, immigration and criminal defence.

Jodie was fortunate enough to receive a bursary award from the Human Rights Lawyers’ Association allowing her to spend three months working with capital defence attorneys in Texas, USA. Jodie was placed with the Texas Defender Service (TDS) in Austin via the London-based charity Amicus, and was sent out as a legal intern to work with attorneys representing vulnerable and poor clients facing the death penalty.

Shayan – Medicine
Shayan’s first contact with the University was back in 2004 when he attended the Year 10 Health summer school at Wheeles Lane Technology College. The week-long event opened my eyes to higher education, university life and to the world of medicine. Talks from the admissions tutor at the medical school and practical sessions put on by current students inspired me to apply to such a challenging course.

In college I applied for the Academic Enrichment Programme (AEP). The week-long residential introduced me to students currently studying medicine, one of which was to become my mentor for the following year. I gained further experience of university life and made friends with people that helped me along the way at college and with whom I’m still in touch to this day. It was also at this summer school I heard about the Access to Birmingham (A2B) Scheme and scholarship fund that was available to students with a background like mine. I didn’t realise how useful this scheme would be for the following five years of study at Birmingham, one I am so grateful for.

In my first year I became a student ambassador for the University. I got involved with both the Year 10 and AEP summer residential programmes, as I had first-hand experience of what a difference these programmes make and wanted to continue inspiring students to come and study. I have mentored many AEP students over the five years I have done the programme, many of whom are now studying medicine here at Birmingham.

In my fourth year, I applied to study for an intercalated degree at Imperial College London. I graduated in July 2013 with a degree in Medical Sciences for Infection and Immunity. Without my initial experience of university life and having the chance to apply to Birmingham, I would not have had the opportunity to apply for a second degree at another prestigious institution.

Gary – International Relations and Political Science
Originally from Cadbury College in Birmingham and a former A2B applicant, Gary graduated in International Relations and Political Science and was President of the University’s Guild of Students during his time here.

Gary strongly believes that everyone has the right to fulfil their potential through education and that the student’s voice should be heard. He succeeded in doubling the resources spent on student representation while at the Guild and enjoyed being involved in shaping student life at Birmingham.

He chose to stay on at the University, becoming a postgraduate student, taking a part-time Masters degree in Local Government. He also began working in Training and Development for the National Union of Students as the West Midlands Area Convenor, helping local colleges set up and develop their own student unions.

Gary’s university experience helped him develop the confidence and skills needed to work in an area that really motivates him.

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CAREERS AND JOBS

Careers and educational opportunities in the UK and worldwide
Target is a great site for young people. It gives information and advice about careers, gap years and educational opportunities at home and abroad. Visit https://targetjobs.co.uk/ for more information.

UK UNIVERSITIES, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

UK universities and colleges
To search for courses at UK universities and colleges go to: www.ucas.com

Active map of UK universities and higher education institutions
The University of Wolverhampton has developed a UK active map of universities and HE institutions (visit: www.lkc.wlv.ac.uk/ukmap) – here you can click inside the map on the name of the institution you want to find out about (or in the right-hand panel) and you will be transferred to your chosen university website.

Complete University Guide
For information on all UK universities and advice on which university to choose visit: www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk

COURSES AND CAREERS

Leaving school, college or university? Plotr is a free service for young people who are about to leave school, college or university. The site provides detailed university and college opportunities together with careers advice, job vacancies and vocational guidance.
Play the plotr game to find a career you’ll love: www.plotr.co.uk/game

BEING A STUDENT IN BIRMINGHAM

If you want to know what it’s like to be a student in Birmingham, visit www.visitbirmingham.com or if you want to find out more about being a Virtual University Channel (www.youtube.com/unibirmingham) to find lots of information and great videos. You can also join us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/unibirmingham) and Twitter (twitter.com/unibirmingham).

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Useful information
The Directgov public service website (http://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk) has some really useful information for young people about their education, training and careers.

DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR UNIVERSITY

Skills4uni
If you have extended projects and assignments to do, visit: www.skills4uni.bham.ac.uk
Here you will find interactive activities, videos and resources, which help you through a project and also help you to develop the independent learning skills you will need for university study.

USEFUL INFORMATION

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EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Useful information
The Directgov public service website (http://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk) has some really useful information for young people about their education, training and careers.
wondered what all those words, initials and acronyms mean, who don’t. Higher education is full of jargon; so, if you’ve ever in a certain profession that can be very confusing for people Jargon is a type of shorthand language used by people who work in a certain profession. A level – Advanced level qualification you usually take after doing your GCSEs and offered in a whole range of subjects; you will need two or three (sometimes more) A levels to get into a university.

Access schemes – some universities encourage young people from their local areas – who normally wouldn’t attend their institution – to think about

Admissions – the admissions office of a university or college handle your application and enrolment into the place; so that’s who you need to ask for when you phone up to talk about getting in.

Admissions tutor – a person, such as a lecturer, who decides whether or not you will be offered a place at the university/college you have chosen; there is usually an admissions tutor for every subject or course.

AS level – stands for ‘Advanced Supplementary’ level and is a qualification you can take at the end of the first year of your A level course; so the AS level is equal to one half of an A level.

Bachelor degree – the degree most students go for first; it takes three or four years to complete and can be taken in lots of subject areas such as arts (BA), music (BMus), science and technology (BSc), education (BEd), engineering (BEng), and law (LLB); when your degree is awarded you can put the letters after your name, for example – John Smith BSc.

BTEC – stands for the Business and Technical Education Council, the body that validates the BTEC qualifications (Award, Diploma and Certificate); the BTEC qualifications prepare you for work or for higher education.

Bursary – this is money you might be given as an award, grant or scholarship if you have the right qualifications and experience to qualify for it.

Campus university – a university where everything you need is on one site, including all the buildings used for teaching, administration, facilities and living accommodation: Birmingham is a campus university; in fact it has two – one in Edgbaston and one in Selly Oak.

City & Guilds – nationally recognised qualifications in vocational (work-based) and skills training but these are not generally used to meet university entrance requirements, so you need to check whether the university you want to attend accepts them or not.

Clearing – this is about putting the right person in the right place at the right time; it is a system operated by UCAS in August each year that matches students who have not yet been placed – or have not met the terms of their offer, to a suitable university (or other institution) and degree programme.

Core modules – these are modules that are compulsory, so you can’t opt out of them; you just have to grin and bear it and accept that you really need to know this stuff!

Civic university – one of the universities established in the 19th and early 20th centuries in major industrial areas and big cities – and basically meaning ‘of the city and its people’; Birmingham is one of them.

Degree – a higher education qualification usually taken after doing a A levels or equivalent and split into undergraduate or first (Bachelor) degrees, and postgraduate or second (Masters and Doctorates) degrees.

Department – most universities divide their subject areas into departments so students belong to the department that teaches their course; some universities have colleges, schools or faculties instead – some even have a combination of these, but you’ll soon get used to it.

DipHE – Diploma in Higher Education; a qualification approximately equivalent to two years of a three-year degree; often available in vocational (work-based) subjects like Nursing.

Dissertation – every student’s favourite piece of work, a dissertation is a long (10,000-word) essay that contributes to the final mark or grade awarded for your degree.

Doctorate – taken after your first degree, this is any research degree (PhD, DPhil), that allows you to use the title ‘Doctor’ before your name, or the letters PhD after it; some people prefer to use PhD after their name to avoid being mistaken for a medical doctor!

Diploma – a qualification for students between the ages of 14 and 19 that offer a mix of classroom learning, creative thinking and hands-on experience. It can be studied at foundation, higher and advanced level. See www.gov.uk/courses-qualifications

GCSEs – General Certificate of Secondary Education, the exam at which you’re assessed to decide whether or not you will be offered a place at the university you want to attend. It can be taken at 14 and 19, and something equivalent like Vocational Qualification, BTEC Diplomas or O Levels.

Grants – can be, and most often are, automatically linked to your education expenses: so you don’t need to apply for them.

Halls of residence – these are a kind of accommodation for students at universities, well, they used to be; these days it’s a bit more sophisticated; there are student houses, shared accommodation and student villages.

Interview – this is where a member of the admissions team (they do exist, you know!) will ask you questions to assess your suitability to attend the university.

Jargon buster – A-Z jargon buster

Mistakes – don’t worry, all students make mistakes, it’s all part of the training process. Sometimes you just have to think of them as learning experiences.

Personal statement – this is a short essay or short answer application form you complete when you apply to university: it is a chance to show the university why they should offer you a place.

Postgraduate – this refers to the degree you take straight after completing your first degree.

Two plus two equals four. Higher education is full of jargon: who doesn’t. Higher education is full of jargon; so, if you’ve ever wondered what all those words, initials and acronyms mean, here’s your chance to find out with our A-Z jargon buster.

A-Z Jargon Buster

A

B

C

D

www.gov.uk/courses-qualifications

www.gov.uk/courses-qualifications

www.gov.uk/courses-qualifications

www.gov.uk/courses-qualifications
Enquiry-based learning – this puts you right at the centre of your own learning, so instead of sitting quietly and listening to someone tell you what you need to know, you are encouraged to be active and go and find out for yourself – this way you become an independent learner and a great detective!

Foundation course – a one-year full-time course that prepares you for entry to a degree programme in a particular subject; you usually take this when you don’t quite have the right qualifications or experience to start the full-length degree programme straight away.

Fresher – a student in their first year at university/college is called a ‘fresher’ because they are new and fresh.

Fresher’s Week – sometimes called ‘intro week’ or ‘welcome week’ as well, this is the first week of your first term of your first year at university and is packed with fun events and entertainments organised to help you settle in, make new friends and find out everything you need to know about your chosen university and its students’ union.

Further Education (FE) – this comes after secondary education when you have taken your GCSEs; you need further education qualifications before you can go on to higher education.

Further Education college – an educational institution you can go to after you finish your secondary school education that offers academic and vocational (work-based) courses; some offer degrees validated (checked and approved) by a university.

Gap year – this is when you decide to take a year off after finishing school or college before going to university; you might spend the time getting work experience, earning money, travelling or doing something else you really want to do.

Graduate – this is the name you are called when you have successfully completed your degree; for a few months before that time you are a ‘graduand’.

Graduation – usually refers to the ceremony where you are officially given your awards, but it can also mean the successful completion of a degree, so you graduate.

Honours degree – most Bachelor degrees are honours degrees, but a degree may be awarded with or without honours depending on how well you do in your final assessment; the classification of honours degrees are First-Class, Upper Second-Class, Lower Second-Class and Third-Class, but if you don’t achieve enough marks to achieve any of these, you are awarded an Ordinary degree instead.

HNC (Higher National Certificate) – this is a vocational course roughly equal to two or three A levels.

HND (Higher National Diploma) – a vocational course approximately equal to the first two years of a three-year Bachelor degree.

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HND (Higher National Diploma) – a vocational course approximately equal to the first two years of a three-year Bachelor degree.

Guild of Students – the union of students at Birmingham is the Guild of Students, sometimes just called ‘The Guild’, which is also the name of its building; as the first purpose-built students’ union in the country, Birmingham’s Guild of Students is the centre of University life; their main aim is to help students have a better experience while at Birmingham by offering a wide range of activities, services, societies and social events.

HEI (Higher Education Institution) – an educational establishment that offers academic and vocational courses and qualifications; some offer degrees validated by a partner university.
Independent learning – this is about learning how to learn for yourself rather than relying on someone else to tell you what you need to know.

International Baccalaureate (IB) – this is an exam, roughly equivalent to A levels, taken at the end of secondary education; the two-year International Baccalaureate is recognised as an acceptable qualification by universities around the world.

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) – English test for those who do not have English as a first language; it is managed by the British Council and partner organisations and is one of the most widely accepted qualifications by British universities.

Internship – a fixed period of time spent in an industry finding out more and helping with specific projects for anything from a week to a year.

ITE – stands for Initial Education and Training and is a step you need to take if you want to become a qualified school teacher. You can take the Postgraduate Diploma in Secondary Education (PGCE), or the Postgraduate Diploma in Primary Education (PGCE Advanced). Study is usually for one year, full time.

Joint Honours – a type of first (Bachelor) degree where you study two subjects, say English and History, in equal depth; you would study English for 50% of your time and History for the other 50% and your degree would be a BA in English and History.

KS – stands for Key Stage; after Key Stage 4 you go on to post-16 education.

Lecture – an educational talk given by a member of teaching staff to a group of students, usually a much bigger group than you are used to at school.

Lecturer – apart from being someone who gives a lecture, a lecturer is a well-qualified person, perhaps even a specialist in their particular subject.

Live in – living on campus, for example in a hall of residence.

Live out – living off campus, for example in a private house, or rented flat.

Masters degrees – once you have completed your first undergraduate Bachelor’s degree, you can choose to do a second postgraduate degree qualification and this is known as a Masters; so you can have a Masters qualification in the arts (MA) business (MBA), engineering (MEng), science (MSc), philosophy (MPhil) and law (LLM); however, in some subjects you can also take a Masters qualification while you are an undergraduate – the MSci in Maths and Physics, for example.

Mature student – older than most other students (above the age of 21 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or above 20 in Scotland) and have probably not come straight from school; some mature students are very mature indeed and might be in their 40s or 50s when they take their degrees.

MFL – this stands for Modern Foreign Languages and is a popular subject at many universities; it might include the study of French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Chinese and Japanese.

Modern universities – these are higher education institutions that have been granted university status since 1992.

Module – a short course taken as part of some degree programmes; some are compulsory (you have to do them) and some are optional (you can choose to do them); a programme that is made up of a number of separate short courses where you are given a mark or grade for each module is called modular.
N

New universities – these are any of the universities established in the 1990s, the term is also used to describe former polytechnics and colleges of higher education that were given university status in 1992, or colleges that have achieved university status since then.

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification; qualifications that are work-related and cover the skills and knowledge needed to do a particular job.

O

Old universities – these are our oldest higher education institutions, like Oxford and Cambridge, established between the 13th and 15th centuries and historically linked to the Church.

Open days – when higher education institutions open their doors to those who want to attend in the future; it’s a great opportunity to be shown around the university or other education institution and meet some of the staff and existing students.

Osborne – the collective (or unit) name for the two oldest universities in the country, Oxford and Cambridge.

P

Personal development planning – this is a means by which you can record, monitor, build and reflect upon your educational, personal and career development; it can now be done online, too: at Birmingham we have an electronic facility called Progress which enables you to do this.

Personal tutor – a personal tutor is there to help you and is responsible for looking after your personal wellbeing as well as your academic progress while in higher education.

Plagiarism – this is where you copy someone else’s work and pretend it’s yours; it’s a sort of cheating or stealing when you pretend it’s yours; it’s a sort of

Professor – a very senior tutor with expertise and experience in a certain subject who may be the head of a department, often carrying out important national and international research work.

Prospectus – a printed and online brochure (a bit like a catalogue) produced by a university or college advertising their institution (especially its facilities and life in the local area) and courses (degrees and other programmes) to encourage students to apply.

R

Reading list – a list of books and other material (for example, journal articles, articles on the internet) that you are expected to read in preparation for your degree course or programme.

Refectory – a posh name for a university or college cafeteria, restaurant or dining room where anyone can go for refreshments.

Reference – usually a written statement (although it can in some circumstances be given over the phone) prepared by a person who knows you, such as a teacher or employer, about your abilities and character; this person is known as a ‘referee’ and they will receive enquiries about your academic and other achievements and sell hopefully any nice things about you as a person.
Research-led university – research-led universities, like Birmingham, are those where a very high proportion of staff and students (usually postgraduates) are engaged in research of some kind with some projects being of international stature.

Russell Group – this is an association of 24 major research-led UK universities formed in 1994 with the aim of promoting the interests of these universities where teaching and learning take place within a culture of research excellence; they then share new thinking and ideas with one another – Birmingham is a member.

Sandwich course – nothing to do with bread and fillings, although the principle is the same as the sandwich you eat; it is a four-year course that involves 12-months work experience as well as academic study – so the study is the bread and the work experience is the filling.

Scholarship – money awarded to students with high academic achievement to help support their education.

Self-catering/self-catered halls – halls of residence where students have to prepare their own meals.

Semester – this is another word (American usage) for ‘Term’ and is used to describe those terms that are about 15-weeks long rather than the shorter 8–11 week ones; some universities have two semesters and some have three terms.

Seminar – another form of teaching at university, overseen by a lecturer in which smaller groups of students discuss and work on particular subjects together; it is less formal than a lecture.

Single honours – a type of undergraduate first degree awarded for study in one main subject, such as Law or Medicine.

Sponsor – a person or organisation that accepts the responsibility for all or part of your student fees or expenses.

Student societies – groups where you can get together with like-minded fellow students and have fun doing something you enjoy, such as archery, hang gliding or chess.

Students’ Union (SU) – most universities and colleges have a students’ union and you automatically become a member when you begin your higher education studies; these unions organise and offer a range of helpful services and represent all students at their particular establishment – it is also the name of the building where the student’s union is housed: SU – the abbreviation for Students’ Union, also sometimes abbreviated in reverse as ‘US’ – Union of Students.

Summer school – courses and lectures held at a university during the summer vacation; they are also held to give school pupils a taster of what life might be like at university.

T

Tariff – the list of points you score for each of your further education qualifications, so that with the right number of points you can get into your chosen university to do a particular degree programme.

Term – the academic year in universities is normally split into three terms of between eight and twelve weeks long, with a long vacation (about three months) in the summer. (See also Semester)

Thesis – a dissertation (a very long essay) containing the results of an original piece of research to support a particular argument, usually written by a student for their degree.

Transcript – a detailed list of classes or courses a student has taken at college or university, with marks or grades for each subject.

Tutor – an academic who supervises the work of individual students (tutees); so a tutee is a student whose work and/or wellbeing is supervised by a particular tutor.

Tutorial – another university teaching tool where a small group of students meet a tutor to talk about their studies; some tutorials may be offered on a one-to-one basis.

U

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, the organisation that handles most university applications; students fill out an online UCAS form; UCAS then forward it to the universities the student wants to apply to – it also oversees the process to check that no student finds themselves with more than one place and it does try to match students with vacancies as efficiently as possible.

Undergraduate – sometimes called ‘undergrad’ for short, a student doing their first degree.

University – an educational establishment for higher education that has been awarded university status by Parliamentary Statute and which grants academic degrees at all levels, in a variety of subjects;
Vocational course – any course that is intended to train and prepare you for a particular career or job; they often involve practical work experiences, or doing projects similar to what goes on in the workplace; a vocational qualification therefore, is specific to the world of work rather than academic study.

Year abroad – a year abroad can be one of the most exciting parts of some degrees offered by universities; it means that you spend one year of your programme studying at a university in another country; it is especially good if you want to develop your languages skills or if you want to work abroad when you have finished your studies – but not all programmes offer a year abroad.