

Are you studying a vocational course such as a BTEC National Diploma or CACHE Diploma?

Are you thinking of going on to Higher Education?



What's a degree course really like?

Check the course content – departmental websites will usually have descriptions of the units making up the degree. You can check if the course is really what you want to do. For example, Sports Science courses receive many applications from students who love sport, but the content of the course means that successful applicants are those who have a genuine interest in science. Admissions tutors report that the most interesting applications are those where the candidate has clearly researched the content of the degree course. This approach enables you to make links in your personal statement between what you've studied in your level 3 course and the content of the degree.

Courses at different universities with the same name, for example, Business Studies, may have very different approaches. One university's course may have a more theoretical approach, and another one may relate the subject more to its practical application in the work-place. You need to find a course with the type of approach which motivates you the most.

Find out what types of assessment methods are used on the degree course you are applying for. The information may help you decide which courses to apply for as you may prefer the idea of being assessed by exam or continuous assessment.

Make the most of your placement experience!

Unlike applicants coming via the A level route, you may have had up to 200 hours of experience in the world of work as part of your level 3 course. This gives you a fantastic opportunity to include valuable information in your personal statement.

Rather than just describe the experience, make sure you reflect on what you learnt from your experience and how that relates to the content of the degree course you are applying for.

Timing of your application

For guaranteed consideration you must meet the UCAS deadline of 15th January.

Make sure you don't miss it!

Candidates who get their applications in earlier may find that they have more choice as to the dates they can attend open days and events aimed at applicants.

Projects, Research and Presentations

A special feature of vocational courses like National Diplomas is that the project work provides plenty of opportunities to develop your independent research skills, something which will be extremely valuable when you begin an HE level course.

Your vocational course is also likely to have provided you with plenty of experience of working in groups, and you are probably particularly expert at giving presentations by now!

These are the types of skills which admissions tutors will be interested to hear about.

What about all those self management skills you've learnt?

Remember all those course work deadlines you've had to meet over the last two years as part of continuous assessment? The admissions tutor will be interested to hear about how your time management skills have developed as a result.

Don't forget that you've had lots of practice at working under pressure all year – not just at examination time! But you may also have had plenty of practice at class exams, even if they weren't part of the final assessment. If this is the case, you may want to make that clear in your personal statement.

Yet more skills!

It wouldn't be surprising if, like many students on vocational courses, you'd also learnt how to use a wide range of computer software such as Word, Access, Excel and PowerPoint. These will be really useful when it comes to studying at degree level and, again, it's worth referring to them in your personal statement.

All those units you've studied

Admissions tutors have reported that they would like to see on your UCAS application a list of all the units you've taken already (with grades) and also the units you'll be taking before the end of the course. Some units might be particularly relevant to the course you've applied for.

Your personal statement gives you the opportunity to highlight to admissions tutors the units you have really enjoyed and done well in, and how these might have prepared you for the specific aspects of a degree course.

Are you making the best use of your five UCAS choices?

There are some degree courses where certain vocational courses may not be accepted as entry qualifications. Check the UCAS entry profile and university websites carefully to see if your level 3 course is included in the accepted qualifications. If you are still not sure after looking at the website, don't hesitate to ring the university's admissions office to check.

You only have five options on the UCAS application form. Make sure you work with your college's advisors to find out which courses might be the best ones to apply to.

Check the entry requirements carefully. If your predicted grades are below the stated requirements, it's very unlikely that you'll be made an offer on courses which are heavily over-subscribed, (university websites and prospectuses may include information about how many applications per place they receive).

Choice of units

If you have the opportunity to take options on your level 3 course which are aimed at preparing students for study at HE, make sure you take them!

For example, the new BTEC National Diploma in Health and Social Care includes an Academic Literacy unit, and many National Diplomas include a Research Methodology unit.

GCSE Requirements

Many universities have a minimum GCSE requirement, for example, "three subjects at grade C or above". Also, specific degree courses, may have certain GCSE requirements, for example "a grade B in Maths". Make sure you check what's required.

If you don't have the required GCSE grades and still want to do the course, you'll need to take the opportunity to re-sit them alongside your level 3 course.

University Open Days, Campus Visits

If your college has arranged a trip to a University open day or campus visit, get yourself on that bus! These experiences will really help you decide if the university is right for you and give you the chance to ask questions which will enable you to put in a much stronger application.

Courses you may not have thought of applying for!

Remember, just because you chose to do a Health and Social Care or Engineering vocational course when you were 14 years old, doesn't mean that your only HE option is to continue studying in that particular vocational area – there are a range of subjects open to you.

Vocational courses at level 3 will equip you with a variety of valuable transferable skills such as critical thinking and carrying out research which are useful in whatever subject you study at degree level.

For example, admissions tutors for courses such as Sociology or Psychology where entry requirements don't list particular A levels, will also consider applicants with a range of BTEC National Diplomas from Engineering or Business, to Health Studies or Performing Arts because they recognise these transferable skills. Also, don't forget that your vocational course in one subject, may have led you to gain knowledge in another subject, for example, National Diplomas in Creative Industries, Healthcare and Engineering all include units focusing on business skills!

Universities and colleges often express entry requirements in UCAS tariff points and for many courses the points can be made up of a variety of level 3 qualifications.

The important thing is to take the opportunity in your personal statement to explain to the admissions tutor why you are interested in studying their subject at HE and to outline the relevant skills you've gained on your level 3 course.

For some degree courses such as Biology, Engineering or Sports Science it is necessary for applicants to have specific knowledge before they begin and, in these cases, only a limited number of A levels or vocational courses will give you the necessary preparation.



Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network

The Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network aims to widen participation and facilitate the progression of vocational learners into higher education.

All information and details provided in this leaflet were correct at time of printing (September 2010)

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