IS HIGHER EDUCATION FOR ADULTS?

yes

IT’S FOR YOU
If you want to make a change in your life, progress in your career or would love the challenge of learning something new then higher education could be for you.

Further study or training can improve your chances of getting back into work, getting a new job or having a career change.

It has always been possible for adult learners to return to higher levels of study after a break from education - and to proceed you don’t necessarily have to have all the usual educational qualifications.

This booklet includes quotes from current mature students, a range of practical advice about the options available to you and how to reach them.

So if the question is ‘Is higher education for adults?’

Yes it’s for you!
IS HIGHER EDUCATION FOR YOU?

Making the decision to return to education is not always easy. You may need to consider factors such as finance, childcare, caring responsibilities and work commitments.

However there is a wide range of support for mature students and many adults successfully make the transition back into education.

This booklet provides information and practical advice, and for further information and case study videos from mature learners, you can visit www.yesprogress.org.

Higher education isn’t just for teenagers!

Higher education isn’t just for 18 year-olds. Many people can and do start higher education courses at wide ranging times in their life.

I’d always regretted not pursuing higher education in my youth so when I saw a poster for mature students I decided to see what was on offer.

John, University of Sheffield student

THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR MATURE LEARNERS

People with higher level qualifications are likely to earn more than those without, however there are plenty of other benefits including studying something you are passionate about, the people you meet, the sense of achievement, and developing new ways of looking at problems.

Here are a few other good reasons for doing a higher education course

- Many vocational programmes are directly related to particular work areas you may be interested in - such as accountancy, business administration, sports studies, surveying and teaching.
- Higher education qualifications are essential for entry to some careers, such as architecture, dentistry, and nursing.
- A degree, diploma or HND improves your chances of obtaining a fulfilling job and increasing your earnings.
- To open up new opportunities or possibilities.
- Higher education learning helps you develop important transferable skills including planning, communication and teamwork. These can give you the edge in the job market.
- You can study your favourite subject for personal enjoyment or because it is something you have always wanted to do.
- You can study full-time, part-time or even through distance learning.

The average graduate earns £9,500 per year more than the average non-graduate.

By 2020, it is estimated that 40% of the workforce will require higher level skills (the skills associated with higher education).
CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS

Higher education covers a wide variety of different courses, taught at traditional universities and further education colleges. They can lead to the award of an undergraduate honours degree, foundation degree, certificate or diploma in higher education.

Start your research early

- what subjects suit your career aspirations?
- are there courses related to your hobbies or interests?
- what do you wish to achieve by the end of your studies?
- do you need work experience?

The appropriate route for you to take towards certain qualifications may need to be identified much earlier than you think. If, for example, you wish to become a nurse or teacher, you will need some relevant experience (for example as a volunteer) before you apply for a degree course, so this will need to be arranged in plenty of time.

Whatever your aspirations or interests, at an early stage you need to investigate which universities offer this degree and what their entry requirements might be.

“I was at a point in my life where I was looking for a career to not only support my young daughter but also inspire her to aim for her own goals in the future.”

Gemma, University Campus Barnsley student

Don’t worry about all the reasons why you shouldn’t go. Just give it a go, because it is potentially a life-changing experience!

Mark, University of Sheffield student
WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE BEFORE AND ON THE COURSE?

All higher education providers offer a range of academic and financial advice services for all students. Many also have specific support for mature students, including mentoring schemes, welcome events and mature student committees.

Before you start studying
College or university admissions tutors welcome enquiries from prospective students, so you can contact them for help. You should also take advantage of open days to look around and ask questions.

Every college and university will have student services and support teams that can help prospective students make the right decision about course options.

If you are already enrolled at a college and are looking to progress to higher education, then your tutors and advisors will offer you help and advice on your application.

Getting help and support when you are on the course
Your tutors are your first port of call for any problems or questions you have about assignments or any of the course requirements. Find out where their office is and make sure that you ask them for help if you need it. That’s what they are there for!

Student support services at institutions are specially trained to offer students advice, guidance and support in all areas. For example, if you are experiencing any personal issues which are affecting your studies. So make sure you find out where the support services department is and what they can offer you.

Many colleges and universities have other support too such as study support and counselling, so do your research and discover what’s available.

Finance
There will be specialised finance advisors to offer advice on student finance and money management. They are also a valuable point of contact if you experience difficulties.

Unions and peer support
Student Unions often have Mature Students’ Officers and Committees which aim to represent the views of mature students on campus and campaign on issues which may affect you. You may find peer support networks or mentoring schemes where you can access advice from a mature student already studying.

Careers services
Look out for careers services which can help you find part-time employment whilst studying. They will help you to explore your career options and offer support with your CV, job applications and interviews.

Childcare
Many institutions offer childcare provision, such as nurseries. You would be advised to check availability and whether there is a waiting list at an early stage. You may prefer to consider a nursery close to your home, or whether a childminder would offer more flexibility for your own personal circumstances.
GETTING INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Depending on the type of course and institution you want to access, there are a variety of routes open to you. All higher education institutions actively welcome mature learners (at 21 or over this means you!), but you will need to demonstrate to them both your aptitude for and your commitment to that particular route of study - some recent experience of study at an appropriate level is usually needed.

Typically, learners demonstrate these requirements by studying on a preparatory access course or foundation year, A levels or BTEC level 3 at a local college. Certain pre-degree level foundation courses may also be available.

Sometimes there will be specific requirements for the course you want to progress to - for example, a science subject or mathematics. It may also be necessary to have a GCSE (often English or maths) to ensure that you will be able to cope with the course content, although some institutions will offer tests at the interview stage for those who don't possess GCSEs. If you are unsure about the qualifications you already have, or want advice on the qualifications you need, contact the institution offering your chosen higher education course for advice.

You may already have the qualifications and /or experience to progress directly into higher education. If you’re not sure if you are ready to apply, the ‘Yes Progress!’ website www.yesprogress.org can help you to identify and assess your existing skills.

The main methods of delivery of the courses are:

a) **Full-time courses** - usually taught during the daytime in two or three blocks of twelve weeks ‘semesters’ or ‘terms’ (also requiring additional work on your part outside the main teaching period).

b) **Part-time courses** - usually taught one or two days a week, or evenings and weekends, again in blocks of approximately twelve weeks each, and again requiring additional work outside the main teaching periods.

c) **Distance learning** - allowing you to work mainly from home, using the internet and other text-based resources, but also with regular telephone, email and more limited face-to-face contacts with tutors.

d) **Vocational and work-based courses and training** - including ‘sandwich’ courses and foundation degrees, some of which provide the opportunity both to study and to earn ‘on the job’.

Note - the time spent in university or college may be less than you expect. An important part of qualifying is learning to study independently, outside the classroom. A full-time course may involve 35 hours per week, but the time spent in the classroom can vary from 5 to 25 depending on the course and year of study.
The best route into higher education for you will depend on many factors. Qualifications that are specifically designed for adult learners such as Access to Higher Education Diplomas and foundation years allow you to benefit from:

- studying with a group of like-minded learners
- studying locally, usually with hours suited to adult learners
- informal, adult-friendly methods of teaching and learning
- study skills that are designed with progression on to higher education courses in mind

**ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES**

Access to Higher Education Diplomas are nationally recognised awards which are accepted by most universities and colleges for entry to a wide range of degree level courses including nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy, science, social work, teaching, computing, business, law, art and sport.

**The Access Diploma is a qualification which prepares people without traditional qualifications to start at university.**

Access programmes are offered in most further education colleges across Sheffield city-region, in subjects such as:

- art and design
- business
- computing
- education
- health science professions
- humanities and social sciences
- science
- sport

As well as giving you academic knowledge in your chosen subject, all access to higher education courses include core units which will help you to develop the study skills you need to succeed at university such as research skills, presentation skills, essay writing and examination techniques. You may be advised by your local college to do GCSE English and/or maths as some universities and colleges ask for these in addition to the Access Diploma.

Access courses are normally one year full-time, though some may be available by part-time study or online. You apply directly to the college where you’d like to study - make sure you do this well in advance of the time you plan to start.

**Funding your course**

There are fees for an access course, but mature students can take out an advanced learning loan to cover this. If you go on to successfully complete both your access course and degree course, you will not pay this back. The loans are not written off until you complete your degree course but because you are not likely to have reached the repayment earnings threshold you will not have made any repayments.

For more information on access courses, visit www.accessstohe.ac.uk

**Access Diplomas are delivered in colleges and available in a range of different subjects.**
FOUNDATION YEARS

Some university courses provide their own foundation years (sometimes also called preparatory years) to prepare students for progression on to the first year of a degree. The local courses currently available and web addresses for more information are listed below. Applications for these courses are made through UCAS.

Sheffield Hallam University

Offer extended degree programmes in

• art and design
• biosciences and chemistry
• business
• computing
• engineering and maths
• media arts and communications

These are designed for those that do not have traditional qualifications or cannot meet the entry requirements for study at degree level. The entry requirements vary but all courses typically require 5 GCSEs at grade C (or grade 4) or above including English and maths.

Successful completion allows you to progress on to the first year of a relevant undergraduate degree course.

University of Sheffield

Department for Lifelong Learning

Degrees with a foundation year (full and part-time) are designed specifically for mature learners who have been out of education for some time and haven’t previously accessed higher education. The requirements for entry are different from those for students wishing to enter directly onto a degree programme. They are committed to supporting learners from non-traditional backgrounds to succeed at university and will consider a range of factors including previous work, life and educational experience.

The foundation year focuses on developing students’ academic skills, confidence and subject knowledge before progressing onto their chosen degree course (subject to achieving the required grades on the foundation year). Courses are currently available in over 23 different degree subjects across arts and humanities, social sciences, health and natural sciences.

Foundation programme in combined studies (part-time) - this course provides a thorough preparation for a wide range of degree courses. It is suitable for mature learners who haven’t yet chosen a degree course, or want to study for a degree for which there isn’t currently a specific foundation year. Entry requirements are the same as those for a degree with a foundation year (see above).

Certificate in higher education – society and culture (part-time). This course is designed for students looking for a shorter, flexible part-time programme of study. It is equivalent to level 1 of a degree and can provide a pathway into further degree level study.

www.shu.ac.uk

www.sheffield.ac.uk/dll

Of the total students at Sheffield Hallam University in 2017/18, 33% are mature students. For many health related courses the proportion of mature students is much higher.
FOUNDATION DEGREES

Foundation degrees combine academic study with work-based learning. They are designed jointly by universities, colleges and employers, and are available in a range of work-related subjects. Typically, you’ll get the chance to learn in the workplace as well as the classroom. They usually take around two years to complete full-time, and part-time courses take longer.

Foundation degrees are university-level qualifications in their own right, and are also equivalent to the first two years of a full-time honours degree. Once you’ve got a foundation degree (FdA or FdSc) you can ‘top up’ your qualification to an honours degree (BA or BSc). This usually involves an extra year studying full-time (or the part-time equivalent).

Please note, there are other types of foundation course available, not to be confused with a Foundation degree. Some universities and colleges offer ‘Foundation courses’ which are degree preparation courses similar to access courses. There is also the Art and Design Foundation Diploma, which may be a prerequisite for entry to some art and design degrees. Both can be very helpful for mature students aiming for higher education, but are not higher education qualifications in their own right.

A LEVELS

A levels are a tried and tested route into higher education. However, opportunities to study A levels outside a school, or part-time, are few and far between.

Chemistry is sometimes offered in college because it is a pre-requisite for medical training, and a few colleges offer online courses in a limited number of subjects, so these are worth checking.

Other than these, A levels are no longer a realistic route for mature students. Some Open University study modules may be suitable as an alternative, but check with your higher education provider first.

VOCATIONAL AWARDS (LEVEL 3) – NVQS, BTEC

Colleges in the region offer a wide range of vocational qualifications in areas such as art & design, business studies, health and social care, ICT, media, public services and travel & tourism. Because such awards are specifically designed to develop skills in particular work-related areas they are more suited as preparation for vocational degrees.

Most universities are happy to accept vocational qualifications for entry, although some do not regard them as suitable for academic degree subjects so make sure you check entry requirements.
DISTANCE LEARNING AT PRE-DEGREE LEVEL

If you are unable to attend classes on a regular basis, learning in your own time at home using a range of materials may well be an attractive option. It is possible to study for a range of GCSE, A level and Access courses.

The benefits of distance learning are:

• it’s a very flexible way to study allowing you to work at a pace that suits you and your circumstances
• materials needed for study are provided or made available by the course provider.

But remember...

• studying in isolation requires a great deal of motivation
• contact time with tutors and other students is limited
• you will need easy access to a phone, PC and internet
• you may be expected to interact with other learners through computer conferencing or some face-to-face tutorials.

DIRECT ENTRY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

It may be the case that your prior qualifications, knowledge and experience mean you are ready to go straight into studying your higher education course.

Entry requirements for mature students may be more flexible, with some recognition of prior learning on courses you have completed in the past or experiential learning gained in the work place. For advice on these, contact the admissions staff.

Even if you have the relevant entry qualifications, if it is some time since you last studied, you may find it useful to take an access course or foundation year. This could help to ease you back into studying as well as giving you the support and encouragement through the UCAS application process that the college or university can provide. Always contact the institutions you are interested in for advice.
PART-TIME OR FULL-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION?

When researching your options, you need to remain realistic about what you will be able to achieve given your particular life circumstances. Part-time degree level study may be a suitable path. Most universities offer a limited number of part-time degree courses. As a rule, they are more adult friendly in the way they are organised and delivered but make sure you check the timetable as they often include daytime classes.

A part-time undergraduate degree course may take five or six years to complete. Teaching takes place during standard university and college term times (these will be listed on their websites).

Don’t assume that part-time study will be any easier in terms of the pressures it will put on you. Balancing the demands of home life, existing commitments and independent higher education study is a very real challenge for all students - both full and part-time. There are support mechanisms in place at all higher education institutions to help and advise you which route will best fit you and your circumstances.

SO, BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR AIMS, RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS FULLY, AND, HAVING DONE SO, BE PREPARED TO ASK QUESTIONS.

It’s perfectly possible to combine study and work. It still demands dedication and commitment, but opportunities for adults are many and varied.

MATURE STUDENT FINANCE

Of course, one of the key questions adults ask when they are thinking about studying is ‘how much will it cost?’ But remember to weigh up not just the costs but also the benefits of higher education level study.

Since September 2012 tuition fees have risen significantly but remember you do not have to pay up front and you only start paying back when you are earning over £25,000.

Repayments are manageable - for example, if you earn £26,000, your repayment will be £7.50 a month. Loans are written off after 30 years! Don’t worry, if your income ever falls below £25,000 - your repayments will automatically stop. A good way to think about it is as a ‘graduate tax’.

Finance is provided by the Student Loans Company.

Loans

Providing you are studying for your first degree, everyone, regardless of age can get a Tuition Fee Loan to cover the full cost of their course.

Additionally, if you are aged under 60 when you start your course you are also eligible for a Maintenance Loan. This loan is intended to cover your living costs, such as food, accommodation and travel. All students are eligible for a minimum loan amount of £3,224 and many will get more, depending on household income.

It’s worth noting that student loans do not go on your credit files, and will not directly affect your credit score, or your ability to get future loans or credit.
Grants

In addition to these loans, you may also get grants whilst at university. Grants are non-repayable. The figures available for 2018/19 are shown below.

Parents’ Learning Allowance
If you are on a full time course and have one or more children, you may receive up to £1,669.

Childcare Grant
A grant based on 85% of the cost of childcare up to a maximum of £164.70 per week for one child and £282.36 for two or more children.

Please note that if you do decide to claim the Childcare Grant, you won’t be able to claim any childcare costs from the Working Tax Credit.

Adult Dependents’ Grant
You could receive a grant of up to £2,925 if your partner or another adult member of your household has an annual income of £3,796 or less.

Bursaries and scholarships
The university you’re applying to may also offer extra financial help in the form of bursaries or scholarships. These are non-repayable so it’s worth researching what is on offer.

For more on student finance, visit
www.yesyoucango.org
www.gov.uk/mature-student-university-funding

MORE ON MAINTENANCE LOANS

Maintenance loans give you more money towards your living costs whilst at university, but of course mean you have to repay them afterwards. The repayments are based on your future income, not on how much you owe, so this won’t mean higher monthly repayments after graduation. Many people never end up paying back their student loan.

This chart shows how much student loan you may be eligible for based on your household income. If you are over 25 years of age at the start of your course you will be classed as an independent student.

You need to consider your own circumstances, but for most people it makes financial sense to take out the full amount of the loan they are eligible for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income</th>
<th>Maximum living cost loan</th>
<th>Maximum tuition fee loan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to £25,000</td>
<td>£8,700 (£7,324)*</td>
<td>£9,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £30,000</td>
<td>£8,076 (£6,707)*</td>
<td>£9,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £35,000</td>
<td>£7,452 (£6,090)*</td>
<td>£9,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £40,000</td>
<td>£6,828 (£5,473)*</td>
<td>£9,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £42,875</td>
<td>£6,469 (£5,118)*</td>
<td>£9,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If you choose to stay at home during your studies, the amount you can receive as a loan is reduced.

Where the figures come from
Where household income is above £25,000, the student loan is reduced by £1 for every complete £8.10 of additional household income if they live at home
£8.01 of additional household income if they live away from home
Higher education institutions, including most of the local further education colleges, provide a wide range of different types of courses and methods of delivery across the Sheffield city-region. The main types of courses offered are:

1. **Full-time undergraduate degree courses** usually studied over three years
2. **Part-time undergraduate degree courses**
3. **Degree courses with a foundation year** - degree courses with integrated foundation years. These are specially designed for mature learners who have been out of formal education for an extended period of time, or do not have the standard academic qualifications needed to enter directly into the first year of degree level study.
4. **Foundation degree courses** combine academic study with workplace learning
5. **Higher National Diplomas (HND) and other higher level skills-based courses** usually studied over two years full-time
6. **Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Certificates in Higher Education** skills-based courses usually studied over two years part-time

It is sometimes possible to turn foundation degrees, HNDs and HNCs into full honours degrees by adding additional years of study at the same or a different higher education institution. It’s worth finding out what specific progression routes or ‘add-ons’ may be available before beginning study on these types of award.
LOCAL PROVIDERS

UNIVERSITIES

Sheffield Hallam University
Tel: 0114 225 3813
Email: guidance@shu.ac.uk
Web: www.shu.ac.uk

The University of Sheffield
Tel: 0114 222 7000
Email: dll@sheffield.ac.uk
Web: www.sheffield.ac.uk

Doncaster College
Tel: 0800 358 7575
Email: infocentre@don.ac.uk
Web: www.don.ac.uk

Northern College
Tel: 01226 776000
Email: courses@northern.ac.uk
Web: www.northern.ac.uk

North Nottinghamshire College (RNN Group)
Tel: 01909 504500
Email: contact@nnc.ac.uk
Web: www.nnc.ac.uk

Rotherham College (RNN Group)
Tel: 01709 722777
Email: info@rotherham.ac.uk
Web: www.rotherham.ac.uk

The Sheffield College
Tel: 0114 260 2600
Email: info@sheffcol.ac.uk
Web: www.sheffcol.ac.uk

COLLEGES

Barnsley College
Tel: 01226 216123
Email: info@barnsley.ac.uk
Web: www.barnsley.ac.uk

Chesterfield College
Tel: 01246 500500
Email: advice@chesterfield.ac.uk
Web: www.chesterfield.ac.uk

Dearne Valley College (RNN Group)
Tel: 01709 513114
Email: ssc@dearne-coll.ac.uk
Web: www.dearne-coll.ac.uk

www.ucas.com
https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk

NOTES

www.ucas.com
https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk
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