

Choosing the right course

Your academic, personal, and professional destiny can be influenced by the course you decide to study. You may have an exact course in mind, but it is also in your best interests to explore other potential and similar options. Sometimes limiting your options can hinder the experiences you can have! Here are a few crucial things to think about while you are pondering what course to apply for...

Field of study

What are you passionate about? Consider your strengths, weaknesses, career aspirations, and subjects you enjoy.

Career goals

- Does the program align with your long-term goals? Do you think this specific course will help you achieve your dreams?
- Research how graduates of the program succeed in the field.

Program ranking

Research the university's ranking in your chosen field, not just overall (UCAS and the university websites are a good place to start), and try to attend any open days that the university offers; see what other students on the course say!

Course requirements

- What grades and levels of experience are required for a place on your chosen course?
- Consider your current grades and what you've achieved up to this point.
- What qualification pathways have you taken? GCSEs? A-Levels? BTEC?

Research the curriculum

What does the course involve? Will you be required to take part in any activities, field trips etc., which may prove more difficult? Speak to the university to see what help can be given.

Offers

When you have applied for your course, depending on your grades, or where you are currently in your journey, you may receive a conditional offer (an offer that is subject to certain conditions being met before the offer can be accepted), or an unconditional offer (a guaranteed place on a course at a university).



Alternative routes to university

If you don't have the grades, don't worry, there are other options:

Access to Higher Education (HE) Diplomas

Often referred to as CAVA (from the awarding body), these courses are ideal for students aged 19+ who don't have A-levels or equivalent qualifications.

- Tailored to specific subject areas (e.g. healthcare, social sciences, science, business)
- Usually takes one year (full-time) or two years (part-time)
- Delivered by colleges and some adult education centres
- Accepted by most UK universities
- Offers support for students with disabilities or learning needs

Funding note: You can apply for an Advanced Learner Loan, and if you later complete a university course, the loan is written off.

BTECs & NVQs

Vocational qualifications like:

- BTEC Nationals (Level 3)
- NVQ Level 3
- T Levels

These are accepted by many universities for practical or career-based courses (e.g. animal care, IT, health & social care). They often include coursework over exams, which can suit those with health or sensory needs.

Online learning platforms & Open University

Some universities accept Open University credits, and you can build these up at your own pace.

- Suitable if full-time college attendance is difficult due to health
- You can start studying from home while preparing for full university entry
- Offers disability support and often flexible deadlines

Foundation Years at university

Many universities offer foundation year programmes (sometimes called "Year 0") for students:

- Without traditional qualifications
- Who are returning to education
- Who need extra preparation before a degree

These are built into a four-year degree and give you a supported start.

Functional Skills & GCSE equivalents

If GCSEs weren't accessible to you, consider:

- Functional Skills Level 2 in English and Maths
- Adult GCSE re-take programmes at local colleges with exam accommodations
- Online providers with adapted assessment formats

These are accepted by many universities in place of standard GCSEs, especially for entry into foundation courses.

Accredited Experience (APEL or RPL)

If you've done relevant work experience, volunteering, or informal study (e.g. caring roles, community work), some universities offer:

- Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- This route is more flexible but may depend on the institution.

Support for disabled students on these pathways

- Colleges and training centres must provide reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.
- You can apply for DSA when entering university, and some colleges offer early needs assessments too.
- Speak to the Course Advisor or Disability Officer at your chosen college or provider before enrolling.