

## Choosing where to study

With thousands of courses to choose from, across 46 further and higher education institutions in Scotland, choosing the right college or university can be a tricky business. You may know what career you have in mind, but where you study can be just as important as what you study.

Each institution differs in how and what they teach on each subject. Here are some things to consider when you are exploring your options.

### List your priorities

First of all, think about what you want from a course, such as the scope of the subject and the level you want to study it at. For example, you might want a more practical or vocational course that would give you a better chance of getting a job, offering less theory and more practice.

Some institutions offer specific courses with industrial experience, whether that be as a designer or a biochemist (see **Reputation** below). Is this important to you?

Make a checklist of your requirements, considering module structure and content, course length, level of course, and list the institutions you are interested in.

### Do your homework

Once you have decided which institutions you are interested in, look up their websites to get as much information as you can. This is an excellent starting point in accessing their prospectus and finding comprehensive information such as its history, student life, aims as an institution, facilities, student and staff numbers, departmental information and importantly, details about the subject and course content.

This should give you a good idea of whether you would like it there or not. Don't skimp on this stage. If you can't visit the campus then many institutions offer a virtual tour on their website.

### Check out the premises

Once you've visited the websites, the next thing to do is to visit the institutions you're interested in, ideally attending any open days or taster days that they offer. These are advertised on the website and in their prospectuses, and are usually held at certain times of the year.

You can also find a list of college and university open days under the '[Upcoming Events](#)' section of our website.

This is the best way to work out if you like the feel of the place and its location. Walk around the campus to get a feel for the atmosphere and speak to students who are already on your course of choice, or ideally, who are finishing it. They can tell you their experiences of both the course content and the institution itself, such as how well organised the course is, the quality of teaching or helpfulness of the tutors.

See our article on '[Making the most of open days](#)' for more tips and advice.

## Reputation

Some institutions are renowned for having excellent links with industry and big employers, which is good for making contacts with potential employers and helping your CV look more impressive. Others are better known for their academic reputation, offering more in-depth theory but less practical work.

A good example can be with art and design courses; some courses offer industrial placements say, for graphics, textiles or product design. Others offer more theory-based work with deeper or wider scope of subject coverage, but have a more established reputation.

You should also look at the success rates of students at the college or university by checking out employment rates after graduation. This might give you an idea of your chances of finding a job after leaving. Most advertise these statistics on their websites.

The links at the end of this article provide excellent information about institutions, their success rates and statistics.

## Location, location, location

If you are going to study in another town or city, make a proper visit to see if you will like life there. This is particularly important if you want to go to a rural college or a city college – as you can imagine, there are some big differences.

There are basic considerations when studying away from home - this can be the location, how far it is away from your family and how often you intend to visit, and the transport links for getting around the town and city and to/from the campus.

On the other hand, you might decide that you do not want to attend a college or university, and apply for a distance learning course that you can do from home. The Open University is a good choice for some subjects, but many universities are now offering more and more distance learning courses that can be done completely from home, with only occasional compulsory attendance.

## Accommodation

This can be one of the deciding factors if you want to study away from home. You need to look at the cost of either student or privately rented accommodation and the cost of living for the locations you are considering. These can vary from place to place. Each institution can provide details on the types of accommodation available and possibly even put you in touch with other students looking to share accommodation.

Living away from home on a student budget is challenging and difficult to balance. Don't forget to take advantage of advice on costs of living and budgeting on individual college and university websites. You could also consider getting a part time job to supplement your funds.

Of course, if you decide to stay at home and study at your nearest college or uni, then living costs are drastically reduced!

## Facilities

Facilities, such as IT labs and the library, are as equally important when it comes to choosing a college or university. This is particularly true if you are studying a technical subject, such as engineering or computing. Libraries are really important when it comes to the theoretical side of your studies, such as the right books available to everyone on the course when it comes to essay or exam deadlines.

If you are studying sports for example, don't forget to check out leisure facilities such as the gym or sports clubs, to see if they have good quality or the latest equipment.

### And finally - some websites to look up

[Unistats](#) is a government website where you can compare official course data from both universities and colleges.

[What Uni](#) is a comprehensive and student led website which provides information about degrees, unis and general advice about studying.

[The Complete University Guide](#) is an excellent site covering university, subject and career choices and other considerations about higher education study.

[Bright Knowledge](#) is a website with information on careers, education and student life.

[The Guardian University Guide](#) provides tables on rankings by subject, institution and help finding a course.

[Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#) is the independent body entrusted with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education.