

n u s Aimhigher...

thinking it through



a guide to HE

For further copies of this booklet call (freephone) 0800 587 8500 quoting reference HEGUIDE or go to the website www.aimhigher.ac.uk/heguide.

You can also obtain copue of this booklet in large print by calling freephone 0800 587 8500.

how to use this guide

This guide is designed to help you make an informed decision about Higher Education and what is right for you.

- You need to consider all the sections
- Work through the 'think it through' bubbles
- Make notes in the spaces provided
- Consider all the questions
- Use the internet and the websites suggested in the 'find out more' sections

Where you see the  icon please go to the glossary at the back of this guide for further information.

introduction

If you're thinking about continuing your studies, then your head is probably full of questions. What course should I do? Where shall I go? How much will it cost? This guide will help you look into Higher Education (HE). It'll prompt you about what to consider, show you where to find more information, and encourage you to weigh things up and make choices that are right for you.

HE isn't just another word for university. You can study one of 50,000 HE courses at a university, a Higher Education college or a Further Education (FE) college, either locally or further afield. HE is all about furthering your education, learning new things, being in charge of your choices and getting to where you want to be in the future - whatever stage you're at, whatever age you are.

Throughout this guide, you'll be directed to the Aimhigher website at www.aimhigher.ac.uk, which is a great place to start when you're searching for information about any aspect of HE. Get started now because before you know it, it'll be time to apply!

what does your future look like?

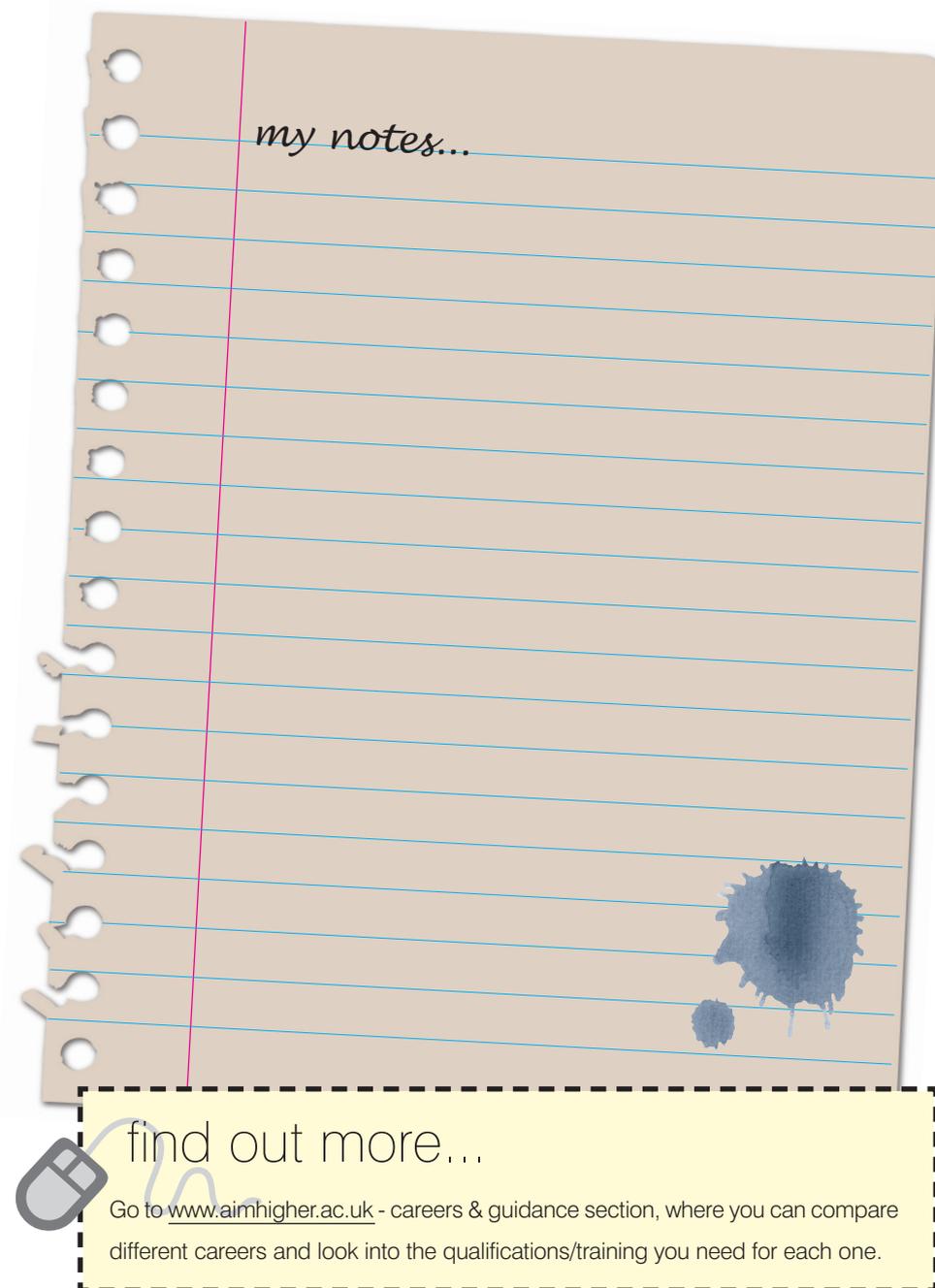
What kind of Higher Education you choose will depend on what you want to do with it.

Whatever your reason, think about how HE will be of benefit to you in the future, then do some research. Use the internet, talk to friends, teachers and parents, or contact Connexions ☎ (080 800 13219) or Learndirect ☎ (0800 100 900).

Also, many careers can be entered in a variety of ways. A vocational media course, for instance, could be as highly regarded as an English degree in the world of television.

Take time to think through what your future holds. There are some ideas below.

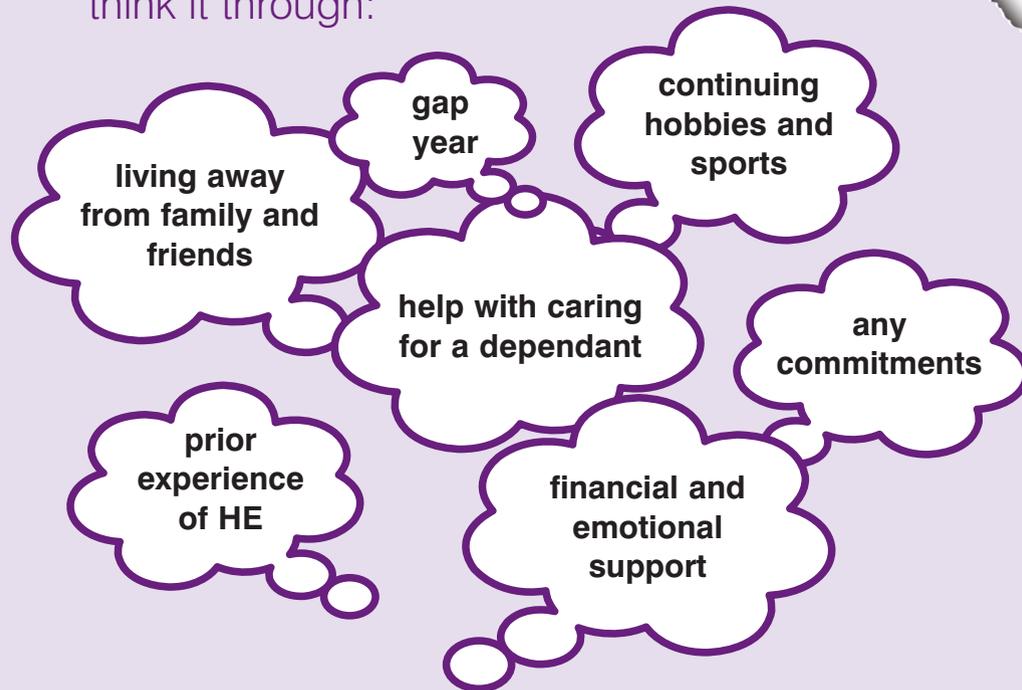
think it through:



where are you now?

Before looking at which course or institution is going to suit you best, it might be worth weighing up your personal circumstances. Take some time to think through the ideas below, and work out how becoming a student of HE might feel.

think it through:



my notes...

find out more...

Go to www.aimhigher.ac.uk - student life section, to find out what personal support is available to you, plus advice on accommodation, safety, and what to do if you're an international or mature student.

Also, visit www.nusonline.co.uk for the lowdown on student life.

students with disabilities

Colleges and universities are continually making themselves more accessible to students with disabilities as a matter of good practice and as a requirement of the law.

To find out more about the facilities and support available for the course you are considering, you should contact the Disability Advisor or Student Support Services at your chosen college or university. If possible, meet up to discuss your requirements.

Funding for equipment, specialist support, travel and some specific expenses may be provided through the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). This is arranged through your Local Education Authority (LEA). You will need to contact them early on in the application process to determine if you are eligible to receive it. To find out more about the benefits that you could be entitled to, take a look at the Skill website: www.skill.org.uk

think it through:

size of lectures/seminars

will support staff be available?

are field trips and practical work accessible?

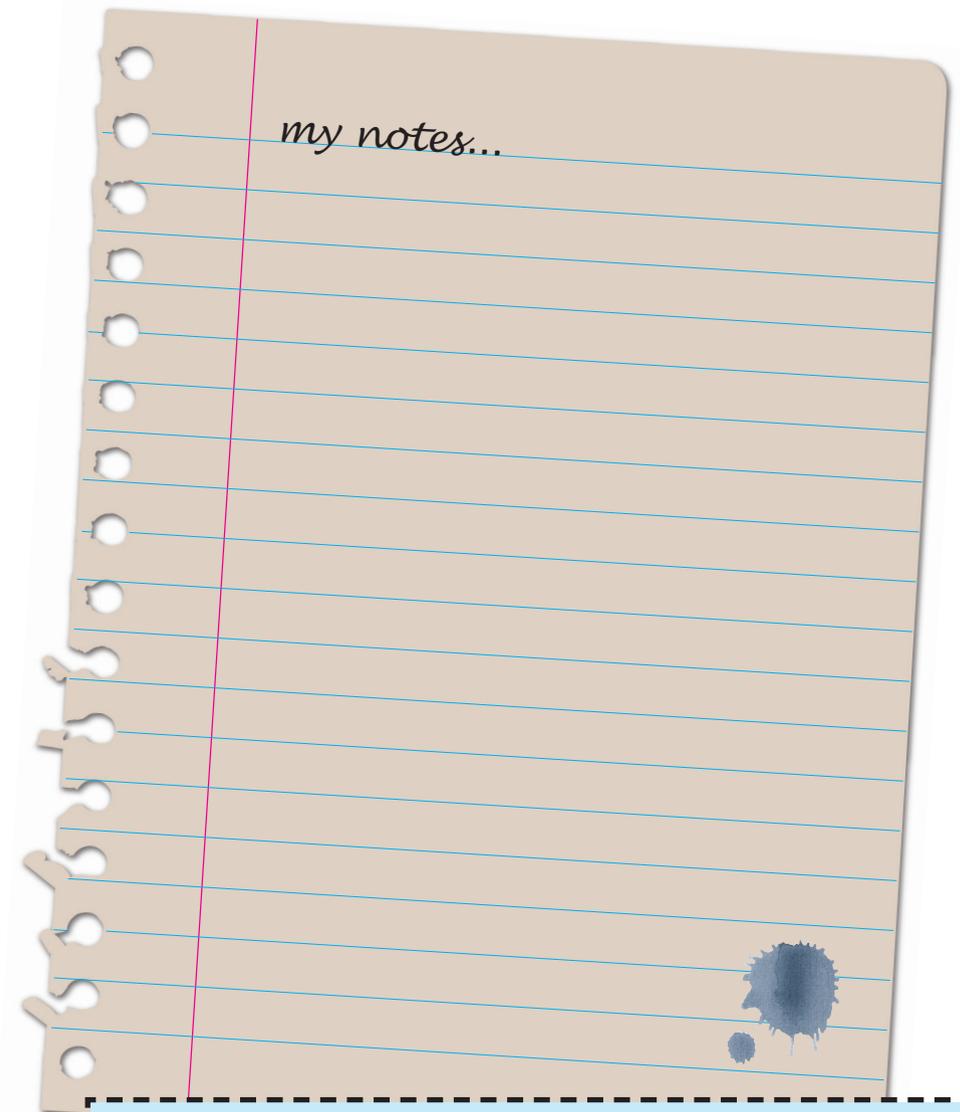
can one-on-one tuition be arranged?

are the accommodation, lecture rooms and social areas accessible?

how are lectures/seminars given?

visit the campus

is there a students with disabilities officer at the students' union?



find out more

Go to www.aimhigher.ac.uk - student life section, then guidance & support, then disability, to find out how to contact your LEA, and read more about the DSA.

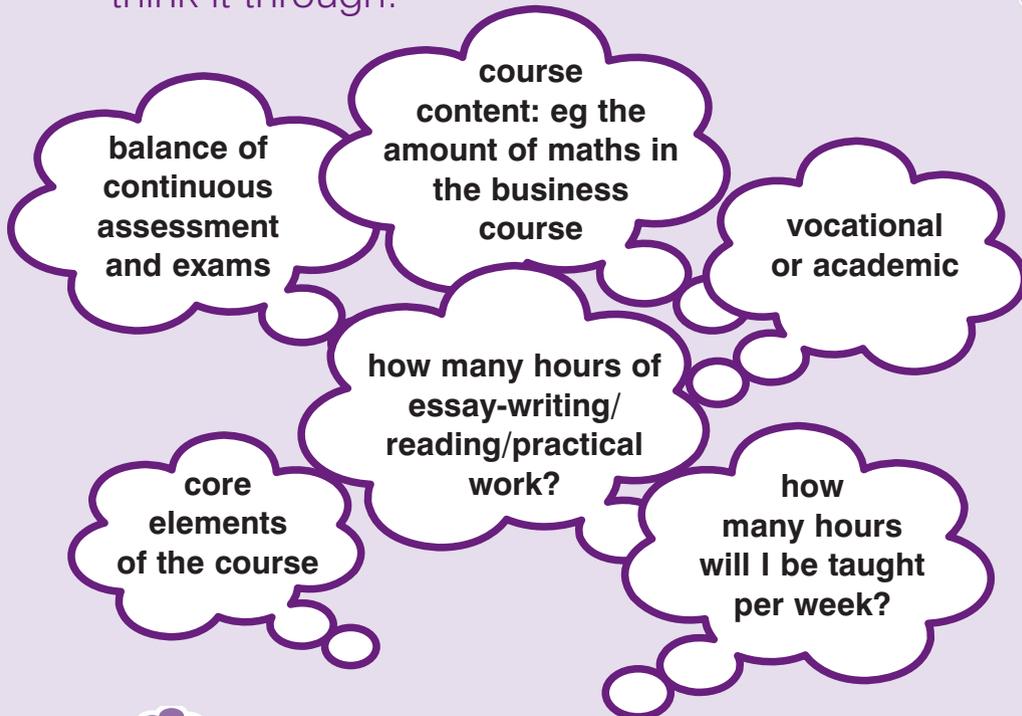
which course is right for you?



what do you want to learn?

Bear in mind that far more subjects are available in Higher Education than at school. There are the familiar academic subjects like Maths and History, and some less familiar ones like Social Policy and Philosophy. There are also all kinds of vocational courses (IT or fashion design, for example), and some of these can lead straight into a career, such as a nursing course or an accountancy course.

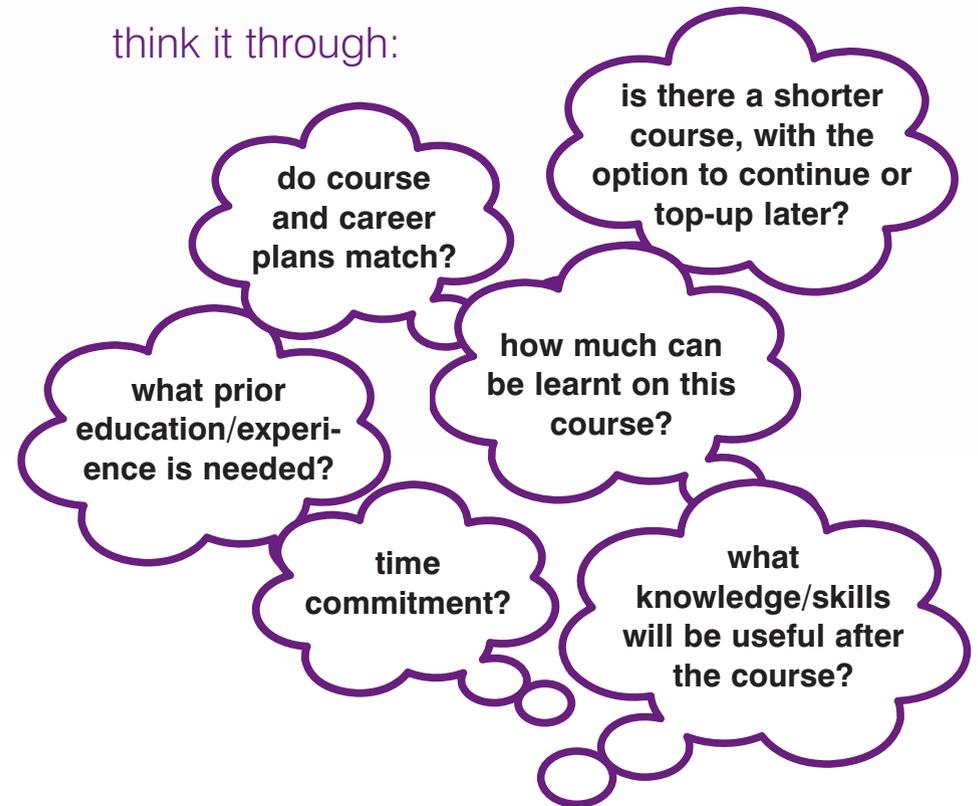
think it through:



how much do you want to learn?

Higher Education doesn't just mean getting an Honours degree – you could study a Foundation degree course, an HNC/HND , or a Diploma of HE. Or you could work towards credits  that lead into HE, or study HE without aiming for a qualification (eg a taster course).

think it through:



what way do you want to learn?

There's a number of ways to complete your studies – full-time, part-time, or through flexible routes such as e-learning or distance learning courses. You can study and work at the same time if you want to, whether that's casual work around a full-time course, or agreeing study leave with your employer.

think it through:



find out more

Go to www.aimhigher.ac.uk - courses section, to start looking for the course that's right for you. Make a list of the ones that appeal.

check out your course

Have you got a list of the courses you're interested in?

For full-time courses, go to the University & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) website at www.ucas.com to search for the courses you're considering.

For part-time courses, contact the individual institution directly for details, or look at their website. Your local library may also have leaflets about local courses.

Work through the following sections to find out as much as you can about the courses you like.

check out: entry requirements

You can check out what you need to get onto the course you want to study at www.ucas.com.

At www.aimhigher.ac.uk - courses section, there's also information about vocational routes into HE, as well as guidance for those people wanting to get back into education.

It might be worth phoning the places you're interested in to find out what they'll accept. This could be useful if you're entering higher education with relevant work experience instead of exams, or if you don't have – or think you might not reach – the required grades.

check out: course content

Find out which places run your preferred course, then look at each institution's website or get hold of their prospectus for further details about what the course involves. A prospectus is a book of information about what an institution offers (course, accommodation, activities) produced by the institution to market itself to potential students. Order prospectuses from www.aimhigher.ac.uk or look through them at your nearest Connexions office.

For more detailed information on course content, you should call the institution direct.

check out: course quality

Think about how your course might compare against other courses. Use the internet to do some research. This will help you make an informed decision, rather than relying on gut instinct or the word of someone you know.

Go to the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website at www.tqi.ac.uk. This site is being fully launched in 2005, but some useful information will be available from August 2004. It includes statistical data, by institution and by broad subject area (for example, Engineering or Creative Arts & Design), as follows:

- entry profiles (ie the mix of students on a course)
- completion rates (ie how many students finish a course)
- achievement rates (ie what classes of degree students achieve)

The site will expand over the next year to include data about how many students got jobs six months after graduation, the most common types of job they entered, external examiners' findings for most subjects and the results of a new National Student Survey.

Also, check out the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at www.qaa.ac.uk. They publish a range of independent review reports and guidelines, including:

- reviews of higher education institutions across the UK
- reviews of higher education courses in further education colleges
- an archive of reviews of subjects in HE, current reviews on health practitioner areas and from 2005, reviews on foundation degrees
- information about Access  to Higher Education courses

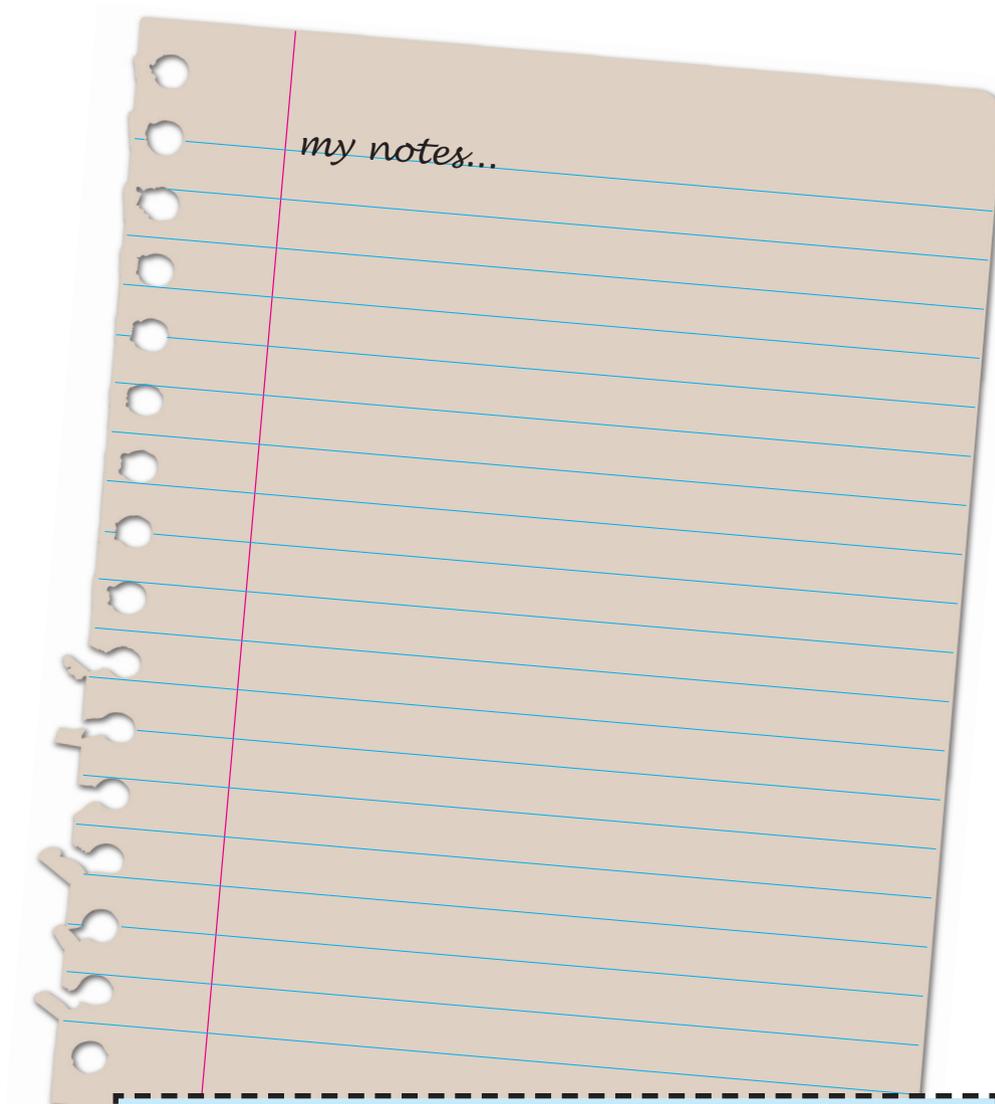
You can search reports by institution or subject. The QAA also have guidelines on national standards for HE in a range of areas to help you judge the quality of the institution, course and qualification you're interested in. Visit www.qaa.ac.uk/students

check out: course accreditation

Some professions approve related courses. If you're looking to pursue a career in a particular area, check your course is one of those approved by the relevant professional body. Every institution should be able to give you this information.

have you...

- visited www.ucas.com for full-time courses?
- phoned institutions direct about part-time courses?
- ordered some prospectuses?
- found out what your course covers and how it's assessed?
- visited www.tqi.ac.uk or www.qaa.ac.uk to compare courses?
- checked whether your course is professionally accredited?
- found out what you need to get on it?
- made a shortlist?



find out more

If you haven't been there already, visit www.ucas.com, www.tqi.ac.uk and www.qaa.com before moving on to the next section.

which institution is best for you?

Colleges and universities offer a great opportunity to experience a new environment and meet a wide mix of people. You can move away or study close to home. There are HE institutions all over the country. Find a full list on the maps at www.aimhigher.ac.uk - universities & colleges section.

Prospectuses  and information packs can tell you the basics about an institution – where it is, and what it offers. Also, individual websites can help you to compare and evaluate the merits of each place.

location

Where you study can be almost as important as what you study, as you need to feel happy and settled whether you're at home or not. If your dream course is in Birmingham, but you hate big cities, you're going to need to think very hard.

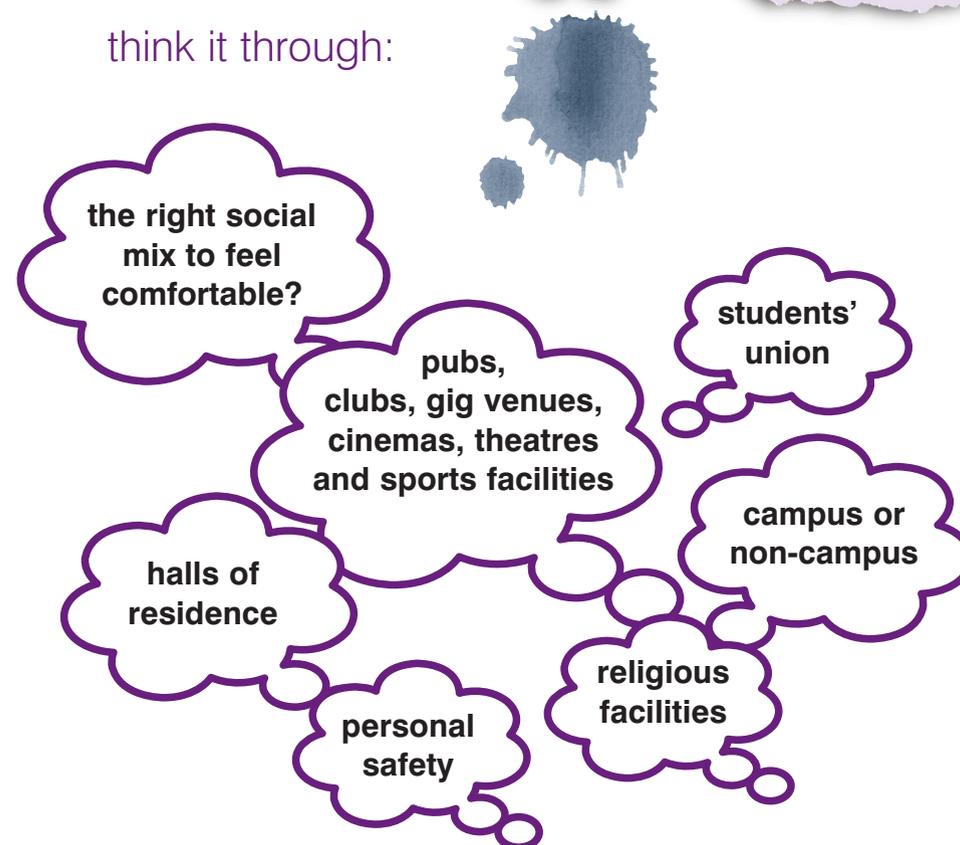
think it through:

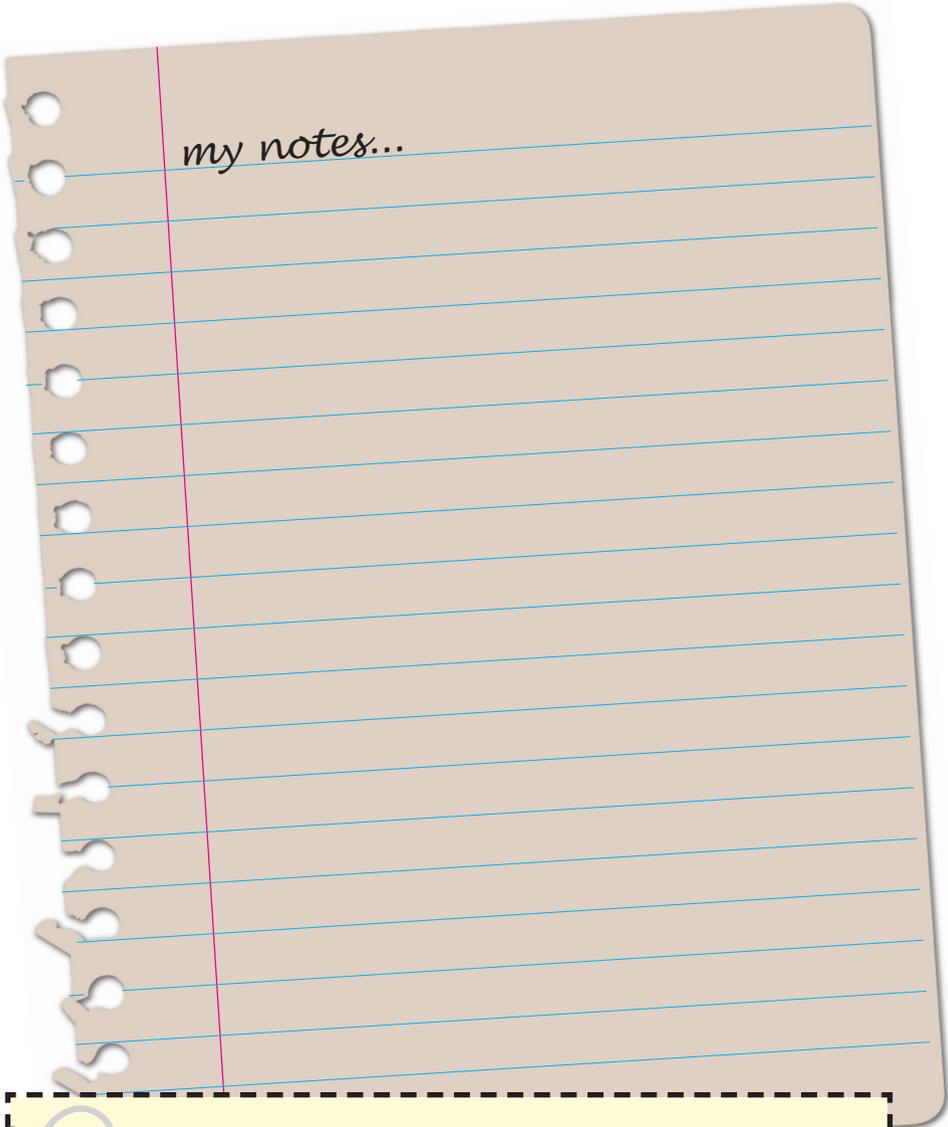


other factors

Course and location are crucial considerations when you're choosing an institution, but it's also worth giving some thought to how you'll fit in and what else is on offer.

think it through:





my notes...



find out more

Go to www.aimhigher.ac.uk - universities and colleges section, and weigh up whether to stay at home or move away using a handy list of pros and cons.

check out your institution

Have you got a list of places that offer the course you want to do?

Before you make a final choice on institution, it's worth digging a bit deeper rather than just relying on information they've produced themselves in their prospectus.

check out: quality & standards of institution

Find out about the quality and standards at the institution you're considering by visiting www.qaa.ac.uk and looking through their review reports. Also, at www.tqi.ac.uk you can see a summary of an institutions teaching and learning strategy, and a broad description of how they take account of employer needs.

check out: 'feel' of institution

Find out whether you're suited to the institutions you like the sound of. Visit www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/perfind to see data tables that detail the social mix at different places. Or get in touch with the Students' Union at a specific institution to hear what current students say about it. HEFCE's  Performance Indicators  can also help you explore student retention rates and employment outcomes.

check out: reputation of institution

Be warned: there are no official rankings of universities, although some national newspapers do compile their own league tables. Commercially published UK university guides may be of interest too, but don't rely on them. Ask lots of questions and make up your own mind about a place.

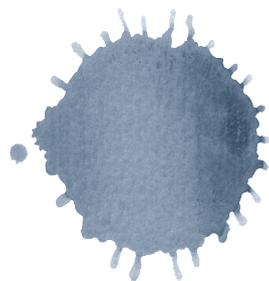
check out: the institution yourself

Think about whether it would be useful to see a few of the institutions on your shortlist before applying for any courses. Go to www.aimhigher.ac.uk - applying for a course section, and click on open days or call the institution directly to find out when would be a good time to visit.

Many institutions run open days for people considering applying to them, and then another set for those who have already applied. Try to visit during course-time when students will be around.

have you...

- compared a number of prospectuses?
- looked at the websites of the places you are interested in?
- thought about the pros and cons of home vs away?
- thought about what else is important to you?
- considered the quality, feel and reputation of the places you like?
- contacted the students' union?
- arranged a visit or an open day?



find out more

Talk to your friends, parents, teachers or a Connexions/Learndirect adviser about their views on different institutions.

how much is it going to cost?

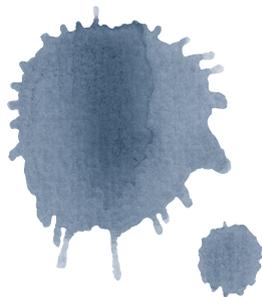
At this stage, you'll have a good idea which course you want to study and where you want to study it. Now you need to think about how much it's going to cost, and this might affect your final decision on what and where to study. There are differences in cost between living in different parts of the UK, for example, or in taking a course for one year instead of three.

There are three main costs that every student needs to consider:

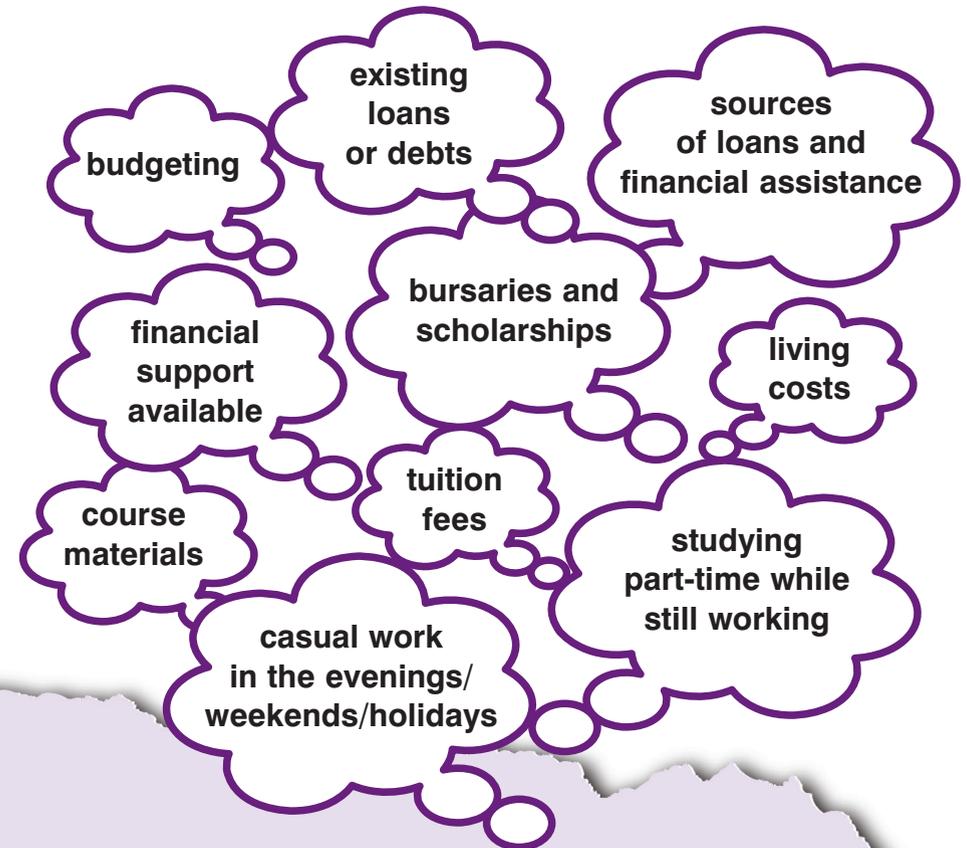
- the tuition fees charged by the college or university
- living costs
- costs related directly to your course (eg books, field trips, art equipment, photocopying etc).

Financial support is available but amounts vary depending on your family situation and the type of course.

Student finance is a complex issue. Make sure you read all the information you can find. Think about your personal circumstances and work out a budget that suits you.



think it through:



have you...

- found out if there is a cost for your course?
- estimated the cost of your living expenses?
- taken into account the cost of your course materials?
- talked to your family?
- created a budget?

my notes...



find out more

Go to www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport to find out about the help available for HE students.

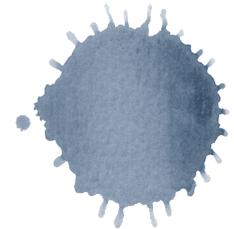
And visit www.aimhigher.ac.uk - student finance section. There's a cost of living calculator on the site. Enter your own figures and get a rough idea of the costs involved.

what next?

To make an informed decision about what kind of HE is right for you, you need to consider all the sections in this booklet.

Have you:

- worked through the thought-bubbles?
- made your own notes?
- considered all the questions?
- used the internet?
- addressed any doubts?
- estimated the costs?
- made decisions you're happy with?



The next step is to make an application. If you want to do a full-time course, you'll need to make an application through UCAS. If you're going to take a part-time course, you'll need to apply to the institution. Contact them directly for an application form.

Go to www.aimhigher.ac.uk, applying for a course to find out how to apply for your chosen courses, and the timetable by which applications and admissions are organised.

Good luck!

feedback

Have you found this guide useful? Use the feedback button at www.guide2he.ac.uk to log your opinions

Glossary

G Connexions offers a broad range of information, guidance and support, including careers advice for 13-19 year olds and for young people with disabilities up to the age of 25. www.connexions.gov.uk

G Learndirect is the national information and advice service that supports adults in making appropriate decisions on learning and work opportunities. If you're older than 25, and want to discuss careers, contact Learndirect. www.learndirect.co.uk

G HNC/HND stands for Higher National Certificate/Higher National Diploma

G A credit recognises that a person has undertaken a chunk of HE. Credits can accumulate and count towards other courses or transfer to institutions.

G Entry requirements are the grades, prior learning, work or life experience you need to get onto an HE course.

G A prospectus is a book of information about what an institution offers (course, accommodation, activities) produced by the institution to market itself to potential students.

G Access courses provide opportunities for entry into HE for mature students without formal qualifications

G HEFCE stands for Higher Education Funding Council for England

G HEFCE Performance Indicators are a range of statistical indicators intended to offer an objective measure of how a higher education institution is performing