



for schools
for individuals
for employers

**Mature Students' Guide
to Higher Education**

It's never too late to learn!

If you are over 21 and are considering returning to education then this guide is for you. You may have taken some time out to have children, be looking to change or further your career, or simply want to learn more about the area you are interested in.

There are many reasons why you may feel that higher education is out of your reach due to age, lifestyle and financial constraints. However it is possible to juggle work and course commitments, many courses can be studied part-time and financial help is available.

It's never too late to learn and this guide will offer some useful information on higher education, tips on getting through some of the barriers you may face as a mature learner and advice on what to do next.



What is Higher Education (HE)?

Qualifications in the UK range from level 1 to level 8. HE courses are those set at a higher level of difficulty (level 4 up to level 8) than for example A-levels, level 3 NVQs, Access to HE Diplomas and other courses at level 3 and below. You can study HE programmes at universities, HE colleges and some Further Education Colleges.



Types of HE Qualifications

Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma (HNC/HND)

Vocational qualifications that will prepare you for a career in a certain occupational area. A HNC is equivalent in difficulty to the first year of a degree and a HND equivalent to the second year of a degree.

Typical length of course:

1 year (HNC) or 2 years (HND) full-time

Benefits:

- Shorter course than others
 - either 1 or 2 years full time
 - On completion you may be able to use the qualification to join a degree course in the 2nd or 3rd year
-

Foundation Degree (FD)

Vocational qualification that can be studied in various work-related subjects. The course combines academic and work-related learning.

Typical length of course:

2 years full-time

Benefits:

- FDs have been developed in partnership with employers so are designed to meet employers' skills needs
- On completion you may be able to use the qualification to join a degree course in the final year

Extended Degree

An honours or foundation degree with an additional year (foundation year) of study at the start of the course. The foundation year is designed to enhance your skills and knowledge to equip you for the later years of the course.

Typical length of course:

4 years full-time

Benefits:

- An ideal qualification for students with few or no formal qualifications who are returning to education. You do not always need formal qualifications to get onto the course.
-

Honours Degree (BA/BSc)

The most popular type of HE qualification. It is a subject based qualification designed to give you a thorough understanding of a particular area.

Typical length of course:

3 years full-time (4 years if course includes a year in industry or abroad)

Benefits:

- You can study almost any subject and it offers a very thorough understanding and high level of knowledge in that subject.
- This is a level 6 qualification (rather than level 4 or 5 as the above are) so could open up more opportunities to you on completion

Visit the [Higher York HE course database](http://www.higheryork.org/study/courses) for details of courses offered by our partner institutions: www.higheryork.org/study/courses

All of the above courses can be studied either full-time or part-time (though not at all institutions).

“How do I get onto a Higher Education course?”

There are many different academic and vocational qualifications which allow entry onto HE courses, but don't worry if you don't have any of these formal qualifications. It doesn't mean you can't study at degree level.


Mature students come from a wide range of backgrounds and can enter HE through various routes including:

- Already possessing an academic or vocational qualification
- Using experiences from work, voluntary activities or other areas. This is sometimes referred to as APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning)
- Completing an Access to HE Diploma designed for adults with few or no formal qualifications
- Enrolling onto an Extended Degree programme which offers a 'Foundation Year' at the start of the course
- Returning to College to study A Levels



“As a mature student I have gained knowledge, friendships and a new career. My advice to anyone thinking about starting a course; if you are a mature student you won't feel out of place; if you have young children you will get support to help you through your studies; if you have a disability you won't be disadvantaged; if you are looking to start or change your career then you will get lots of help. Go for it! It could be life changing!”

**Shelly, Fd Equine Science & Husbandry,
Craven College**



Want to find out about HE courses in York?

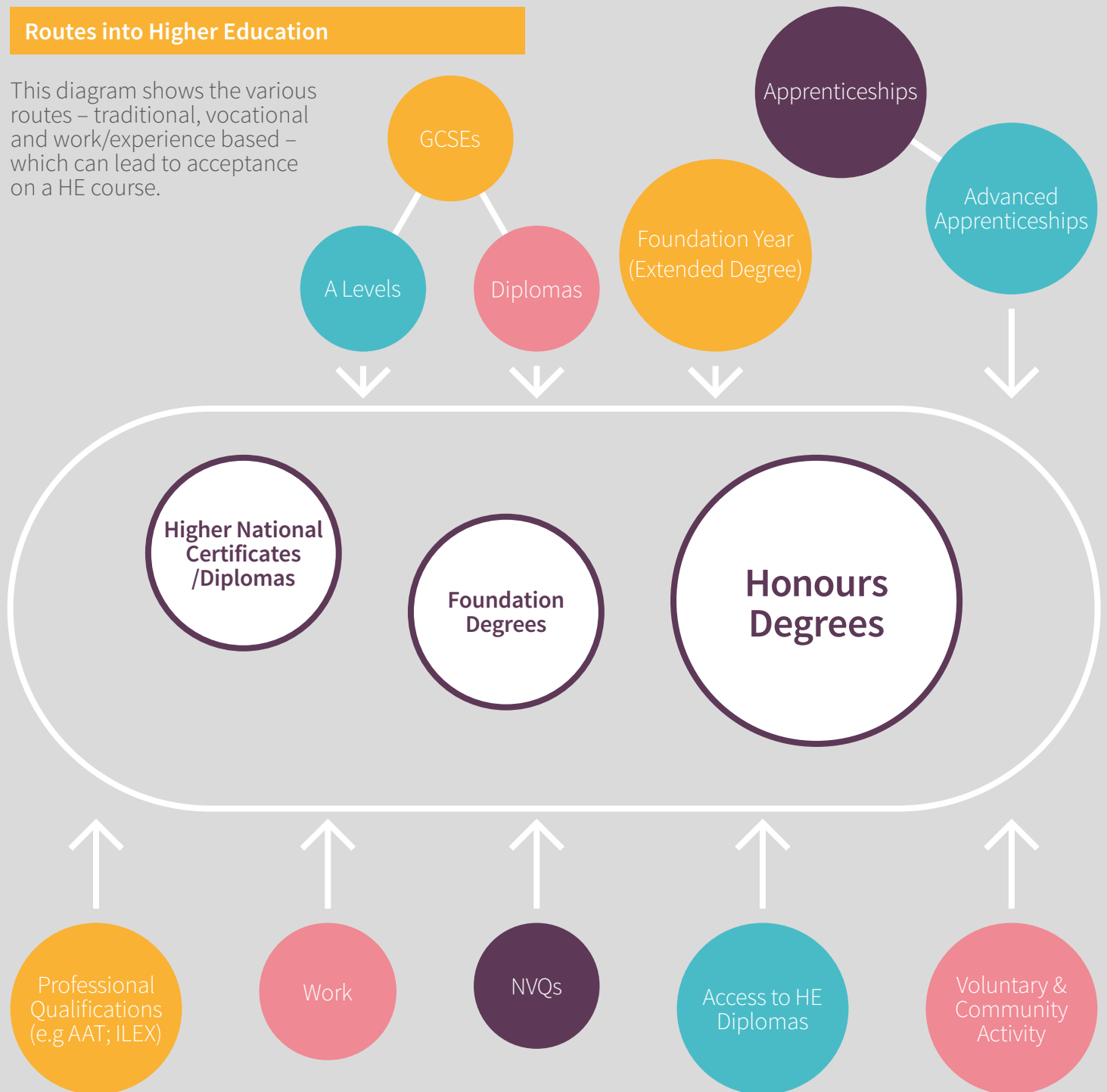
visit www.higheryork.org

Did you know...

If you are over 24 and decide to study for an Access to HE Diploma as a route into HE you can apply for a 24+ Advanced Learning Loan to help fund the tuition fees. Student Finance England will 'write off' any outstanding 24+ Advanced Learning Loans you owe for an Access course once you complete a HE course. This means you don't have to repay it if you go on to get a degree.

Routes into Higher Education

This diagram shows the various routes – traditional, vocational and work/experience based – which can lead to acceptance on a HE course.





So what's stopping you?

Returning to education can be daunting and there are lots of reasons why you could feel that it may not be an option for you. In this section we explore some of the common barriers that over 21s face and some solutions that are available.

“I have too many commitments to study full time”

You don't have to study full time! These days many students choose to study part-time in order to combine work and family commitments with studying. The individual university or college (see page 15 for useful contacts) can give you details about part-time courses available.



“Doing a degree was something I had thought was beyond reach in my 30s. As a lone parent of a two year old, relocating to Higher Education has had its challenges but I can't stress how much support the university makes available to you... Not only have I gained knowledge and access to career prospects, but I have also benefited in terms of self esteem, pride and new friends.”

Claire, BA Politics, University of York

“I don't have any qualifications or the right qualifications”

If admissions departments are not able to offer you a place on your chosen course based on your skills and experience they will be able to advise you what you need to do (i.e. qualifications to study, experience to gain) in order for them to consider you for the specific course.

So, even if you don't have the appropriate entry qualifications to start with, don't give up. You can go back to college to take A-levels or vocational qualifications or enrol on an Access to HE course.

Access courses take a year to complete (or longer part-time) and teach basic study skills, required for degree courses, as well as subject specific modules.

“I can’t afford it”

Funding your studies is a big concern for all students, but especially if you are a mature student. You may be giving up a regular wage to commence full-time study and/or have adult or child dependants.

For full-time students

There are loans and grants available to help with tuition fee costs and other costs associated with student life:

- Tuition Fee Loans
- Maintenance Grants
- Maintenance Loans
- Parents’ Learning Allowance and Childcare Grant for students with children
- Adult Dependants’ Grant if you live with a partner or other adult who depends on you financially

There is no upper age limit for Tuition Fee Loans or Grants. To apply for a Maintenance Loan you have to be under 60 at the start of the academic year.

The amount of Maintenance Loan and any Grants you get will depend on your household income.

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“The Student Loans website was really easy to follow. In fact, I couldn’t believe how easy it was and because of these loans I can now study to do other things which I always thought were out of my reach. I would definitely recommend this to anyone who is considering studying a higher education course.”

Sylvia, Access to Art and Design, York College

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For part-time students

Tuition Fee Loans are available for each year of your course.

For Access to HE courses

24+ Advanced Learning Loans are available for Access to HE Diplomas and other level 3 and 4 qualifications. If you then go on to complete a HE course the loan will be written off and you won’t need to repay it.

You can visit www.gov.uk/student-finance for more details about the financial assistance you may qualify for. Alternatively contact a student finance adviser at the university or college where you are considering studying.

(see page 15 for contact details)

Financial support for disabled students

Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs) are available to both full-time and part-time HE students with a disability, long term health condition or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia. A DSA can help to meet the cost of any additional equipment or support you may need to access your course.

More information is available at www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

If you think you may be eligible for a DSA you are encouraged to contact the university or college where you would like to study to find out more about the support available to you.

“I have work commitments”

You can study many qualifications part-time or through distance or flexible learning. By studying part-time you should be able to combine studying with other commitments such as work and family life. Flexible learning allows you to study at your own pace, effectively fitting your studies around any other commitments you have.

If you choose to study full time and you need to earn while you learn it is still possible to juggle work and course commitments. Once lecture and seminar times have been confirmed (although this may not be until the start of term) you can try and arrange working hours to fit around these.

Wages from part-time work are not taken into account when working out how much Maintenance Loan or Grant you are entitled to. You need to bear in mind, however, that as well as the time you are required to be in university or college, you will need to spend additional time studying independently.

It is therefore advisable not to work too many hours. Universities and colleges generally recommend that you work no more than 16 hours a week, if you are studying full-time.

Need more advice on finding your course?

visit www.higheryork.org

“I have worked in hairdressing for twenty years and make-up for eight years and I wanted to study a degree course to really expand and hone my skills. York College offered exactly what I wanted and luckily I arranged my working hours to free up two days a week to travel from Cambridge to York to study the course.”

Melanie, FD in Media Make-Up, Special Effects, Make-Up and Hair Design, York College



“I have children”

If you have dependent children, finding and funding good quality childcare will be at the top of your list of concerns. There are many registered childcare providers to choose from and many universities and colleges have a private nursery on campus.

Financing your childcare

If you are a full time HE student you can apply for a Childcare Grant.

The Grant helps with childcare costs for children under 15, or under 17 if they have special educational needs.

You must be eligible for student finance to apply for a Childcare Grant. Any money you get is paid on top of your student finance and you don't have to pay it back.

Most registered childcare providers only offer daytime places, so if you need to be at college or university in the evening, you'll need to organise this separately.

Want to find out more about support for students with families?

visit www.higheryork.org



Did you know...

Full-time students with children could also get a Parents' Learning Allowance to help with their learning costs. The money can help pay for books, study materials and travel. How much you get depends on your household income.

You may also be eligible to claim some means-tested benefits and/or Tax Credits in addition to your student loans and grants. Check with a student finance adviser at the university or college where you are considering studying.

“Studying part-time while working (as Deputy Manager at a nursery) took a full five years but it fitted in well around my job and family and was manageable once I had established a set routine and was organised, in terms of a work/life balance. My experience at Craven has been a very positive one, studying at a higher level has changed me on both a personal and professional level and has enabled me to fulfil goals I never thought I would.”

Catherine, BA Hons Young Children's Learning and Development, Craven College



“As a mature student, you know how things work in the real world and you have very high expectations, especially when you’re paying for something. But for me it certainly proved to be a good investment”

Diane, BSc Hons in Horticulture,
Askham Bryan College

What to do next

1. Choose which course to study

Once you've decided that HE is something you wish to pursue, you need to decide which course you would like to study. This may sound daunting but it needn't be. Simply follow these three steps:

i) Gather Information

Once you've looked at all the usual sources of information (i.e. prospectuses, university and college websites) it may be worth contacting a department admissions tutor for further details about a course. Open days are also an excellent way to find out more about particular courses as well as life at a university or college.

Visit www.opendays.com or www.higheryork.org/events/open-days for details of forthcoming open days, or contact your local providers for dates of forthcoming events. Some universities and colleges offer information events aimed specifically at mature learners and some may be able to arrange a bespoke visit for you and a tour of the facilities.



ii) Seek Advice

You may benefit from speaking to a professional trained in offering advice and guidance about HE choices (see useful contacts on page 15).

Amongst other things you will be able to get advice on:

- Where to study
- What subject to study
- Whether to study an academic or a vocational course
- Whether to study full time, part time or by distance learning

iii) Make a Decision

After gathering information and seeking advice, you will hopefully feel adequately equipped to make some decisions about your HE future. The next step is to apply for your chosen course.

2. Apply for your chosen course

Once you've decided which HE course you are interested in, you will need to submit an application.

Full time courses

How to apply:

You need to apply via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) - www.ucas.com

When to apply:

In order to ensure your application is guaranteed equal academic consideration you need to apply before 15 January in the year you are hoping to commence your course (15 October for Oxford or Cambridge, and all courses in medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine/s).

What happens next?

If you submit your application to UCAS by the above deadlines, by the end of March you should have received decisions from all the institutions you applied to.

Once you have carefully considered any offers, you need to let UCAS know which you wish to accept by the deadline in early May.

Part time courses (including Access to HE courses)

How to apply:

If you decide to apply for a part time course you need to apply direct to the institution you wish to study at. See useful contacts on page 15.

When to apply:

There is no official deadline (as for full time courses) but many part-time courses fill up quickly so it is advisable to get your application in as soon as possible – from the September before you are thinking of starting your course.

What happens next?

The university or college will contact you to inform you whether or not they are offering you a place.

Timescales will vary depending on where you've applied and at what time of year you submitted your application - this may be something you want to ask the university or college admissions department.



Need help with your application?
visit www.higheryork.org

Case Study

David Shuttleworth

Further Education Tutor

Following a 25 year career in the Financial Services sector I was made redundant in 2012. After spending some time as a volunteer classroom assistant at both York College and Leeds City College I enrolled on the full time, pre-service PGCE course at York College in order to gain the necessary skills and experience I needed to fulfil my ambition to launch a new career in the teaching profession.

As a result of the course, I made significant changes to my practice and continued to learn and adapt throughout the whole duration of my studies and teaching placement activities.

The course was demanding both intellectually and in terms of having to successfully juggle my time in order to complete the work and assignments required.

I received tremendous support from my course tutors and my mentor, not to mention the support provided by the other PGCE students.

“The course was ultimately thought provoking, stimulating and highly rewarding; all of which has provided me with the knowledge and confidence to put my learning into practice as I take my first steps as a Further Education tutor”.



About us

Higher York is a partnership between Askham Bryan College, the University of York, York College, York St John University and the City of York Council. Craven College is an associate member of Higher York.

For more information please visit:

www.higheryork.org

Get in touch via:

contactus@higheryork.org

Contacts

Askham Bryan College

www.askham-bryan.ac.uk
01904 772 277

University of York

www.york.ac.uk/mature
01904 323 196

York College

www.yorkcollege.ac.uk
01904 770 397

York St John University

www.yorksja.ac.uk/wp
01904 876 598

Craven College

www.craven-college.ac.uk
01756 791 411

Other useful sources of information

For access to personal advisers and lots of information to help you choose or change career:

National Careers Service

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

For information on financial support available and how to apply:

Student Finance England

www.gov.uk/student-finance

For details on applying to full-time HE courses:

UCAS

www.ucas.com

Further useful resources and links on the Higher York website:

www.higheryork.org/mature





www.higheryork.org
01904 876 350
contactus@higheryork.org



UNIVERSITY *of York*



ASKHAM BRYAN COLLEGE

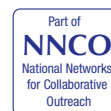


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