

Why go to university

Audio transcript

Slide 1: Introduction

Hi. My name is Nicky Rogers, and I work at UWE Bristol, as a careers adviser in the Widening Access team. Welcome to this session focusing on how Higher Education can benefit you, which is one of a variety of resources on the UWE Bristol website on different topics about planning for your future and applying to university, which you can check out as well.

Slide 2: what does HE mean to you?

University can mean different things to different people. It's important to think what you would want to get out of it. That will influence your choices of both what you study and where you go to study it.

Slide 3 Webinar focus

Looking at the key information is important when making decisions and so we will explore data about higher education. We will look at the wide-ranging benefits of higher education and consider how they can vary from person to person, and start to think about their relevance and significance to you. And we will also signpost you to useful websites to get you exploring information about higher education for yourself, so that you can consider what is right for you.

Slide 5: Features for studying for a degree

You're currently used to studying for A levels or BTECs. So how will university be different to this? What will it be like? What do you actually do when you are studying for a degree? You might know about the variety in courses at university, but how do you study for one? Doing a subject that you will like is important as your learning will be in depth, going into detail. You'll be developing your analytical and critical thinking skills. Nothing will be taken at face value. You will engage with current affairs in your subject area and beyond, and continue to form your own opinions, ideas and solutions. You will be encouraged to challenge, to think deeply. You'll develop all the skills that employers really value.

You'll research topics by looking at the literature, and what academics and reports say on your topic will be really key. Maybe the academics at your university will be involved in pioneering/world-class research. Professional training may be relevant if you are on a vocational degree, for example nursing, medicine or teaching. You'll need to be certain that you want to enter that particular area of work. Work experience can help you test this out, and of course it may be an entry requirement for the course. Many courses are accredited too by the relevant professional body linked to their subject, as is the case in HR, engineering and psychology, which allows you to train or practise in that field. In other cases, degrees may be semi vocational. Learning about an industry, such as forensic science, childhood studies, marketing or law, can help you to specialise in an area as well as keeping options open about a range of occupations. It's worth finding out whether these subjects lead to the careers you're interested in.

Slide 6: Reasons to go to university – survey

This survey of UK students' reasons for going to university highlights the top motivations, which might resonate with the thoughts you had the start of the session, but also some questionable influences on students' choice, shown in the circles. So make sure you're aware of your own motivations and why. Trying to work out what's really important to you will help you consider the right courses, universities, locations and so on. It is important to be self-reflective here, to work out what you truly want and what is important to you. Let's look at two of the main reasons often given: for the student experience and because of subject choice.

Slide 7: The student experience

People often say 'I'm going for the experience' but this is a general concept. What does it specifically mean to you? What specific experience do you want to get? Is it one or a mixture of the following factors?

The experience may enable you to make lifelong friends at university, try out new experiences, develop a new passion or hobby, widen your perspective on life, develop in confidence and maturity. One thing that is true to say is that you will get out of it what you put into it. So taking advantage of the huge array of opportunities available whilst you are at university is a good place to start.

Slide 8: A blended learning experience

Since the pandemic, many unis have moved to a blended learning model combining face-to-face teaching with the option of online learning.

The positives have been that students are finding that the new blended model gives them more access to academics than previously and more control over when they learn so they can create a timetable that fits around their other responsibilities.

It is worth noting that blended learning is naturally increasing students' digital skills. This can help in the future as 82% of advertised jobs require some level of digital skills.

Slide 9: Subject choice

There is much to consider when think about subject choice, as there are over 30,000 courses listed on UCAS. How will you choose just five?

There's more to this decision than 'I am taking maths because I like it'. It's important to ask why. Why else do you want to do this subject? What do you love about this subject? Ask yourself these actual questions, especially, 'are you fascinated and curious about this subject?' This is key as you will really need to be motivated to take the time needed for independent learning, and dive deeper for information required

for your assignments. You really need to be curious about your subject to sustain motivation to study it over two to three years of your course. So that you come away with the grade that you feel matches what you can achieve.

Slide 10: Some Careers require a degree

Some careers require a degree. The ones shown here are 'graduate only' career choices, some of which require a specific named degree in that subject

If you are interested in these particular jobs, then you will *have to* get a degree; although some degree apprenticeships may be available, they can be hard to come by and going to uni will be the quickest and most straightforward way to get the qualifications for entry.

Slide 11: Wide range of graduate career paths available.

As we've seen, many graduates need their degree to get their first job. It's definitely possible for graduates who come from the same degree to go into different jobs. However, on your screen you'll see a number of graduate destinations where the graduates went into careers related to their degree.

These examples show higher skilled roles, and you can see a clear progression where the graduate has been able to apply skills and knowledge from their studies to the workplace.

Slide 12: Graduates from any subject wanted

There are many careers, employers and jobs at a professional or degree level that employ graduates from any subject area into professional and managerial level jobs in a range of different sectors. They offer graduate training schemes where they train you over a few years and sometimes offer professional qualifications. They are all looking for transferable skills which could be developed from studying any subject and having a full university experience. They will offer training and support to give you the job specific skills they need.

This means you really do not need to know what you want to do for a career when you start university. Lots of people may start with an idea but find that through study and expanding their horizons their ideas change with time. So the direction you can go in after university can be really flexible.

Slides 13–16: Skills development through HE

So how does this work?

Let's consider the range of activities an average student might get involved with at university whilst they are studying as it's not all just lectures and reading in the library.

Students will attend lecture, seminars, online group debates, deliver presentations, all of which support communication skills and will require them to work flexibly and use initiative.

They will be complete work which is assessed via exam, report writing, reflective writing, portfolio, dissertation and essays. All of which will require critical thinking, analysis, choice and use of data, problem solving and research.

Industry experience including field trips, guest lectures, working on a live business brief develops commercial awareness.

We gain skills in most tasks we do, this can include sports, taking part in a club like writing for the university magazine or being a course rep feeding back the ideas of your peers. Think about how this can support leadership, teamwork and negotiation skills.

So, your qualification opens doors, but it is truly the skills and qualities that you can evidence from your time studying that will get you in through the open doors! Again, it is a case of the more you put in the more you get out.

Slide 17: Graduate employment prospects

One of the sectors that has been least affected by the covid pandemic has been the graduate job market, partly because having a degree gives greater flexibility over how you work, including the ability to work from home. The chart shows the median salary, ie the midpoint of all salaries from low to high in each section; stats show that the average starting salary for graduates last year was just under £25,000, and that they are currently experiencing the highest rate of earnings growth in some years.

Slide 18: The cost of higher education

Another common concern of going to university is the cost. We can't deny that university is expensive, with tuition fees of £9,250 per year. Remember that you don't start repaying loans until you earn over £25,000 per year. It's estimated that a majority of students won't pay the loan back in full and any outstanding amount is written off after 40 years. And remember, if you have a break from work to have a family or you're unwell and can't work, or if your income drops, you simply stop making the repayments. With living cost loans, the amount you get depends on your household income. There are sources of funds you can access. Scholarships are non-repayable and often given by the university or another organisation. They are often awarded for excellence, which could be academic, sporting or musical or other factors such as parents' jobs, or where you live. Bursaries are also non repayable and given by universities. It can vary a lot from financial support with fees or accommodation to cash gifts.

Slide 19: Part-time jobs

Placements in between years two and three often pay a wage which enables students to save and use the money in their final year reducing the need to work. Currently 8 out of 10 students have a part-time job, which could be in term time or the holiday time or both.

Slide 20: Blackbullion

Money-Ready for uni has a bunch of useful tools to help you wrap your head around applying for university, and understanding the financial side of it.

Slide 21: Jobs of the future

We can't say exactly what new/emerging jobs are around the corner but you could think about the possibilities by looking around at new developments, such as driverless cars and new health technologies. Studying for a degree can:

- Allow you to learn from academics and researchers who are leaders in their field / doing new / ground-breaking research
- Work with cutting edge technology and in high class facilities
- Help you develop a higher level of skills and knowledge

All of which can potentially help you to prepare and position yourself successfully for the new jobs of the future.

Slide 22: What will influence your decision?

Should I go to university? It's a very personal question that only you can answer.

Now is the time to be self-reflective and start thinking about what you could do to think about what is influencing your decision.

Slide 23: Useful sources of information

You can see some logos on the screen now for some really good resources you can use to help with research and making choices. Don't forget though, that the most detailed information about a course will always be on the university course pages online.

The first point of call is UCAS as it has the most accurate listing of all courses. You can search using entry requirements, location, does it offer a sandwich year option, type of degree.

Prospects has hundreds of graduate job profiles, as well as advice on what you can do with a specific degree. It gives examples of skills, employers and graduate destinations for those who studied the subjects. So, if you are interested in a subject but don't know where it can take you, this page will help.

If you need an ideas generator you can use the SACU website where you can answer questions about your likes and interests to receive a list of 'good match' courses to explore.

Slide 24: Next steps

So, what next?

- Assess the pros and cons of all the many opportunities that are open to you - If you have a career in mind find out if you need a degree.
- Research courses, higher education providers, look at UCAS Apply, get a sense of student life, look into the finance you'll need, what the entry requirements are and the grades you'll need.
- Research some alternatives and make an action plan.
- Most importantly start exploring now as you may change your mind and remember research takes time.

Many thanks for listening and good luck in the future.