

## Studying at a university

- 1 Why is higher education important for a good career?
- 2 What did you have to do to be able to study at Masaryk University?

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Adapted from:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-universities.htm>

### Universities

More than a quarter of the working population of the USA has one. Cairo, Bologna, and Paris have been offering them the longest. And you can now supposedly get them by sitting at home at a computer. What am I talking about? A university education, of course. So who goes to university and what do they get out of their experience?

### Admission

Most universities don't let just anyone in. Grades in the subjects you take in the final years of secondary education are what usually count and in many countries people also have to do an entry test. While most participants in higher education are in the 18-25 age-group, some people choose to take a break from work later on in life and opt for the role of mature student, bringing experience of work and the real world to their studies.

### Which one to go to

In many countries there is a pecking order to the universities, with a few high status institutions at the top turning out an intellectual elite and attracting the best minds in teaching and research. Take a quick name check of the leading writers, politicians or scientists in the UK or the USA and you should find the majority chose to spend their student years sitting in the dining halls and libraries of Oxford and Cambridge or Harvard, Princeton and Yale. The training grounds for medicine, law or engineering in Britain tend to be the metropolitan 'redbrick' universities slightly lower down the list.

### Money

When entrance was restricted to a lucky few in Britain, the state actually paid the sons and daughters of the middle classes not only their tuition fees but also a yearly grant towards living expenses as well. These days most European and North American students are given a loan which they have to pay back to the government once they are in full-time employment, or they finance themselves by working their way through college with part-time jobs in the evenings or at weekends.

### Where to live

For the majority of students, attending a university in a town or city near to where they live is the only financially viable option, but in Britain for many years going to university meant leaving home, with all the freedom and independence that implied. Universities traditionally offer cheap and clean accommodation in halls of residence or student houses. After a year or so, many students opt to share private rented accommodation outside the university, which often pushes their culinary and hygiene skills to the limit.

### Year out

These days if you haven't taken time off between finishing school and embarking on higher education, you haven't really lived. The gap year can be devoted to working for charities in different parts of the world, or simply to travelling, but it can at least concentrate the mind and perhaps give you a few more ideas about what you should do with the rest of your life. If you want to study abroad, you can often get a year out as part of a language course, or enter a scholarship programme such as Erasmus to support you while studying at a foreign university. Business or management students often devote time away from university in the form of a work placement, to help them gain practical experience in a professional environment.

### Teaching & learning

A common feature of any university is attending lectures, which involves taking notes while a lecturer, a university teacher, is speaking to large group of students. In Britain, you are also expected to present a subject perhaps once a term and comment on it in tutorials. These are small group discussions led by a lecturer at which closer analysis of a particular area is undertaken. Science-oriented courses also involve practical lessons and field trips which enable students to get to grips with their chosen course of study in the laboratory or beyond the university walls.

### How you are doing

As at school, progress is measured by examinations, either divided into Parts I & II, or taken at the end of the course, and known as Finals. Alternatively, it can be based on continuous assessment and coursework. An important component of most systems is the extended dissertation, a piece of writing measured by the number of words a student has to produce, say 10,000. This must be based on some original research from primary as well as secondary sources and on some sort of gathering and interpretation of data.

### Social life

There is an old saying that 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy', and prospective students expect a rich and varied social life. Friendships forged in the student union bar or in the many and varied clubs & societies that exist at most universities may last a lifetime. In the USA fraternities & sororities encourage a similar bond.

### Life after university

Well before the graduation ceremony, when students queue up to receive their degrees from the Chancellor of the university at a special ceremony, the careers office has been busy assessing future graduates for the kind of employment paths they should take by giving them an aptitude test, arranging interviews, company presentations and recruitment fairs. For those attracted by the academic life, there are further opportunities for study on Masters and Doctorate (PhD) programmes and on into further research and teaching.

And what does university education all add up to?

This was the opinion of Theodore Roosevelt, a former US American President - *A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education he may steal the whole railroad.*

Or is it as an American journalist, Sydney Harris, said? - *The primary purpose of a liberal education is to make one's mind a pleasant place in which to spend one's time.*

### After reading

#### Vocabulary Exercise

For each section, match the words taken from the text (in the box at the top) with the definitions below.

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|                              |                                  |                       |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| aptitude test                | clubs and societies              | continuous assessment |
| degree                       | dissertation                     | Doctorate             |
| entry test                   | field trip                       | finals                |
| fraternities and sororities  | gap year                         | grades                |
| grant                        | halls of residence               | intellectual elite    |
| lecture                      | Masters                          | pecking order         |
| private rented accommodation | recruitment fairs                | redbrick universities |
| scholarship programme        | student houses                   | student union bar     |
| subjects                     | tuition fees                     | tutorial              |
| work placement               | working your way through college |                       |

### **Admission**

1. an examination to see if you are good enough to go to university
2. areas of knowledge you study at school
3. a number or letter to symbolize how well you have done in an exam

### **Which one to go to**

4. learning institutions built later than Oxford or Cambridge
5. hierarchy
6. the best minds in the country

### **Money**

7. money given by the state to help for e.g. education
8. money you pay for a university course
9. paying for your education by being employed while you are studying

### **Where to live**

10. houses bought by the university and rented to their students
11. houses rented to anyone
12. communal accommodation built by university

### **Year out**

13. a year between school and university when you don't study
14. a temporary position with a company to gain employment experience
15. money from a private organisation to help with the cost of study

### **Teaching & learning**

16. study away from the classroom often to collect data or samples
17. small group lesson based on discussing an area or problem
18. lesson in the form of a formal speech using notes and visual aids

### **How you are doing**

19. a long, structured piece of writing exploring a subject in detail
20. examinations at the end of a course
21. evaluating pieces of work during the course

### **Social life**

22. organisations run by and for students to develop different interests
23. a place for students to have a drink
24. student membership organisations in the USA

### **Life after university**

25. exam to see what kind of jobs would suit you
26. university qualification gained after a degree taking one or two years
27. highest university qualification after a Masters taking four or more years of research
28. the first university qualification you receive after 3 or more years of study
29. large 'market place' where employers try to interest students in working for them

### **More activities on this topic**

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of universities at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-universities.htm>

- **Word game: Teach and Learn Idioms.** Match 6 different idiomatic expressions using the verbs "teach" and "learn" to their definitions.
- **Story: Ali goes to university.** Ali can't wait to leave his home and his home town and go off to university. But during his first year he learns some valuable lessons of life.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about universities.
- There is also a university-related cartoon, and some carefully selected external links.

**Answers****Vocabulary Exercise:**

1. entry test; 2. subjects; 3. grades; 4. redbrick universities; 5. pecking order; 6. intellectual elite; 7. grant; 8. tuition fees; 9. working your way through college; 10. student houses; 11. private rented accommodation; 12. halls of residence; 13. gap year; 14. work placement; 15. scholarship programme; 16. field trip; 17. tutorial; 18. lecture; 19. dissertation; 20. finals; 21. continuous assessment; 22. clubs and societies; 23. student union bar; 24. fraternities and sororities; 25. aptitude test; 26. Masters; 27. Doctorate; 28. degree; 29. recruitment fairs

**Higher education in the UK and in the CR**

In the United Kingdom students usually go straight to university after they have completed their further education (A' levels). It usually isn't necessary to do an entrance exam (unless they want to study at somewhere prestigious like Cambridge or Oxford, or some more difficult subjects such as medicine or law).

Students do not apply directly to the university, instead they apply through a clearing system called UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), which handles the admission of every student who wishes to go to university in the UK.

Compare the website of MU - <http://www.muni.cz/admission/procedure> and the website used in Great Britain [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

What steps must be done if students want to enter a university in the UK and in the CR?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the U.K. university entrance system?