

Alternatives to full time study

You might not want to study full time, or you may be in a situation that makes full time study difficult. This might be a lack of financial support, health issues or care commitments.

This article explains alternative ways to study and gives information on potential learning opportunity providers.

Part time study

Most colleges and universities offer part time courses alongside their full time programmes. These can be anything from up to 20 hours a week, depending on the level and length of the course. You would attend classes during the day or evening. This is a good option because you have better access to the tutors, can attend day lectures and use the institution's facilities, such as libraries, IT suites and leisure facilities.

Open learning

If going to a class at the same time each week does not suit you, open learning could be the answer. It can be either:

Flexible learning

You study in college, with the help of a tutor, but at times to suit you, rather than going to regular classes at set times, or

Distance learning

You study mostly at home, with help from a tutor by phone, email, letter, or occasional meetings and seminars.

You learn with books and online material, sometimes watching TV programmes or DVDs.

Open Learning is not always easy. You need to be organised, self-motivated and good at managing your time.

Who provides open learning courses?

The Open University

The Open University (OU) is the largest university for part time higher education in the UK.

You study part time, mainly at home, with full tutor support. You do not need formal entry requirements for most undergraduate courses.

You can choose to study a single course or to work towards a certificate, diploma, BA/BSc degree, higher degree or professional qualification.

There are around 170 qualifications offered at undergraduate level in a wide range of subject areas. These include business, health and social care, information technology and computing, social sciences, humanities, science and technology. There are also short courses in IT, science and arts.

You can do an introductory course: the OU offers short pre-entry level courses, known as Openings.

Depending on how many hours of learning you do, you may be eligible for a part time fee grant from the [Students Awards Agency for Scotland \(SAAS\)](#).

Their free online learning website [OpenLearn](#) offers over 1,000 free courses across a wide variety of subjects, ranging from business to languages.

Students with an HNC or HND can progress to OU degree-level study. The OU gives students credit points for their previous HNC/HND qualifications. This process of credit transfer can help you to get a degree in less time than it would normally take.

You can get further information on the [OU website](#).

Further Education colleges

Many further education colleges run courses by flexible or distance learning.

Most of them lead to recognised qualifications such as Highers, SQA units or Higher National units.

If you take a flexible learning course, you attend college, either by arrangement or drop-in at times which suit you.

If you take a distance learning course, you study mainly at home. However, you usually need to attend college for occasional assessments and for optional tutorials.

There are usually fees for these courses. If you receive benefits, you may get a fee waiver. For more details contact your local further education college.

Online learning

A number of colleges, universities and organisations offer courses online. This is done through an online virtual learning environment (VLE) provided by the institution, so you need access to a computer with an internet connection. You can access text-based materials and videos online and tutor support by email. You can also contact other students through chat rooms and discussion boards.

This allows you to learn at your own pace at a time that suits you.

For further information contact individual colleges or universities.

You can ask your employer if you can access online learning at work.

Private learning providers

There are a number of private learning providers, offering courses in many subjects. Some courses lead to a recognised qualification.

Some providers are registered with the Open and Distance Learning Quality Council (ODLQC) and some are

members of the Association of British Correspondence Colleges (ABCC).

You have to pay fees for these courses.

Useful websites

[The Open University](#)

[Open College of the Arts](#)

[Open and Distance Learning Quality Council](#)

[ABCC](#) - provider of home study courses