

Choosing a Degree Subject

With thousands of degrees at hundreds of higher education providers to choose from, it is important to help your son or daughter make a step by step and well thought out decision.

This will be considerably easier if they begin by choosing the subject they want to study – then look at universities that offer this subject (see companion article - Choosing a university).

Encourage them to use the following checklist:

1. Do you have any future career plans?

For some careers the most usual route in is through an approved first degree e.g. for architecture, medicine, veterinary science, nursing

Other careers are more flexible, with options to study an approved course at either first degree or postgraduate level, e.g. teaching, and for some careers, such as law and psychology, postgraduate conversion courses are available for graduates with unrelated degrees.

Many careers are open to graduates of any subject, e.g. marketing, journalism, accountancy. Use [Prospects](#) or [National Careers Service](#) to check entry routes carefully.

2. No career plans?

This may be a good point to seek careers advice. If you identify a specific area of work that you are interested in, you may wish to choose a degree relevant to this – see [Getting help with careers- where to start](#)

3. Still not sure of future plans?

Choose a subject(s) you enjoy and are good at, or consider a new subject you haven't studied before, but in both cases do check you have a full understanding of what is involved in studying this subject at degree level – look at course descriptions on university websites and go to university Open Days. Use [Informed Choices](#) to match level 3/A level subject choices with degree options. Finding out from current students what it is like to study certain subjects, and degree Subject Guides on [UCAS](#) can be useful.

4. Be realistic about your capabilities

Are you going to get the grades needed at A level (or equivalent) for the degree subjects you are considering? Grades can differ widely depending on the popularity of the subject and/or the number of course places available. Use university websites/prospectuses to compare the grades normally required.

5. Research degrees relating to your chosen subject

Use [UCAS course search](#) to locate degrees by subject, location or university and look at the range of courses available within a wide subject area e.g. for geography, the following courses are offered - BA, BSc, Physical Geography, Human Geography, Environmental Geography, Geography and Natural Hazards, Geography and Planning, Marine Geography, Geography and Geology.

If you are uncertain about your future career plans, you may wish to keep your options open by choosing a broad flexible course with a wide range of modules. You can develop your interests as you go along, often with options to change courses if necessary or study modules from other courses/departments.

Equally if you have some career ideas, select a course with the right focus for you. This could be modules that you are interested in, or where the research interests of university staff match yours, e.g. urban studies/planning modules on a geography degree if you have an interest in town planning.

6. Can't decide between two subjects?

You may be able to combine them on a joint or combined degree. Use [UCAS course search](#) to find courses. This may keep more career options open and lead to you gaining a wider range of skills -but check if a joint degree will still meet the entry requirements for any specific careers you are interested in.

7. Decided on your subject – consider course variations:

- Sandwich degrees/Extended degrees – four-year courses with an extra year to gain work experience or study abroad.
- Integrated degrees – four-year courses with a three-year degree and one-year postgraduate combined
- Part-time or distance learning options.

You can explore these variations at [UCAS course search](#)

8. Worried you will not have the entry requirements for a degree?

Look at Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) courses and degrees with a foundation year - these usually have lower entry requirements and can lead to a full degree in the future.

9. Discuss your ideas with your teachers/tutors and your parents

- but remember you will be studying this subject for at least three years; it needs to be something you are really interested in and the choice should ultimately be yours!

Useful websites

[UCAS](#)

University websites and on-line prospectuses

[Discover Uni](#) - choose what and where to study and use a search tool to find courses. Compare courses by student satisfaction, teaching quality, assessment, academic support, resources and student destinations.

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