

GOING TO COLLEGE?

Thinking about going to college? But still not sure if it's right for you?

Read on for some information and advice we hope will help you to decide.

HOW DIFFERENT IS COLLEGE FROM SCHOOL?

In general, college is a more adult and relaxed environment than school. It's not quite so structured; no end-of-class bells or stairwells you can't use! You'll be treated like an adult and expected to behave like one. But you are free to enjoy yourself too.

The people you study with won't all be the same age as you; some might even be the same age as your parents. Like you they've decided to invest time and effort in their education, so they tend to be pretty serious about getting the most out of the course.

You'll be mixing with a much wider group of people, so there are plenty of opportunities to make new friends and join clubs, gyms and other groups.

Colleges tend to be bigger, and may have several campuses, so it can take some time to find your way around. This can be a bit intimidating at first, but colleges hold induction or welcome days, and information sessions, to help you settle in. There are a whole range of student support services you can use, and colleges usually have better facilities for study, food, sport and leisure.

Methods of teaching might be a bit different – more practical workshops, lectures and tutorials (discussion groups).

You take more responsibility for managing your time and your course work. Lecturers and tutors won't give you constant reminders about handing in work or meeting deadlines. It's up to you to keep up with the work.

Any big change in life, like starting a new job or going to college, can be daunting at first. It does take a while to settle in. But everyone who starts your course is feeling exactly the same way and your first day nerves will pass.

WHAT'S ON OFFER?

Areas of study

Scotland's 27 colleges offer a huge range of different courses. Here are just a few examples of the subjects you can study:

- Accounting
- Art and Design
- Business Administration
- Catering
- Child, Health and Social Care
- Computing and IT
- Construction
- Engineering
- Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy
- Music or Drama
- Social Sciences
- Tourism and Hospitality



Most college courses are work-related and designed to help you get a job in a specific industry or type of work. But colleges also offer courses that will:

- prepare you for the world of work
- lead to general educational qualifications, like Highers and National 5s
- prepare you for entry to an apprenticeship
- prepare you for entry into higher education.

For up-to-date information about full time and part time college courses in Scotland go to Planit at www.planitplus.net. There are direct links to every college website.

Visit the websites of the colleges you are interested in and read their prospectuses for detailed information.

Take every opportunity to get along to college Open Days or Evenings. You'll get a much better 'feel' for the place and be able to speak directly to the people who are responsible for individual courses. Don't be afraid to ask questions, they want you to.

Follow any colleges you are interested in on social media, for example Facebook or Twitter.

CHOOSING WHAT TO STUDY

There are a few things to consider before choosing what to study at college.

- What are you good at?
- What do you enjoy doing or learning about?
- Which courses will make the best use of your interests, abilities and strengths?
- What type of course will help you to achieve your career goals?

Once you've thought these things through, your first step should be to find out about the different subjects and qualifications you can take at college.

QUALIFICATIONS AND ENTRY LEVELS

Colleges also offer many different levels and types of qualification, including:

- **National Certificates (NC) and National Qualifications (NQ)** – normally one-year courses, entry qualifications vary from no formal qualifications to five National 5 subjects.
- **Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)** – work-based qualifications available from SCQF Levels 4 to 11, entry qualifications vary depending on the subject studied and the level of SVQ.
- **Higher National Certificates (HNC)** – normally one-year courses, entry qualifications usually vary

from 1-2 Highers, or a relevant NC/NQ. It's possible to progress from an HNC to the first or second year of a degree.

- **Higher National Diplomas (HND)** – normally two-year courses, entry qualifications are usually 1-2 Highers and a group of National 5 subjects or a relevant HNC. It's possible to move from an HND to the second or third year of a degree.
- **Degrees** – normally three or four-year courses although some take longer, entry qualifications are usually 4-5 Highers or a relevant HND. Many colleges now offer degree-level courses in partnership with universities.

It's important to check the entry level of any courses you are interested in. Can you meet the entry requirements? Do you, or will you, have the specific subjects the course requires? Also, always check what the course can lead to. Ask for specific information about the destinations of last year's students when you go along to Open Days. It pays to think and plan ahead.

HOW DO I APPLY?

For most courses you should apply directly to each college. You usually apply by:

- using the college's online application system
- downloading an online application form, completing it and sending it to the college.

Please note these exceptions where you should apply through UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). Applications for entry in 2021 should reach UCAS between 8 September 2020 and 15 January 2021.

- Full time degree, HND and HNC courses at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).
- Full time degree, HND and HNC courses at colleges which are academic partners of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).

Online applications

- You will need an email address to set up an online applications account. Make sure your address is sensible, with nothing inappropriate.
- You will also need to have the following information to hand before you start the form: your SQA Scottish Candidate Number, National Insurance Number, details of your qualifications and any work experience you've had.

- The number of courses you can apply for at any one college varies, from just one to three. But you can apply to several colleges. It's always a good idea to have a back-up plan.

The personal statement

For many courses you will need to write a short personal statement setting out why you want to do the course. Mention:

- why the course interests you
- any leisure interests that are relevant to the course
- the skills, strengths and personal qualities that make you a good applicant
- any relevant achievements
- your future career plans; and
- relevant work experience, charity or voluntary work.

This section is usually limited to a certain number of characters so you need to make every word count. Get your personal statement ready before you apply. Prepare a draft version as a Word document and then cut and paste it into the online application form.

- Places on the course you are applying for could be limited so take your time and get it right.
- Always check your spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Interviews, portfolios and auditions

For some courses you may be asked along for an individual or group interview, or both, as part of the application process. For art and design or performing arts courses you will need to submit a portfolio of your work or go for an audition.

When to apply?

Even if your college application is your back-up plan it's a good idea to apply early. Try to apply before March for courses starting in August and by November for courses starting in January. Most colleges deal with applications on a first come first served basis, so apply as early as you can. It is possible to make a late application, but many courses could already be full.

FUNDING YOUR STUDIES

If you meet residency requirements then tuition is free. In brief, if you have been ordinarily resident in the UK for three years and ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date (depending on when the course starts) then you are likely to be eligible. The rules can be complicated but the websites listed in the following sections have detailed information.

You will need to pay for your day-to-day living costs. The funding you can claim depends on your age and the level of course you plan to take.

FURTHER EDUCATION COURSES

These are courses below HNC level, such as NC and NQs.

If you're aged 16 or 17* – Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

If you take a full time or part time non-advanced further education course at college, and are under the age of 18 at the start date of your course, you may qualify for the EMA if your household income is less than £24,421 a year (for households with one dependent child) and £26,884 (for households with more than one dependent child). The allowance is £30 a week during term time.

If you are normally resident in Scotland at the start of your course you may also get help with travel and course expenses from the college Bursary Fund.

You can get EMA and Bursary forms from the colleges; most colleges send them out to you if they offer you a place on a qualifying course. Visit college websites for more information. Also see the EMA Scotland website at www.mygov.scot/ema

Winter school leavers can only apply for financial support from January 2021.

- * You may be eligible for an EMA up to the age of 19, but from the age of 18 a Further Education Bursary may be a better option.

If you're aged 18 and over – a Further Education Bursary

If you take a full time course, which leads to a qualification up to but **not** including HNC, you may be eligible for a bursary.

Bursaries have two main elements: a maintenance allowance, which may include contributions towards necessary books and equipment, and a travel ticket, if appropriate. The maintenance allowance and travel element of the bursary are means-tested and take account of household income. Visit college websites for more information.

If you are under 25 and living with your parents on the start date of the course you may get a maintenance allowance of up to £84.30 a week (up to £106.53 if you are living away from the parental home, depending on the circumstances). The actual award paid depends on the level of your household income.

HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES

These are courses at HNC level and above, for example HNDs, Certificates in Higher Education (CertHEs), Diplomas in Higher Education (DipHEs) and degrees.

For more information on funding this level of course, and how to apply, visit the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) website. You can download a free SAAS Funding Guide 2020 -2021 from the site.

You apply online to the SAAS for your tuition fees, student loan and supplementary grants. You can also track the progress of your application online.

If you are studying full time in Scotland, and you meet their eligibility conditions, SAAS will pay your fees each year. See the useful contacts section for SAAS details.

You will also find information about funding full time higher education on Planit at www.planitplus.net/Articles/Learning/33?articleId=14.

THE CHANCE TO PROGRESS

You can really go places with a college qualification. Many college students who complete NC or NQ courses stay on at college and move on to study more advanced courses at HNC or HND level. These may then lead to degree level courses at college or university.

Many colleges have a partnership or articulation agreement with one or more universities. These agreements help to ensure that students can progress smoothly from a specific HNC course to the second year of a relevant degree, or from a specific HND to the third year of a relevant degree.



If you are planning to progress from one level of study to another, for example from a Higher National course at college to a degree course at a university, always check in advance with the institution that offers the higher level course that the course you are currently studying, or planning to study, will be recognised for entry.

COLLEGE EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND – SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

There are 27 colleges in Scotland with 264,858 full and part time students. 37% of school leavers go into further education.¹

FURTHER EDUCATION (FE) 2018 – 19²

- 66.3% of full time FE college students completed their course.

- 65.2% completed the whole course successfully. A further 10.1% were partially successful.
- 24.7% of full time FE college students did not complete their course.
- 8.7% of students withdrew from their course before they could apply for funding and a further 16% 'dropped out' before completing the course.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) 2018 – 19²

- 81.5% of full time HE college students completed their course.
- 69.8% completed the whole course successfully. A further 11.7% were partially successful.
- 18.5% of full time HE students did not complete their course.
- 5.2% of students withdrew before the funding qualifying date and a further 13.3% dropped out before completing the course.

FINDING INFORMATION

All of these rates can vary across different colleges, courses and levels of study. If you, or your parents or carers are interested in the performance indicators for a specific college, you'll find them on the college website, and at:

- College Performance Indicators, on the Scottish Funding Council website at <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications-statistics/statistical-publications/2020/SFCST022020.aspx>
- Education Scotland's College Review Reports at <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/inspection-reports>

¹ Source Colleges Scotland Key Facts 2020

² Source SFC Statistical Publication, College Performance Indicators 2018 - 2019

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USEFUL CONTACTS

Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)

Tel: 0300 555 0505 www.saas.gov.uk

@saastweet

www.facebook.com/saasfb

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)

Tel: 0371 468 0468 www.ucas.com

@ucas_online

www.facebook.com/ucasonline