



University of Essex

Guide to university terminology

Applying to university can involve a lot of jargon. We have created a guide explaining some commonly used terms you might come across when applying for an undergraduate course.

A

Alumni – the term used to describe students who have completed their degree and graduated from a particular university.

Applicant Portal – once a student has submitted a university application, they will receive access to an online applicant portal to keep track of their application status. It shows all information about that application, including whether they have received an offer or whether they need to submit any supporting documents. Students can also update their personal contact information.

B

Bachelor of Arts / BA – these are usually courses based on Arts and Humanities subjects such as English Literature, Art History, Drama and Philosophy etc.

Bachelor of Engineering / BEng – this covers all types of engineering degree.

Bachelor of Laws / LLB – a law degree.

Bachelor of Science / BSc – these are usually science or IT based courses that require some lab time, whether that is in a science lab or a computer one.

Bursary – a non-repayable sum of money that a university may award to students meeting certain eligibility criteria to help them with the costs of their university study.

C

Campus university – on a campus university, everything is in one place, including lecture rooms, accommodation and shops/restaurants. A campus university might have more than one site, or campuses in different locations, but each site will have all the facilities needed in one place. Campus universities have a real community feel to them.

CertHE / Certificate of Higher Education – a level 4 qualification that gives students a foundation level knowledge in a specific subject and is equivalent to the first level or year of a Bachelor's degree. It

can be completed as a standalone qualification or may also be awarded when a student leaves their degree early (if they have completed the first year of their degree). Once awarded, students can then choose to progress to higher level study, such as a full Bachelor's degree. A good choice for students that don't want or need a full degree but want some further study and qualifications to add to their CV.

Change of course offer – students might receive a change of course offer from their university if they have not met the entry requirements for the course that they applied for, and the university considers that the student would be suitable for a different course. This might also happen if there have been any changes to the original course that the student applied for.

City university – a city university will have buildings and facilities located in different parts of a town or city, rather than having everything on one site. Often, the buildings are close to each other and located in a similar area. You would need to walk or take a bus to travel between facilities, and you would get a real flavour of the area.

Clearing – this offers students the chance to apply to university using their actual grades, rather than their predicted grades, and is the final part of the application cycle. If a student has only just decided that they want to go to university, if their grades are better than predicted, if they have changed their mind about where they want to go, or if they have not achieved the grades that they thought they would, they can use Clearing.

Conditional Firm (CF) – a conditional offer that an applicant has accepted as their firm choice. Once any conditions have been met, their offer will change to an unconditional firm.

Conditional offer (C) – an offer of a place on a course that requires students to meet certain conditions before their offer becomes unconditional. A conditional offer usually (but not always) requires a student to achieve certain grades. If a student holding a conditional offer on results day meets the grades required, then the offer will be changed to unconditional on their UCAS account. Other offer conditions may also be included, and if so, these would be clearly set out in the offer letter.

Contextual offer – an offer which is usually lower than the standard entry requirements. A university may make a contextual offer when they take any personal circumstances into account.

Credits – each module is worth a certain number of credits. To be able to progress to the next level of study and to complete their degree, students will need to complete and pass a certain number of credits.

D

Deferral – if a student wishes to take a year out between applying and starting their course, they can choose to defer their offer to start their studies during the next academic year.

Degree Apprenticeships – there are increasingly more opportunities to apply for a degree apprenticeship where students will be earning money working for a company as an apprentice whilst also undertaking their degree at the same time. There is competition for these courses, but students are earning from the start and their degree is paid for! Fitting in both working and studying requires commitment, excellent time management and organisational skills. To find out about these opportunities, please see the UCAS website or head to the [apprenticeships website](#).

Department – a specific academic section of a university that focuses on teaching a certain subject area, e.g. the Department of Law.

DipHE / Diploma of Higher Education – a level 5 qualification that is equivalent to the first two years of a degree and is awarded either as a standalone qualification or after completing two levels/years of Bachelor's degree study.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) – available to UK students to cover some of the specialist support that students might require due to a specific learning disability, mental health condition, long term illness or other disability. To find out more, head to our [webpages](#).

Dissertation – a large-scale research project. An undergraduate course usually offers a dissertation module that takes up a large number of credits in your final year. Whether students have to do a dissertation will depend on the subject you study and the university.

E

Equal Consideration Deadline – the deadline by which students need to submit their university application via UCAS. Students may still apply after this date, but some university courses may have closed, or spaces may be limited. Many universities will keep a large number of courses open past this deadline.

F

Faculty – a broad term used to describe a group of academic schools or departments in a university. The departments within a faculty will usually belong to a similar or related subject area. For example, the Faculty of Social Sciences at Essex includes departments such as Economics, Essex Business School, Government, Languages and Linguistics, and Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies.

Firm choice – an applicant's first or preferred choice. Once they accept this offer (which can be conditional or unconditional), it becomes their firm choice.

Foundation Year / Year Zero – if a student hasn't reached the entry requirements for undergraduate study for their course, they may be offered a foundation programme which has modules where they can develop their subject knowledge and academic skills before embarking on their degree course. For example, at the University of Essex we have Essex Pathways.

G

Graduate – a student who has finished their degree and passed.

H

Hardship Fund – provides discretionary funding to support students who have had an unexpected, exceptional change in their financial circumstances that has resulted in short-term financial difficulty that could not have been reasonably expected. It is not designed to cover course tuition fees. See eligibility criteria [here](#).

I

Insurance choice – an applicant's second, or back-up, choice. Once they accept this offer, it becomes their insurance choice in case they do not meet the conditions of their firm choice.

Integrated masters – a combination of three years of undergraduate level study with a final year at postgraduate/masters level so that when complete, students graduate with a masters-level qualification.

J

Joint honours degree – a course where students study two subjects. If the course title has the word 'AND' in the middle it means that both subjects are equal in content. If it has the word 'WITH' then the first subject will have more content than the second.

For example: Politics and History, or Politics with History.

L

Lecture – a more formal presentation of a subject delivered by a member of department. Often a large number of students will be in a lecture and the lecturer will provide the key information on the subject being taught, with students taking notes. They will usually take place in a larger lecture hall or theatre.

Level 2 qualification – a high school qualification typically taken at age 16, such as GCSEs (or international high school equivalents).

Level 3 qualification – refers to school, college, or sixth form qualifications typically taken in years 12 and 13, such as A-Levels, BTECs and T-levels (or international equivalents).

M

Maintenance loan – available to UK students to help towards living costs while studying an undergraduate course. The amount you can access depends on household income, whether the

university is in London or not and whether students will be living at home during their studies. If the amount of the loan does not cover all living costs, students would need to cover the rest themselves.

Modules – each course is broken down into smaller sections called modules. There are core modules that need to be completed and then there are optional modules.

For example: BA Film Studies - Possible modules might include: American Film Authors, World Cinema, Dystopias, Disney and the Globalisation of Childhood...etc.

O

Offer Holder Day – an exclusive opportunity for students holding an offer to visit a university in person, meet with their department and get a better understanding of their course to make sure it's the right fit. They can meet with current students and find out more about what it would be like to study there.

Open Day – provides applicants and their families or friends with the chance to look around a university, speak to staff and current students, and get a feel for what it would be like to study there.

P

Personal statement – a statement designed to support a student's university application. It is a chance for students to personalise their application and to explain why they have applied for their course and why they would make a great student. The same personal statement will be sent to all courses and universities a student has applied for.

Personal tutor – a named member of an academic department who acts as an adviser for students and helps support their academic needs and goals.

Placement year – students can often choose to add a year to their university course where they gain experience in the workplace, before returning to their university to complete their degree.

Plagiarism – cheating by copying or using another person's work without acknowledgement. This will result in a university taking disciplinary action.

Postgraduate – a student who returns to university after their first degree to study at a higher level. A Master's Degree is usually the next step which typically takes a year to complete. After this a student can go on to study for a PhD which usually takes a further 3 years of study.

R

Reference – a written recommendation from someone who knows a student in a professional manner, often this will be written by a teacher or adviser at school, or someone who works with a student. The UCAS application includes a reference section which is where the referee will write their recommendations.

Registration – when an applicant formally completes all the requirements to become an official university student.

S

Sandwich courses – courses that include a placement year or year abroad - which is usually after the second year of study - then students return to their university for the final year of study.

Scholarship – additional financial support awarded by universities to students meeting eligibility criteria. They are usually non-repayable and are awarded based on academic achievement or personal circumstances.

Seminar – a small group session where students discuss topics that have been presented during previous lectures with other students and academics. A seminar gives the chance to explore issues in more detail.

Single honours degree – a degree course where only one subject is studied in detail, such as Biological Sciences.

Student Ambassador – a current university student who represents and promotes a university to other young people. They will often help with events on campus, in schools and online.

Student Finance – a loan programme offered by the government, through Student Finance England, that helps students pay for their tuition fees and living costs through a tuition fee loan and a separate maintenance loan.

Students' Union (SU) – part of a university run by students to represent all students. They usually organise and represent all clubs, societies, sports and events at a university.

T

Tuition fee loan – a loan available for UK students on a full-time undergraduate course which covers the full amount of the tuition fee, regardless of household income. The tuition fee is paid directly to the university after registration. Students will only start to pay this loan back after they have graduated from their course and are earning over a certain amount of income from employment.

U

UCAS – the Universities and Colleges Application System. If a student wishes to study at university in the UK, then they need to apply through UCAS. They can apply for up to 5 courses, or 4 if they want to study medicine, veterinary science or dentistry. Students then receive replies from the universities as to

whether they will offer a place and any conditions that need to meet to be accepted. Then students choose their firm and insurance choice from those they have received offers from.

UCAS Extra – if a student has used all 5 of their choices and find that they don't receive an offer, they will be able to add an additional choice through UCAS Extra.

UCAS Points / UCAS Tariff Points – some universities will ask for grades; some will ask for UCAS points. Each grade is worth a certain number of UCAS points, and students have to add together the points they have from their grades to meet, or exceed, the points requested by the university. Check out the [UCAS website](#) for further details.

Unconditional Firm (UF) – an unconditional offer that an applicant has accepted as their firm choice.

Unconditional offer (U) – an offer of a place on a course without any conditions that need to be met.

Undergraduate – a student who is currently studying for their degree, which typically takes 3 years to complete.

Unsuccessful decision (R) – if a university has decided not to offer the student a place, they will make an unsuccessful decision on their application. If a student wishes to know why their application was unsuccessful, they can contact the university to ask for feedback.

W

Withdrawal – this is where either the student or the university has withdrawn a course choice on UCAS. The reason for the withdrawal should be shown on their UCAS account.

Y

Year abroad – a program that allows students to spend an academic year studying abroad at a partner institution in a different country. This is often during the penultimate year of the degree course.