

# Is Higher Education for You?

More and more people are entering Higher Education and at every age and stage of life. You may feel apprehensive about embarking on university study, particularly if you have been away from education for some time. The guidelines here are intended to help you to evaluate whether you are ready to take the next step towards Higher Education and, if you do take that step, what this experience may mean in practical terms.

Here are some basic **questions** and **answers**, to give you more idea about whether Higher Education may be for you:

**Q Do you have the qualifications to do a degree?**

**A** These days there are a number of entry routes to Higher Education. You do not necessarily need A-levels. The previous experience that you have will be valued, and mature students (21 and over) can apply without formal qualifications. Look at prospectuses for universities in your local library or college. Speak to the admissions officer at the university to find out whether you are ready to apply.

**Q How much help will you get?**

**A** Studying at university is different from other types of education in that you will be expected to work much more independently. There will be support, but quite a lot of the time you will be doing work on your own in the library or at home. This will bring its own rewards as you gain confidence in your independent learning and enjoy the flexibility of making your own choices about the direction of your research. Many of the skills that you will need are ones that you may have developed through working and organising home life so don't underestimate yourself.

**Q What can I do if I need to develop these skills before applying to Higher Education?**

**A** Your local Further Education College offers 'Access' and other courses, such as a Foundation Year, that will prepare you for all aspects of university. You may decide that you just need to enrol on a course to give you some background to the subject area that interests you, or to develop a specific skill, such as computing for example.

**Q What subject will you choose?**

**A** You might choose a subject that follows on from a course that you have been doing, but you might choose a subject that is new to you. You can often combine more than one subject and keep your options open. If you have a particular career in mind you should check which subjects will be appropriate. Examine prospectuses carefully to get a good idea of what subjects and combinations are on offer and what they will involve. Speak to a Careers Officer or College Admissions Advisor about this. On Access courses you will be able to try out three or four subjects before picking a Higher Education Course.

**Q Why go to University?**

**A** You will have your own reasons, but you can include the following as good ones:

- To make good friends.
- To get a good degree.
- To get a different job.
- To develop creativity.
- To develop new interests.
- To do something for yourself.
- To develop new skills.
- To have lots of fun.
- To improve career prospects.
- To work with others.
- To develop confidence.
- To think differently.
- To try out new things.
- To enjoy learning.



# Preparing for University and Organising Your Studies

## WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU AND HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR TIME

Use this section to acquaint yourself with the demands of university life before you go, and to prepare in your pre-university time.

### CONTACT HOURS AND TIME COMMITMENT

Before you can think about what your life is going to be like when you are at university, you need to have a very clear idea about just how much of your time is going to have to be spent in class, researching and writing assignments. You can then assess how much time will be left over for you to squeeze the rest of your life into and how much co-operation you will need from your friends and family!



Different subject areas and different universities require students to be available for varying amounts of 'contact time' (the time when you are in face to face contact with the tutor). It is very important that you ask an advisor at the university (someone in 'Admissions' or 'Registry', or the relevant academic department) to let you have the timetable for your course/s as soon as possible. Although universities may not circulate this information until near the start of the course, they generally have it available much much earlier (in the Spring of the preceding year) and can supply it on demand.

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### Contact Time

As a rough guide, your contact time **might** look like this:

**Two semesters** (similar to 'terms') of approximately 16 weeks. Of these 16 weeks will be contact time with taught classes. (The other four will usually be a 'reading week' and time for assessments.) The 16 week semesters will run from the end of September to the beginning of December, and from the end of January to the beginning of May.

### OR

**Three terms** of approximately 10 weeks. Like school terms, but beginning later and ending earlier.

In each week full-time students may expect 4 or 5 classes, each of approximately 3 - 5 hours duration. This may be split between an hour-long lecture and a 1½ hour seminar. This will vary according to the subject you are studying as courses in nursing, teaching and science for example require greater time in class, commitment for practical work and longer terms to account for work placement.

So, your contact time (when you must be in college) may, for example, be 12 - 16 hours a week for 2 blocks of 12 weeks if you are a full-time student on a humanities course, but may well be more than this.

### STUDY TIME

In addition to the time when you are required to be in a class, you will need time on 'campus' to research in the library, complete set reading, to talk with your fellow students, to use the computers and to relax! The amount of time needed for your own personal study will increase when you are approaching assignment deadlines. You will find that there will be periods when you are working intensively on assignments and everything else may have to go by the board.

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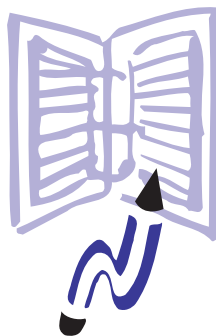
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#### DEADLINES

You will be given assignment deadlines, usually at the beginning of each separate course or module. These dates do not mean that you should leave all work until they arrive. It is common for assignment deadlines for different courses you are studying to fall in the same week – usually mid-way through the semester/term and at the end – and you will not be able to work on them all at once. You will find that universities are **not** flexible about deadlines. This is because of the large volume of work to be marked by tutors and because of the need to have work marked, a sample double marked, and a sample marked by an external examiner prior to 'Exam Boards' which happen at fixed times. You will need to recognise this fact about university deadlines and plan your work accordingly. Of course, in exceptional circumstances, where something untoward happens to prevent you handing in work on time, there will be formal mechanisms for arranging extensions. In this event, you will probably be required to produce evidence, for example a doctor's certificate, so bear this in mind. The university will have printed regulations about how to apply for extensions which you should study just in case.



- For further advice see section 8: 'FURTHER HELP'.

### WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU AND HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR TIME

#### TIME MANAGEMENT

##### How will you manage to get the assignments done?

There are some simple things which you can do to lessen the panic of running out of time for assignments.

- First of all, you should use a year planner to mark all the actual deadline dates for the semester/term. (If you are attending a course now, e.g., Access, Foundation, A-levels, start working on your time management.)
- Next you should mark all of your personal commitments that you know will prevent you from working on assignments, e.g., family birthdays, weekends away, commitments with children and periods of particular demand in your job.
- Next you should share out your own assignment deadlines and tasks into the spaces. This will give you time for working on assignments through the term. Yes, this **does** mean that you may be researching and writing notes before you have had a lecture on a topic. It will encourage you to be thinking about, and working on, assignments continuously and you will have a bank of research and notes ready for adding to, and be prepared for the final write up.



#### Tips!

- **Help yourself by being organised.**
- **Try to visit the library on the same days as your teaching sessions. Keep a diary with a list of everything that you hope to achieve in that day. If you need to meet certain people, tutors, other students, arrange to see them at times close to your teaching sessions. In other words, capitalise on the time when you are in college to make the best and fullest use of your time. Wherever possible avoid duplicating effort by teaming up with a study partner and attacking the library together, sharing lecture notes and 'brainstorming' ideas.**

#### Preparation:

In order to prepare your time-management skills you might consider the following points:

- When you first return to formal study you will find tasks take you longer as you are not used to these activities, and will not be quick at finding resources and using them. Many aspects of study will take much longer than expected.
- As you progress you will find that you can get tasks done in less time but schedule time for unforeseen events and for time off.
- Prepare yourself by working through Section 2: 'PREPARATION FOR STUDY' and getting used to ways of saving time researching, reading, and writing notes.
- Prepare your friends and family by making sure they are very aware of the commitment that you are going to be making. Make your time planner very visible to all so that they are aware of the periods when you will be most in need of their support.
- Recognise that you may not be able to carry on life as before. Even if no housework or gardening gets done in term time, you will be able to blitz it all in the summer.
- You have to find out what works for you, and for those close to you. The same pattern of work doesn't suit everyone. Some people find it useful to stick to a work-style 9 to 5 pattern. Others have to be (or prefer to be) much more flexible.
- You will find some weeks will be more or less productive than others during the term.
- Think about the **3 D's** – what can be **deferred** until the holidays, what you can **delegate** to other people, what you can **delete** completely.

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### TIME MANAGEMENT

*You have spent all your mature life being a time-manager. The life you live at home, at work and in your studies requires that you manage your time. You have already developed the skills that will help you. It is simply a matter of directing these skills to the demands of a new environment and towards new goals.*

#### Task 1 Identifying the time that can be freed-up for study

- Make a list of all the different activities that currently make demands on your time in a typical week.
- Against each of these activities, fill in the approximate amount of time taken on each day of the week. Assess how much time is left in each day. Divide this in two – one half is for time off and the other is for study.
- Are you left with a realistic amount of time to complete 12 hours 'contact time' a week, and 12 hours personal study? (We are not calculating travelling time here, but you might make a note of this.)

**Don't Panic! It can be done. Millions of people like you prove this!**

#### Task 2 Deciding on priorities

- Look again at your list of current activities and discuss each with a friend, family member or fellow student. Which can you have help with? Which can you/will you have to give up? Share ideas on ways in which you can free up more time.
- Draw up a priority organiser sheet and think hard about how high up on your list of priorities you want your university work to come. (You could use this later to discuss with your family and friends whom, given the opportunity to share your hopes and fears, may be more understanding and supportive when the time comes.)

1. Rate each task on scale of 5 (unimportant) – 15 (Crucial)
2. Now put in order or priority. Use the '3 D's' – defer, delegate, delete!
3. Discuss the implications of your priority list.