

Truths and Myths about University

You have to do A levels to go to university

FALSE

There are many qualifications that allow for entry into higher education – A levels, Key Skills, BTEC National Diplomas, Advanced Apprenticeships and Access courses. Some courses ask for GCSE qualifications in Maths and English Language but sometimes Science and Languages. Check online and in the course prospectus for the specific requirements, as each course in each university and college will be different. If you're not sure whether your exam courses are appropriate you can ring up or email the course admissions tutor and ask.

A full time course means being at university from 9am to 5pm 5 days a week

FALSE

Some courses have very full timetables. Practical subjects with lab work, and Teacher Training courses tend to have the largest amount of contact (direct teaching) time. Many other courses will expect students to do most of the work independently in their own time. As a guide you might expect to be in university three or four days a week and for each hour of contact time there would be about three hours of independent study.

Everyone who goes to university lives away from home

FALSE

Some students choose a course at a university away from their homes. It may be that a particular course is only available at that university or that they want to get to know a new city, town or part of the country. Living in halls of residence can provide an opportunity to become immersed in student life or some students want the added independence of living away from home while studying. An increasing number of students attend universities and colleges that are close enough to allow them to remain at home. This means they can stay in the area that they know, they have the support of their family, it is usually cheaper to live at home, they might have a part-time job that they want to keep, their friends may all be staying locally, they may help to look after the younger or older members of the family. Some students start off living at home and move into shared houses later in the course, others spend the first year in halls and then move back home or into a shared house with friends. N.B. Part-time jobs with many national retailers can often be transferred between home and university town.

Many universities employ students in part-time jobs while they are studying

TRUE

Most students combine study and work in some way, either during term time, at weekends and/or in the holidays. Universities and colleges often employ students to work in their enquiries offices, in the catering and grounds departments, as note takers for students with disabilities or in occasional work as guides at Open Days, etc. Universities and colleges that have a policy of employing students are usually understanding about the demands of exams and assessments at certain times of year.

You have to pay for your university course before you go or while you are studying

FALSE

Eligible fulltime undergraduate students don't have to pay fees before they start university or while they are studying (although they can if they want to). Instead, eligible students will be able to apply for a Student Loan for Fees to cover these costs. This means that they won't have to worry about finding the money before they start their course or whilst they are studying, and the fees will be paid directly to their university or college. Students only have to start repaying the loan once they have left university and are earning over £25,716 and if they haven't managed to pay back their loan 30 years after they have finished their course, then they will stop having to pay it back.

You don't have to pay your student loan back until you have started working and earning over a certain amount

TRUE

You do not begin repaying your student loan until the April after you finish your course and you only start paying it back if you are earning more than £25,716 per year. At £28,800 per year, you would repay £23 per month and at £30,000 it would be £32 per month. These deductions would usually be made automatically through the tax system and any outstanding balance will be written off after 30 years. Information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan/what-you-pay>

All higher education courses last for 3 years

FALSE

Many degrees last for 3 years but there are many others that don't. Foundation degrees, which tend to be work based or work related, are 2 year courses. Sandwich degrees are usually 4 years, but students usually earn during that year which helps fund their final year.

A personal tutor will check that you are doing your homework every week

FALSE

Some universities, colleges, and courses allocate a personal tutor to each student, but others offer a range of people, the lecturers for each subject, the senior tutor responsible for the degree programme, postgraduate students. None of these people will check to see you are doing your homework every week – they trust you to be responsible for yourself. You will be given deadlines to meet, presentations to give, reports to write and you are expected to meet those commitments in order to pass your course.

There is no one to turn to if you find it difficult to cope

FALSE

There are whole ranges of support networks. The Student Union has dedicated welfare teams with expertise in finance, academic support and accommodation. There are counselling services that offer confidential advice and support. Often there is a chaplaincy service that will provide pastoral as well as religious support to members of all, or no faiths. The departments will have tutors responsible for the progress of students and they can often help with both academic and nonacademic difficulties. There will be senior members of staff in the university whose responsibility is for students' welfare.

You have to be rich to go to university

FALSE

Like for most things, it would help! But it isn't necessary. There are higher education students who are single parents, retired grandmothers, 18 year olds straight from school, long term unemployed, people who have taken a year out, people who have worked and are returning to education, people who have worked and want to change their careers, some people combine work and study. Remember, you don't have to pay your fees straight away or whilst you are studying you can apply for a full loan and wait until you are earning before you start to pay the money back. Most people will work at some time during their study. Most people will have student loans or debts to pay off when they finish and many people will be entitled to some kind of financial help in the form of scholarships and bursaries.

There is no point in going into higher education when you could be gaining work experience during those three years

FALSE

There are so many different reasons why higher education is a good idea. Whatever your dream job, your chances can be improved if you have a higher education qualification. Graduates over their lifetime will earn 25% more than someone with A-levels (*Source: Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP, 2006, in Universities UK, Research Report, The Economic Benefits of a Degree*).

Only practical courses like Business Studies or Law help you get a job

FALSE

For some careers there are obvious degree choices – medicine, music, etc. But even something like Law is open to a graduate no matter what they have studied. Any graduate can go into Law by taking a one year conversion course. Again, if you look at the job adverts many will specify that you need a degree but don't mind what it is in. If you have a career path in mind, do some research and you may find the requirements are more flexible than you think. All degrees will give you transferable skills that employers are looking for and that will help you land a great job when you graduate. All universities offer comprehensive careers advice and support; they have excellent links with employers of graduates and provide constructive advice on the applications process as well as helping to develop any additional skills required.

If you find you have chosen the wrong course you can always change to any other subject

FALSE

While at most universities it is possible to change courses in the early weeks of the first year you have to fulfil the entry requirements of the new course, and there has to be spaces available. If the course is a modular one (built up in sections each of which is worth a certain number of credits) it may even be possible to change to a different university. Certainly modular degrees offer the flexibility to tailor the options you choose to reflect the way your interests develop throughout your degree. Even here though, there are likely to be a core of compulsory subjects and then a range of options. It is sometimes possible to change from a single subject degree to a joint honours degree later in the course, but again, you will need to make sure you have the entry requirements and have taken any required units of work.

All graduates earn the same so it doesn't matter which degree subject you take

FALSE

The subject of the degree matters a great deal in terms of earnings. For example, on average, across their career, those with education degrees earn around 15% more than arts graduates. Female law graduates earn around 24% more than female arts graduates. Men with accountancy degrees earn in excess of 40% more than the average arts graduate. Men with electrical engineering degrees earn 40% more than male arts graduates during their career. Male psychology graduates earn on average nearly 20% more than male arts graduates during their career (*Source: Sloane P J and O'Leary N C, 2004, The Return to a University Education in Great Britain*).

You get no financial help when you go to university

FALSE

If you're starting a full-time higher education course, the main types of financial help you may be able to get are:

- a Tuition Fee Loan to cover your fees in full (up to 9,250 for 2019-20)
- a bursary from your university or college
- a Maintenance Loan, up to £8,944 if you live away from home, more if you study in London

Source: www.direct.gov.uk

Useful sources of information:

www.bestcourse4me.co.uk

UCAS Website: www.ucas.ac.uk

Hot Courses Website: www.hotcourses.com

Aimhigher National Website www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Careers office / Connexions: www.connexionscd.org.uk

Student Finance Calculator: www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk