ESSENTIAL GUIDE





ESSENTIAL GUIDE

Going to College





ESSENTIAL GUIDE

INDEX

Introduction 3

CHOOSING

Staying on in education 4
Choosing what to study .....5 - 6
Choosing where to study 7
Making the most of open days 8
Alternatives to full time study 9

APPLYING AND GETTING IN

Applying to college .....10 - 11
College interviews ..... 12 - 13



FUNDING, MONEY AND WORKING

Funding full time education .....14 - 15
Funding part time education 16
Work placements and experience 17

UNDERSTANDING QUALIFICATIONS

Scottish qualifications explained .....18 - 19
The Scottish Credit and Qualifications framework (SCQF) 20

INTRODUCTION

So you want to go to college? Our guide is here to help you think about important decisions and know what is involved in going to college.

You can pick and choose what you want to read using the links in the index, or just browse through.

To begin with, it's good to understand the differences between studying at school and college.



Teaching Methods

Rather than having lessons and periods, teaching methods at college include lectures, tutorials and workshops, and there are also lots of courses that offer a more hands on approach. At school you study a range of subjects, but a college course will focus on a select range of subjects. If you already know which career area you want to get into, studying a vocational course gives you a combination of theory and practical learning.



Independent study

There is structured learning at college, which teaches you the basics of a subject, but you are expected to do much more independent study than at school. This involves reading and researching to fill out your knowledge.

Academic staff won't prompt you to do this, so you need to be self-motivated. Tutors are there to support you though if you need help.

Time management

In line with independent study, you take more responsibility for managing your time and your course work. You must be aware of deadlines and stick to them, otherwise this could affect your grades. Tutors won't constantly remind you when work is due, but they are there to help if you have any issues.

A full time college course is around 16 hours per week which gives you the chance to study independently or gain part time employment alongside your studies.

College environment

There is a big difference between school and college. Even if you go to a large school, colleges tend to be much bigger, with more people and larger campuses. Sometimes more than one campus.



You will also have access to a wider range of facilities than at school, such as IT centres, laboratories, hair salons, art and design studios, plus sports centres and cafes.

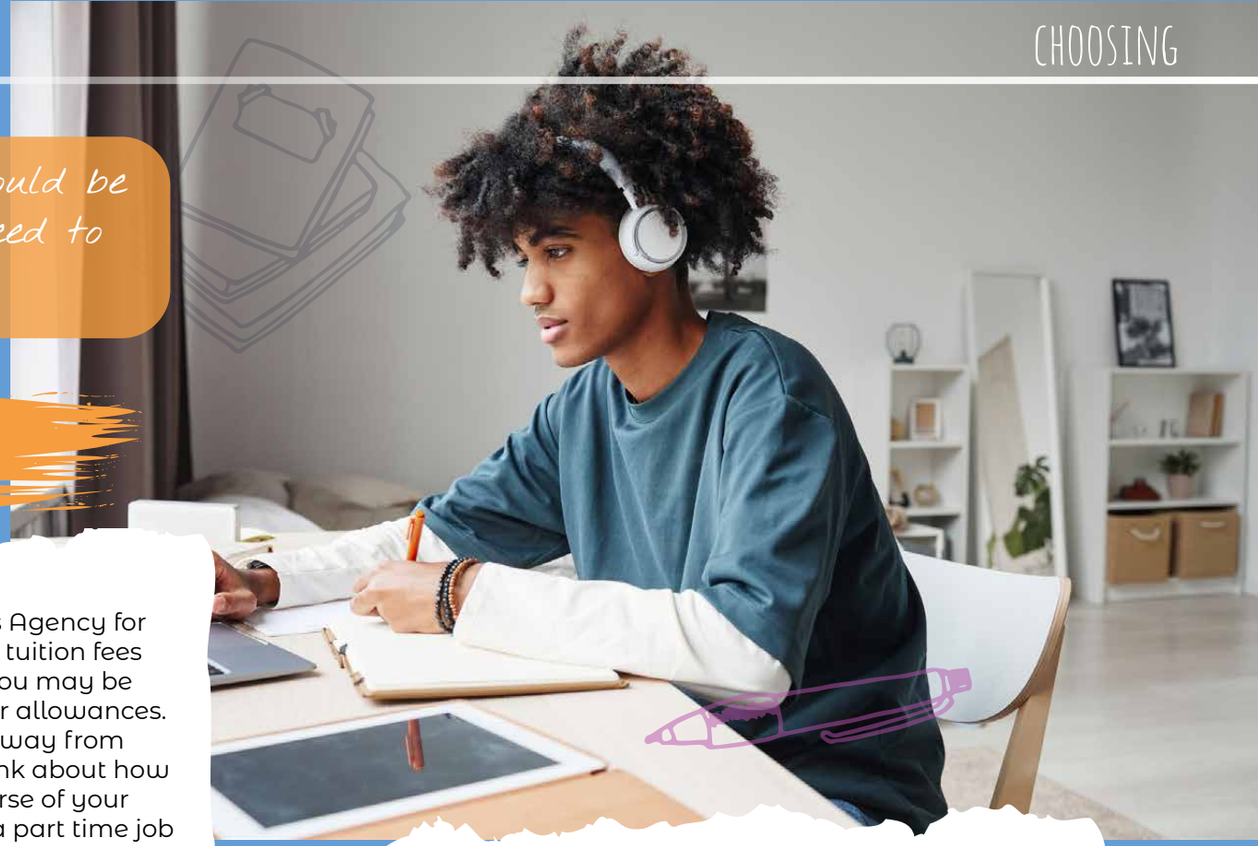
College experience

This is a very different experience from school, in an exciting way.

- It is a more adult environment.
- You will meet a diverse range of people.
- You'll feel more independent.
- You'll learn different life skills, such as money management.
- There are more opportunities to try something new, with lots of clubs and societies to join.

STAYING ON IN EDUCATION

If you are planning on going to college, you should be aware of the main benefits and things you need to consider – it pays to be prepared!



What are the benefits of staying on in education?

Better career or pay prospects – formal qualifications can lead to jobs in higher paid professions.

Greater independence - you can learn to make your own decisions and start taking responsibility for your own life, especially if you live away from home.

Gaining new and important life skills - communication, technical, social and analytical skills that enhance both your personal and working life.

Self-discovery - you might learn new things about yourself on the way, such as a passion for student politics or natural leadership ability.

Good social life - you can meet interesting people, form new and lasting friendships, try new activities and visit new places.

Daily variety - with different classes and lectures to attend, and learning about different subjects at different levels, you can enjoy a varied experience before settling into a specific career.

What Do You Need To Consider?

The cost of studying

If eligible, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) will pay your tuition fees (if studying in Scotland) and you may be eligible for a bursary and other allowances. If you are planning on living away from home, you'll really need to think about how much you'll need over the course of your studies. Many students have a part time job to help with costs.

See the Funding, Money and Working section of this guide for more information.



Long-term commitment

You need to be sure that you have the enthusiasm and drive to commit to further study, which could be another year or two, depending on the course. When doing your research, find out how much study time is involved in a course – not just in terms of attendance, but work you'll need to do outside of taught hours.

Being responsible for your own time

You'll need to be disciplined with your time management as there will be deadlines to meet, lessons/lectures to attend and you may need to juggle this with a part time job. You also need time for a social life, so you have to find the right balance, otherwise you could fall behind with your studies.

CHOOSING WHAT TO STUDY

Choosing what course to study at college is an important decision. You may already have a career in mind, so have a good idea of the courses that are suitable. If you haven't decided, you may find the choice of subjects and levels overwhelming.

Consider the following before choosing what to study.



What are you good at?

Studying a subject that you regularly get good grades in is an excellent starting point. Remember that when you move onto college, you'll be studying at a more advanced level, so you may find it difficult if the course includes a subject you struggle with.

What do you enjoy doing or learning about?

Even if you are good at a subject, you still need to be interested in it, because you will be committing to another one to two years of study. However, don't rule out a subject if you find bits of it boring - that's normal, and something that all students and professionals alike learn to live with.

Which courses will make the best use of your interests, abilities and strengths?

In addition to your school subjects, have a think about yourself in terms of what you like to do, your skills and personal qualities. These aspects include things like communication and analytical skills, patience and confidence, plus what you enjoy doing in your free time. If you need some help to work these out, have a go at the interactive tools in the 'My Profile' section of the Planit Portfolio.



What type of course will help you to achieve your career goals?

There are many different types of courses on offer at college. It could be an academic based subject such as social sciences or business, or a vocational subject such as hairdressing or cookery. If you are unsure which would be best for you, try the CareerMatch and CourseMatch quizzes in Planit. These will give you suggestions based on your interests.

CHOOSING WHAT TO STUDY

What level of course should you study?

This will depend on what your career goal is and what you achieve in school. Your guidance teacher or careers adviser can help you decide. Remember that you can progress through the levels of qualifications, for example, from an NC at SCQF Level 6 through to HNC or HND at SCQF Levels 7 and 8 or even up to degree at SCQF Levels 9/10. Here are the levels explained.

- **NC and NQ (SCQF Levels 2 - 6)** – normally one-year courses, entry qualifications vary from no formal qualifications to five National 5 subjects.
- **SVQs (SCQF Levels 4 - 11)** – often work-based qualifications, entry qualifications vary depending on the subject studied and the level of SVQ.
- **HNC (SCQF Level 7)** – 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.
- **HND (SCQF Level 8)** – 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 (SCQF Levels 9/10)** – normally three or four-year courses although some take longer, entry qualifications when applying through college are usually 3-4 Highers or a relevant HNC/D. 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.



Remember these tips

- Speak to teachers, parents or a careers adviser to get their feedback.
- Take your time to figure out what you want to achieve career-wise.
- Research colleges and courses.
- Don't stress – there is plenty of help and support!

Would you like to progress to degree level study?

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 or HND course to the second or 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 degree that the course you are currently studying, or planning to study, will be recognised for entry.

CHOOSING WHERE TO STUDY

Depending on where you live and if you're willing to live away from home, you may have one local college or several to choose from.

Firstly, you should research which colleges offer the subject you want to study. You can use the Planit website, which lists all the full time courses in Scotland.

Make sure to compare the courses, as subjects and course content will vary, as will the structure and teaching methods. Some colleges offer specific courses with industrial experience, or more vocational courses so it's important to look at each in detail.

Once you have decided which colleges you are interested in, take a look at their websites to get as much information as you can. This will tell you about the college's history, student life, facilities and student and staff numbers. This will give you a good idea of whether you would like it there or not. Many colleges also offer a virtual campus tour on their website.

Open Days

If you can, get along to open days and tour the campus and facilities. This will give you a feel of the place and the chance to talk to students and lecturers. Having the opportunity to speak to current students will give you an insight into how well organised the course is, the quality of the teaching and what the lecturers are like. You may have to book a place to attend. These events are popular so try and book early. You can find out more from the Making the Most of Open Days section in this guide as well as a list of open days under the Upcoming Events Calendar on Planit.





Reputation

You should also explore the reputation of the colleges you are considering. Some are renowned for having excellent links with industry and big employers, which is good for making contacts with potential employers. Others are better known for their academic reputation.

You should also look at the success rates of previous students from the college by taking a look at employment rates after graduation. These statistics are likely to be advertised on the college website.

Facilities

The facilities available are also something you should consider when choosing a college. Particularly if you are studying a practical subject, you'll want to consider the availability of equipment and facilities such as training kitchens and restaurants, salons or science labs. Other important facilities include availability of IT equipment, library and student support.

Location

You should consider how far away the college is from your home and explore what the transport links are like for getting to and from the campus. Make sure to visit the place you are considering, to see if you will like it there.

Alternatively, many institutions now offer more distance learning courses that can be done from home with only occasional compulsory attendance.





MAKING THE MOST OF OPEN DAYS

If you're thinking about going to college, you might be having trouble deciding which one to choose. This is where open days can be very useful. They are a great opportunity to visit the different colleges you are interested in and find out what it would be like there.

You will likely attend a few open days so you can compare institutions and see which one you think fits best. Have a look at prospectuses and websites to see which places teach your subject. Make a list of places you'd like to visit and then check to see when open days are happening and whether you need to book a place. For help deciding where and what to study have a look at the 'Choosing where to study' and 'Choosing what to study' sections.

Some open days are subject specific so make sure you pick the right open day for your chosen course. Open days are usually advertised on college websites, but you can also find them on the Upcoming Events Calendar on Planit.

Plan Ahead

Once you've decided which open days you want to attend, take a more in depth look at each institution and what is happening during the open day. Have a look at their prospectus, website and social media. Some colleges now have apps for their open days, with information like maps and timetables.



Make sure that you:

- read up on where the college is – especially if you're considering moving away from home
- take a look at any timetables for the open day as there might be tours and presentations
- make a note of anything you want to see as well as the times and venues
- make a list of any questions you have – this could be about the course, the institution, the facilities or even the town or city
- plan your journey and arrive in plenty of time to make sure you get the chance to see and do everything you want to.

Top Tips

If you get the opportunity, try talking to current students. You can find out what it's like studying at the college, what the facilities are like and what the course is like.

You should also talk to tutors or lecturers as this will give you the chance to find out as much as you can about the course and the people who teach it.

Find out about the student union and any clubs or societies available – you might want to get involved in something outside your studies.

Make sure to explore the campus, either with an organised tour or by yourself.

If studying at the college will mean moving away from home, make sure that as well as exploring the campus and accommodation you also explore the town or city.







ALTERNATIVES TO FULL TIME STUDY

You might decide you don't want to study full time, or you may be in a situation that makes full time study difficult. This could be lack of financial support, health issues or care commitments. Here are some alternative options.

Part Time Study

Colleges offer part time (up to 16 hours a week) options alongside their full time programmes. Most of them lead to recognised qualifications, such as Highers, Qualifications Scotland Units or Higher National Units.

You could attend classes during the day or evening. This means you have better access to tutors, can attend lectures at a suitable time and use the institution's facilities, such as the library and IT suite.

These courses usually have fees. If you receive benefits, you may be eligible for a fee waiver. For more details contact the individual college.



Open Learning

If attending classes at the same time each week does not suit you, open learning could be an alternative. Colleges also offer flexible or distance learning study.

Flexible learning

This gives you the ability to choose where, when and how you learn, meaning you can study around other commitments, and go at your own pace.

Distance learning

This is done through a virtual learning environment (VLE) provided by the college, so you need access to a computer and the internet. You will get access to materials and tutor support. You can also get in contact with other students through chat rooms and discussion boards. Taking an online course allows you to learn at a pace that suits you. For further information contact individual colleges.

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







APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Once you've chosen the course and college that you're interested in, you'll need to apply. Here's an outline of how it works.



Typical application process

- You usually apply using the college's online application system.
- The college will acknowledge receipt of your application.
- Once your application has been considered, the college will contact you either offering you an interview (if this is one of the course entry requirements), a conditional place or decline your application.
- The interview offer will contain details of any items you need to take with you or any work you must prepare (see the 'College interviews' section of this guide) - you will need to confirm your attendance.
- Following an interview, the college will either offer you a conditional or unconditional place, or decline your application.
- If you are offered a place you need to confirm whether you are accepting it.

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.

Exceptions

There are some exceptions where you should apply for courses through UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service).

Some full time degree, HND and HNC courses at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). Check the SRUC website for details.

Full time degree, HND and HNC courses at colleges which are academic partners of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). Check the UHI website for more information. See the **Essential Guide: Going to University** for more details of how and when to apply using this method.



Completing the application

To apply, you need to set up an online applications account on the college website, so you will need an email address. Make sure your email address is sensible, with nothing inappropriate. It is a good idea not to use your school email address as once you leave school, you won't be able to access it.

You will need to provide the following information to complete the form:

- your Scottish Candidate Number
- National Insurance number
- details of your qualifications
- work experience dates and descriptions
- your personal statement (required for most courses).

Always check your spelling, punctuation and grammar before submitting.

It is a good idea to keep a copy of the information you submit in your application, so that in an interview you remember the details.

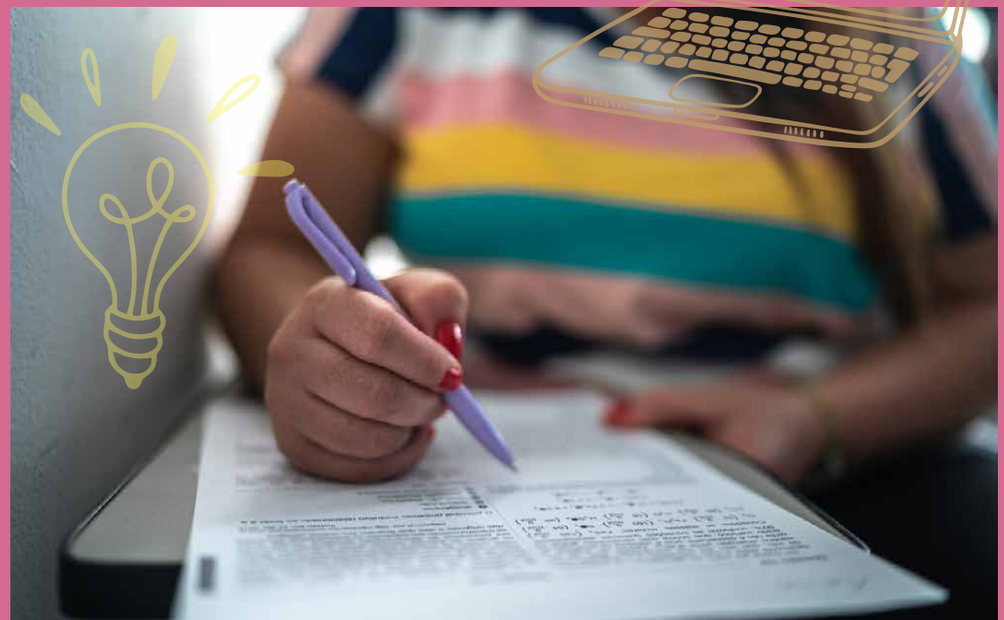
APPLYING TO COLLEGE

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.



Interviews, portfolios and auditions

For some courses you may be asked along to 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

It's a good idea to apply early. 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.

For the exceptions mentioned earlier about higher education courses with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), there are specific application deadlines – see the **Essential Guide: Going to University** for details.

COLLEGE INTERVIEWS

Think of an interview as a chance to show yourself in the best light and to ask more detailed questions about the college and the course. In turn, the interviewer uses it as an opportunity to find out more about you, why you want to do the course and how suitable you are.





Preparing yourself

- Double check the date and time of your interview and plan a route to get you there in plenty of time.
- Check which documents you need to take with you, for example identification, exam certificates or a portfolio of your work.
- Read through your application form and personal statement so the information is fresh in your mind.
- Have a look at the college prospectus and website.
- Think about what questions you may be asked and prepare some answers.
- Think about any questions that you want to ask and make a note of them.
- Decide what you are going to wear - smart, clean and tidy is the way to go.
- If you are unsure of anything, phone or email the college beforehand.



What happens in the interview?

Some colleges invite several applicants at one time so that they can provide information to everyone as a group, before having individual interviews. During the interview you might be asked questions like:

- why would you like to do this course?
- what do you know about the subject area?
- why did you choose this college?
- what qualifications do you have or expect to achieve?
- what are your plans after completing the course?
- what are your hobbies and interests?
- what makes you suitable for this course?
- how will you deal with any challenges during your studies?

You may also be asked questions that relate specifically to the course you have applied for, have to do an audition if you wish to study subjects like performing arts or dance, or complete an aptitude test for engineering courses.

COLLEGE INTERVIEWS

How can you do your best in the interview?

- Be courteous, polite and make eye contact.
- Be attentive and listen carefully to the questions.
- If you don't understand something, ask the interviewer to repeat the question or to explain in more detail.
- Give as much information as you can.
- Remember that everyone has weaknesses as well as strengths, so talk about how you try to overcome or improve yours.
- Be honest and don't exaggerate.
- Ask some questions to show that you have thought about the course and the college.
- And finally, be enthusiastic and smile!



What questions could you ask?

Don't be shy about asking questions at your interview. Remember it is a two-way process and it's important for you to get all the information you can. You might want to ask:

- How many places are available on the course?
- Can I progress onto another course at a higher level if I successfully complete this one?
- Are there any specific subjects or extracurricular activities that would be helpful for entry to, and preparation for, the course?
- What are last year's graduates doing now?

You might think of some more specific questions about the course or the college.



Remember

It's ok to be nervous. The interviewer will be expecting it and will do their best to put you at ease.





FUNDING FULL TIME EDUCATION

Student finance is complex and depends on a range of factors including the type of course you are applying for, your age and personal circumstances.

If you meet the residency criteria set out by the Scottish Government then you will likely be eligible for free tuition.

There are other forms of funding that can help with day-to-day living costs while in full time further education.



EMA

You may be able to claim an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of £30 a week during term time if you are 16-19 years old, from a family with a low income and:

- you are staying on at school full time (you can only get an EMA if you've reached your school leaving age); or
- you take a full time or part time non-advanced course (up to SCQF Level 6) at a further education college or education centre; or
- you are taking part in an 'action plan' with your local council.

To be eligible for EMA starting in August 2026, your household income must be less than £24,421 a year for households with one dependent child, or £26,884 for households with two or more dependent children.

The weekly allowance is paid fortnightly and goes directly into your own bank account.

You must normally sign up to a learning agreement which states that you will go to school (or college) regularly. If your attendance falls below a certain level, you lose the allowance. Visit the Scottish Government website for more information.

Further Education Bursary

If you take a full time course (21 hours or more a week), which leads to a qualification up to but not including HNC, you may be eligible for a bursary.

These are means-tested, so how much you get will depend on the income of your parents or spouse, unless you are classed as a self-supporting student. Apply directly to the college as soon as you have a place on the course.

Weekly Bursary amounts for 2026-2027

Household income less than £24,275:

	Age 18-24	Age 25+
Living with your parents	£99.35	£125.55
Living away from home	£125.55	N/A
Self-supporting	£125.55	£125.55

Bursaries for living costs are normally paid into your bank account every four weeks. Visit college websites or speak with student support services for more information on exactly what you will be eligible to receive.



FUNDING FULL TIME EDUCATION

Care Experienced Students' Bursary

This is a non-means tested award for any student who has been looked after by a local authority in the UK (before age of 18) and is past their statutory school leaving date. The allowance is £225.00 a week. You may also be able to claim other funds or benefits and the college will advise on the maximum level of funding you could get.

Supplementary Allowances

Additional allowances may be available if you need extra financial help because of your circumstances. You don't have to pay these back.

Some allowances are available through the college and some are through the government, but the college can help you with this.

Allowances may include:

- Accommodation Allowance
- Travel Expenses
- Childcare Fund
- Discretionary Fund
- Dependent's Allowance.



Other Sources of Funding and Information



Part time work

Most students need to work part time while studying. There is no limit on earnings while studying but you may have to pay tax depending on what you earn. Employers use the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) process to deduct tax and National Insurance (NI) from your earnings. You will only pay NI Contributions (NICs) if you earn more than £242 a week.

If you need any advice or guidance on finding a job, see our Job Seeking Skills modules on Planit.

Universal Credit

Visit the Universal Credit website to see if you may be eligible for Universal Credit, or contact the Universal Credit helpline on 0800 328 5644 for more information.

Council Tax rebates

Full time students are normally eligible for a Council Tax exemption or rebate, unless you live, for example, with other adults who are not students or you own your own home. Contact your local Council Tax office for more information.

Funding Full Time Higher Education at College

Colleges also offer courses at HNC level and above, including degrees, which is classed as higher education.

For more information on funding this level of course, and how to apply, visit the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) website.

As long as you meet certain requirements, SAAS will pay your tuition fees. You must apply each year to have your fees paid.

In addition to tuition fees, you also apply online to SAAS for your student loan and supplementary grants. You can also track the progress of your application online. For full details on funding your higher education studies, see our **Essential Guide: Going to University**.

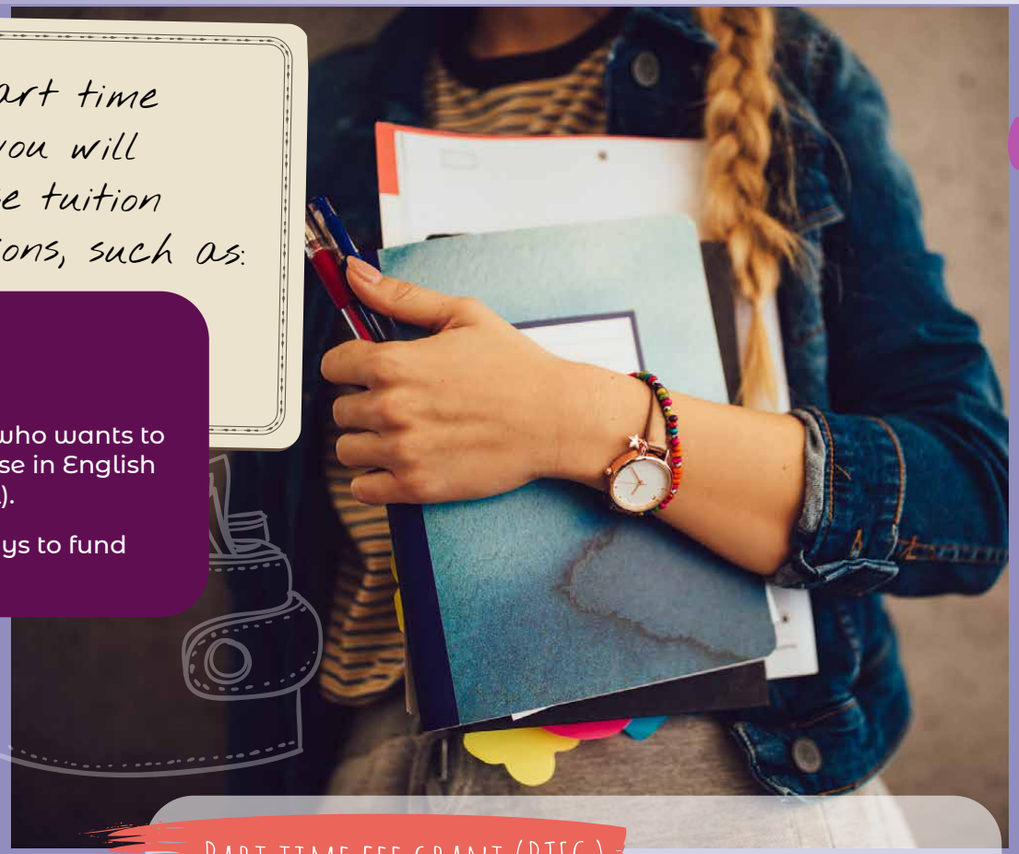


FUNDING PART TIME EDUCATION

If you plan to study part time (up to 16 hours a week) you will usually have to pay course tuition fees, but there are exceptions, such as:

- you are on a low income
- you are claiming certain benefits
- you have a disability
- you are an asylum seeker or refugee who wants to take a non-advanced course or a course in English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL).

If you have to pay, there are several ways to fund part time study.



Part time bursaries

If you want to study a non-advanced level course (up to SCQF Level 6) for less than 16 hours a week (or on an open learning basis), and meet the criteria, you might also be able to claim a part time bursary at some colleges. You might have your course fees paid under the fee waiver system. Contact the college you want to study at for more information.

Discretionary funds

These funds are run by individual institutions on a discretionary basis, so apply directly to your college or university. The funds are limited. How much you get depends on your circumstances.

Part time fee grant (PTEG)

If you want to study a part time higher education course (HNC up to degree level) at a college, university or private training provider and your income is £25,000 a year or less you might qualify for a grant towards your tuition fees. The amount depends on the qualification you are studying and the number of credits it is worth. Contact your learning provider to find out if they are approved to offer the grant by the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS). You can find more information on the SAAS website.

Universal Credit

You may be able to claim Universal Credit if you are studying part time. You'll need to meet other eligibility criteria, like being available for work.

Contact the Universal Credit helpline on 0800 328 5644 for more information or see the GOV.UK website.

Working while studying

You may need to work part time while studying. If so, you might need to pay tax depending on how much you earn. Employers use the Paye As You Earn (PAYE) process to deduct tax and National Insurance (NI) from your earnings. You will only pay NI Contributions (NICs) if you earn more than £242 a week.

If you need any advice or guidance on finding a job, see our Job Seeking Skills Modules on Planit.

Useful Links

There is more information on the Student Information Scotland website.

WORK PLACEMENTS AND EXPERIENCE

Doing a work placement or gaining work experience has many benefits. Some employers prefer some experience and in certain career areas it is expected. Whichever career you are aiming for, by doing this you could:

- gain an insight into working in that industry or that particular role
- learn the skills, knowledge and training you need to get into a specific career
- find out if a job 'fits', or if you want to work in that industry, or career
- make important contacts who could help you into a job when you graduate
- add to your CV and stand out from the crowd.

A work placement is generally a period of work you complete while at school or as part of a qualification, where you are in college for some days of the week and at a work placement for the rest.

Work experience is something that you will gain from a work placement and also any other part time job or volunteering that you do.



Types of Work Placements and Experience

Here are some of the more common types of experience you can get.

- Work placements while at school can last up to one week, or could follow a pattern such as half a day a week for the school year. You attend a place of business to get a taste of the world of work and gain some insight into the career that you might be interested in. You can even get accreditation for your work placement, for example the Qualifications Scotland Work Placement Unit (SCQF Levels 3 - 6).
- A Foundation Apprenticeship is a qualification that you complete while at school over one or two years, starting in S5 or S6. You will spend some time away from school at college and on work placement with an employer.
- Unpaid or voluntary work is another option, which you could do full time during holidays, or part time during term time. You can approach an employer directly or have a look on websites such as Volunteer Scotland.
- Temporary or temp work, which can range from working in a supermarket to admin work, can be valuable work experience even if it is not related to your studies. As well as earning money, you will learn valuable transferable skills that employers want, which could also be indirectly relevant to your chosen career. Registering with a recruitment agency is the best way to find temporary work.
- Work shadowing usually lasts only a few days. You're not actually doing any work, but as the name suggests, you watch a professional work to see what a typical day in their job entails. You should research and look for the person you would prefer to shadow for maximum benefit.

What Should I Think About?

Before arranging a work placement or looking for work experience, remember to think about:

- How much time do you want to commit to?
- Where do you want to work?
- What do you want to learn?
- What skills do you want to develop?

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS EXPLAINED

There are different types and levels of Scottish qualifications, which all fit within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). They are studied at school, further and higher education level. Qualifications up to Higher National level appear on your Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC), which is issued by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The following are a range of further and higher education qualifications available at college.





National Certificate (NC)/ National Qualification (NQ)

NCc and NQs are offered at SCQF Levels 2-6 and can lead to further education, higher education or employment. They are usually studied at college. You enter at a level depending on your ability. Some NC/NQ courses need no formal qualifications.

NCs/NQs usually consist of a number of National Units which are assessed internally and sometimes also by an external exam set and marked by Qualifications Scotland. There are courses in over 50 subjects.

When you successfully complete a course, you can progress to the next level.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

SVQs are workbased qualifications, designed to improve an employee's skills, by demonstrating competence in tasks needed for a specific job. There are SVQs for almost every job. They are available at seven levels, from SCQF Level 4 for more routine jobs and tasks, to SCQF Level 11 for complex jobs with more responsibility.

They are usually made up of 6-10 units. Most SVQ courses are part time, run at college for those in appropriate jobs. There are a few full time SVQs.

Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) can lead to SVQ qualifications at SCQF Levels 4/5 through to 11 (technical and professional apprenticeships). For more information on MAs up to SCQF Level 8, see the Planit website.

Higher National Qualifications

These qualifications are built up of HN Units that can lead to an HNC or HND. They are run in a wide range of subjects, by further education colleges, some institutions of higher education and some training centres.

They can lead directly to work, often at higher technician or junior management level. They can also give entry to more advanced courses including degrees or vocational courses such as Professional Development Awards (PDAs) (see page 19).

Higher National Units (HN Units)

HN Units combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Like National Units, you can take them as qualifications in their own right, or as HNCs or HNDs, which can be studied full or part time.

These Units also form the basis of PDAs. For an HNC you need 12-15 Units, for an HND about 30 Units.

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS EXPLAINED







Higher National Certificates (HNCs)

An HNC normally takes one year full time (2-3 days a week at college), or two years part time (one day or two evenings a week at college). For entry you usually need 1–2 relevant Highers, or a relevant NC or NQ.

With an HNC you will usually be able to get into Year 2 of an HND in a similar subject and you may be able to go into year 1, or sometimes year 2, of a degree.

Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)

An HND normally takes two years full time (2-3 days a week at college), or four years part time (one day or two evenings a week at college). For entry you usually need 1–2 relevant Highers plus other subjects at National 5, or a relevant NC or NQ.

With an HNC in the same subject you can complete an HND in one year full time or two years part time and you may be able to go into year 2, or occasionally year 3, of a degree.

For more information on HNC and HND courses see the Qualifications Scotland website.

Professional Development Awards (PDAs)

Most PDAs are for people in work or looking for employment, who wish to extend their skills. They focus on specialist skills in a particular occupational area.

PDAs are offered at SCQF Levels 6-12. PDA titles include reference to the SCQF level – for example, PDA in Administrative Management at SCQF Level 8. People taking the higher level PDAs normally have qualifications or considerable experience in their career area.

PDAs are made up of National Units or Higher National Units and workplace assessed units. Most are run part time, either at colleges or by employers.

Other Higher Education Qualifications

You can progress to a degree from other qualifications such as HNC or HND. With a relevant HNC you may get into year 1, or possibly year 2. With a relevant HND you may get into Year 2, or possibly year 3.

Some colleges offer degrees, which may be through formal 'articulation' arrangements with universities or institutes of higher education. These link specific HNC or HND courses for entry into a particular degree course.

Useful Websites

You can find more information on qualifications on the Qualifications Scotland website and Planit.

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT & QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

The SCQF lets you compare Scottish qualifications in terms of:

- how difficult they are to achieve (described as an SCQF level); and
- how many hours of learning is required (described as SCQF credit points).

So, even when the content of courses is different, you can compare them by level and the number of credit points you get. This makes it easier to see how one course relates to another. It also helps you to work out how to move on, or move between, qualifications and plan what you need to do next to get into the course or job you want to do.

Note - SCQF credit points are different from UCAS tariff points.

Levels

There are 12 levels, ranging from level 1 for basic education to level 12 for very advanced education, such as a doctoral degree.

The SCQF table shows how some very different qualifications are at the same level. For example, the Advanced Higher is level 7, and so is the HNC. This doesn't mean they are the same. The content is different and they are assessed differently, but they are of an equal level.

Course information records on Planit list the SCQF level allocated to the course wherever possible.

SCQF Levels	Qualifications of Qualifications Scotland (formerly SQA)			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutes	Apprenticeships and SVQs
12				Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11				Integrated Masters Degree/ Masters Degree Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship SVQ
10				Honours Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship SVQ
9			Professional Development Award	Bachelors / Ordinary Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Higher Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
8		Higher National Diploma		Diploma of Higher Education	
7	Advanced Higher Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate		Certificate of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
6	Higher SfW Higher				Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
5	National 5 SfW National 5				Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
4	National 4 SfW National 4	National Certificate	National Progression Award		Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
3	National 3 SfW National 3				
2	National 2				
1	National 1				

* SfW = Skills for Work