

Choosing the right course for you

Choosing the right course is an essential step in ensuring that your study years are memorable, but making that decision isn't easy. Before you fill in your application, research the course to ensure it's right for you and ask yourself a few questions.

What qualifications are there / where should I start?

There's a confusing array of creative courses. Understand your drive for training - do you want to learn for your own satisfaction or to get work in the industry?

The level of qualification you are looking for will depend on your previous qualifications, relevant experience and career aims. Look at our factsheet 'Qualification Levels Explained' to find out about the different types of qualification available. Talk to careers advisors, professional organisations and people you know already working in that field. Understand what skills you need to develop and match them to the qualifications you research.

Further Education Colleges can provide courses at introductory level right through to degree level and short industry related courses.

Universities and Higher Education Colleges can provide pre-degree courses, right through to PhD level. They can also offer short industry related courses and taster courses.

Other training providers offer a variety of accredited qualifications and could include private training providers, distance learning organisations (such as Open University and Learn direct) and adult education providers.

What subject should I study?

Firstly choose a course that interests you, as you're more likely to get good results. It needs to be something that excites and motivates you.

Understand your skills and interests - list them out and compare the areas covered by each course. Consider other subjects areas within the course that may interest you in the future and look out for opportunities to cross-over to other subject areas.

The subject area you choose will depend on your career goals. Be careful to research each course as many courses with similar titles cover very different subject matter – make sure you understand what is on offer. You could ask the following questions:

- What is the course content? Ask for course details to understand what modules you will cover and what choices you will have to make about specialism within the course.
- How do they teach the course (tutors or research, level of contact time, student/tutor ratio)?
- Who are the tutors (Industry and teaching professionals)?
- How will I be assessed (Exams or course work)?
- What industry links do they have (Tutors, work placement, industry speakers and visits, industry accreditation)?
- How much is taught in theory and how much is practice-based work?
- What do students from this course go on to do?
- Are there opportunities to work collaboratively with other students and courses?

Should I visit the institution?

This is essential as you should be inspired by your surroundings and need to get a feel for what it is like to study there. Go armed with a number of things to find out, and then you'll be able to compare different institutions:

- Talk to students and tutors to find out what it is really like to study there.
- Find out what support services are available, such as careers and employability, library, IT support, Student Union etc.
- Check if there are any clubs or societies that may interest you and enhance your qualification.
- What facilities are available to students on the course?
- What equipment do they use - is it industry standard, how do students access it, how much time will you have using it?
- What is the studio or learning environment like?

How do I get on a course?

Firstly check out websites, read prospectuses and request further information. Speak to Admissions services and tutors and attend open days.

Check the entry requirements for each course to make sure you have studied the right subjects and are likely to get the necessary grades.

Many courses offered by colleges and training providers ask for applications to be made direct - contact the college or training provider for their deadlines and requirements.

Most degree subjects are applied for via the UCAS system and you need to ensure you are familiar with the process and deadlines – take a look www.ucas.ac.uk . Most careers advisers should be able to assist in understanding what is required.

Admission tutors are looking for people with the intellectual ability and motivation to succeed on their courses, so make sure you show them how committed and enthusiastic you are in your application and portfolio.

Where should I study?

Choose somewhere that offers the right course for you – don't choose a university because of its prestige, choose it because the course content is right for you and the industry links are good. Be wary of choosing somewhere just to be with your friends - what is right for them may not be right for you. Just because your local college is close doesn't mean it provides the best course for you, so keep an open mind.

Also consider the following:

- Do I want to live at home or away? How long does it take to get there?
- What accommodation is available and what's the cost?
- Will I feel comfortable in the surrounding environment?
- What other course costs are there?
- Do I need to work locally and what work can I expect to find?
- What finance is available to me -will the college provide additional support (Learner Grants, Bursaries)?

Remember, this is a personal choice that can impact on your future so spend some time now to get it right. You should find that the benefits impact on you personally and professionally.