



HEON
HIGHER EDUCATION
OUTREACH NETWORK



AN INSIGHT INTO HIGHER EDUCATION OPTIONS

**SUPPORTING SOMEONE TO MAKE
THE RIGHT CHOICE**



POST-18 PROGRESSION PATHWAYS

This factsheet introduces you to the main post-18 progression pathways classified as Level 4-6 qualifications under the National Qualifications Framework. It shows how work-based and vocational pathways can lead to the obtaining of a degree.

AT A GLANCE

Key definitions

This factsheet focuses on explaining the following qualifications and frameworks

FHEQ = Framework
for Higher Education
Qualifications

RQF = Regulated
Qualifications
Framework

P6

Honours Degree
An undergraduate
academic degree
awarded by universities
and colleges of higher
education

P5

Degree Apprenticeship
An apprenticeship incorporating
a full honours degree which
facilitates both academic and
on-the-job training

P6

Foundation Degree
Two thirds of a full honours
degree. Vocational and fully
flexible allowing students to
study full or part-time

P4

**Higher National
Diploma (HND)**
A work related course
provided by higher
and further education
colleges

P4

**Higher National
Certificate (HNC)**
A work related course,
one level below a HND,
provided by higher and
further education colleges

P4

Higher Apprenticeship
An apprenticeship
incorporating academic and
vocational qualifications and
learning from Levels 4 to 7

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION COMPARISON TABLES

Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are grouped into levels of difficulty, from entry level to the highest level of 8. Regulated qualifications can be either academic, vocational or work-based and are in either the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) or the Framework for HE Qualifications (FHEQ) as shown below.

Level	FHEQ Examples	Apprenticeships*	RQF Examples
8	Doctorate		Vocational qualifications Level 8 NVQ Level 5
7	Master's degree (eg MA, MSc, MBA) Integrated Master's degree (eg MEng) Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate certificate (eg PGCE)	Degree Higher	NVQ Level 5 BTEC Advanced Professional award, certificate and diploma Level 7
6	Bachelor's degree (honours) Graduate diploma Graduate certificate	Degree Higher	BTEC Advanced Professional award, certificate and diploma Level 6 NVQ Level 4
5	Foundation degree Higher national diploma (HND) Diploma of higher education (DipHE)	Higher	BTEC Professional award, certificate and diploma Level 5 NVQ Level 4 Higher national certificate (HNC)
4	Higher national certificate (HNC) Certificate of higher education	Higher	BTEC Professional award, certificate and diploma Level 4 NVQ Level 4 Higher national certificate (HNC) Key skills Level 4
3		Advanced	AS and A levels Access to HE Diploma T-Levels BTEC award certificate diploma Level 3 NVQ Level 3 Cambridge Technical Level 3 International Baccalaureate
2		Intermediate	GCSE (grades 9-4) BTEC award, certificate and diploma Level 2 NVQ Level 2 Cambridge Technical Level 2 Functional Skills/Skills for Life Level 2
1			GCSE (grades 3-1) BTEC award, certificate and diploma Level 1 NVQ Level 1 Functional Skills/Skills for Life Level 1 Cambridge Technical Level 1
Entry			Entry level Skills for life Entry level Functional Skills Entry level Foundation Learning

Apprenticeships are work based training schemes and have been shown in between the two charts as the qualification part of the apprenticeship could fall either in the FHEQ or the RQF (eg a Foundation Degree or a NVQ)

*Not qualifications, indicative levels only

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

As you can see on the previous page, some qualifications can span more than one level. Qualifications categorised at the same level are of a similar difficulty, but vary in size and content. For example, both AS levels and A levels are Level 3 qualifications but as AS levels are studied over 1 year and A levels over 2 years, students develop a deeper subject understanding through studying A levels.

VOCATIONAL AND WORK-BASED PATHWAYS

HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATES (HNCS) AND HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMAS (HNDs)

Who do they suit?

These Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications suit students/professionals wanting to develop skills for use in a particular job through the focus on 'learning by doing'.

Subjects

HNCs and HNDs can be studied at further and higher education colleges. Subjects available include: agriculture, business and management, computing, construction, engineering, health and social care, hospitality management, performing arts, retail distribution and sports and exercise science.

Entry

HND entry usually requires at least one A level and four GCSEs grade 9-4 (A*-C). HNCs usually take one year full-time and HNDs two years.

Progression

Highly valued by employers, they can also count towards membership of professional bodies, such as the ACCA for Accountancy students. They suit learners wishing to earn as they work, study towards a specific career and undergo on-going assessments, projects and practical tasks. These qualifications also enable progression to a degree course (usually to the 2nd year from a HNC and to the 2nd or 3rd year from a HND).

HIGHER LEVEL APPRENTICESHIPS

Who do they suit?

Higher level apprenticeships suit students who wish to learn a specific job alongside experienced colleagues, whilst studying towards a higher level qualification between Level 4 (eg HNC) and Level 7 (eg master's degree equivalent). The qualifications can be studied at a university, apprenticeship training provider or through a professional body. This 'off-the-job' training could be one day a week, or 'block-release' of several weeks in a training centre or college/university.

Subjects

Higher apprenticeships are available in around 50 subjects including: advertising, broadcasting, business and finance, care leadership, civil service, construction, creative and digital industries, energy and water, engineering, hospitality and tourism, innovation and growth, legal services, life and chemical sciences, marketing and PR, management, professional services and security and intelligence.

Entry requirements

These are usually between 64 and 104 UCAS points, plus 5 GCSEs at grades 9-4 (A*-C). Weekly salaries for Level 4/5 apprentices pay up to £480 (BIS apprenticeship survey 2014). Tuition fees for the qualification part of the apprenticeship are paid for by the government and employers.

Progression

At the end of the apprenticeship many apprentices stay with the firm. Progression to a degree or onto professional industry related qualifications are additional pathways.

DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

Who do they suit?

Introduced in 2015, degree apprenticeships suit students who wish to be in employment whilst studying for a full honours degree over approximately five years. The tuition fees are paid by the government and the employers. The learning style can be blended, combining work-place learning with distance learning, on-campus days and exams.

Subjects

Degree apprenticeships are available in over a hundred different professions including chartered legal executive, chartered surveying, aerospace engineering, cyber security technologist, facilities management, human resources management, junior 2D artist, laboratory scientist, public relations, social media and digital marketing.

Structure

There are currently two main structures for degree apprenticeships. One structure is a fully-integrated apprenticeship degree course which delivers and tests both academic learning and the vocational skills needed for the job role. The second structure is a degree programme to deliver the academic knowledge requirements, and additional training to meet the full apprenticeship requirements plus a separate occupational competence test at the end.

Entry requirements

These vary depending on the recruitment model of the employer. Sometimes they are based on UCAS points, sometimes they necessitate passing employer tests or already being employed by a participating employer. Degree apprenticeships can be very competitive.

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (NVQS)

Who do they suit?

NVQs are a 'competence-based' qualification. They suit students wishing to develop a sector-focused skill-set. Learning is through practical, work-related tasks in order to develop the skills and knowledge to do a job effectively. They are designed to be studied at 5 levels, from introductory to senior management level. Level 4 NVQs are compared to Levels 4–6 of the RQF.

Subjects

They can be studied at an FE College, at work, or as part of an apprenticeship. Many career sectors offer NVQs, for example: business and management, catering and food, construction, distribution, engineering, health care, leisure, manufacturing and production, marketing/sales and property.

Structure

Students typically take between one and two years to complete a Level 4 NVQ. Assessment is undertaken through practical assignments, a portfolio of evidence and an assessor observing practical tasks and questioning students about their knowledge.

Progression

Progression is possible from one level of NVQ to the next level NVQ and also onto vocational higher education pathways such as HNC/Ds and Foundation Degrees.

ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

HONOURS DEGREES

Subjects

There are over 50,000 undergraduate courses in the UK to choose from, covering a wide range of subjects such as biological sciences, history, languages, law, social studies, and much more. Each provider will have different content and full details of each course will be available on the university's website.

Choosing a university

There are many factors to consider when choosing a university, and one that is becoming increasingly popular is employability rating, alongside traditional comparisons such as institutional reputation and academic league tables. Some criteria that students can use to find a course are graduate destination data (showing salaries, job titles, and company names), whether or not the institution offers placements, internships and a year in industry, plus the extent to which the institution has involved employers and entrepreneurs in the planning and delivery of its curriculum and enrichment activities.

Entry requirements

Universities and colleges set their own entry requirements, and they vary widely depending on subject, the course, and the provider. This will usually include a minimum number of UCAS points students will need to have, typically gained from A levels or similar qualifications. They may also require specific subjects relevant to the course, an admissions test, or an interview. You should always check subject and qualification requirements with course providers.

Structure

Undergraduate degrees are typically three years long, with the option of an additional placement year that allows students to gain work-place experience which helps them stand out at job interviews. Fasttrack degrees have also seen an increase in popularity, allowing students to complete their degree in two years by working through the summer, or three years with a sandwich year.

FOUNDATION DEGREES

Who do they suit?

Foundation degrees suit students who are unsure about committing to a full honours degree, those who wish to study as they work and those who want more work experience as they study. They often offer smaller class sizes and more personalised learning. Foundation degree students are entitled to the same student financial support as honours degree students.

Subjects

Foundation degrees combine academic study with learning in the work-place. They are equivalent to two thirds of an honours degree, i.e. Level 5 on the FHEQ. The broad choice of subjects includes: accounting and business, agriculture and horticulture, applied sciences, building services, computing, design and fashion, early years, engineering, food, health and social care, hospitality, leisure and tourism, production, retail and sport.

Partnership delivery

They are designed and delivered through partnerships between employers, universities and further education colleges. This ensures that students learn the skills that employers are looking for in addition to academic development.

Entry requirements

These are lower than degree requirements and can vary widely, with some institutions accepting relevant experience in lieu of formal qualifications.

Structure

Full-time foundation degrees take two years to complete. Upon completion, students can progress to the third year of a degree in order to gain a full honours degree.

Note that a foundation degree is not the same as a foundation year which is usually seen as a stepping stone to higher education, particularly if a student does not have the right qualifications to go straight onto a degree programme or has had a considerable amount of time out of education.

SPONSORED DEGREES

Increasing numbers of students are now looking for sponsored degrees to avoid paying tuition fees. 'Sponsored degrees' can be a confusing term as it is applied to different post-18 pathways. Sometimes it is used to describe a whole honours degree with modest sponsorship from professional bodies, sometimes it means sponsorship from employers requiring students to be employed by them before they will fund study. Employers also use the term when the 'degree' can be either a higher apprenticeship, foundation degree, or honours degree.

Find out more about sponsored degrees by visiting www.ucas.com/advisers/which-for-teachers/introduce-higher-education-options/the-complete-guide-to-sponsored-degrees



USEFUL RESOURCES FOR YOU

Use the resources and events information on the www.heon.org.uk website.

Keep up-to date with useful information about changes in progression pathways and qualifications on such websites as:

www.heon.org.uk/teachers-advisers or www.heon.org.uk/parents

www.careerpilot.org.uk

www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels

nationalcareers.service.gov.uk

www.ucas.com

USEFUL RESOURCES FOR THOSE APPLYING

FOR INSPIRATION

Which? University guide A Level Explorer - www.university.which.co.uk/a-level-explorer

This tool allows students to input their current subjects and discover some degree course options, be sure to check the unexpected results

I Could - www.icould.com/buzz

Students take the quiz to identify their skills. There are plenty of links to careers Information and videos to watch

TO RESEARCH CAREERS

Careerpilot - www.careerpilot.org.uk/jobs

A page packed with information about multiple industries and roles

Student Ladder - www.studentladder.co.uk/Careers

Articles on a range of careers can be found here with plenty of other information available about progression pathways

UCAS Careers - www.ucas.com/ucas/16-18-choices/find-career-ideas

Students can research some job families and find out about work experience and other opportunities

POST 18 OPTIONS

Impartial information about HE - www.heon.org.uk

A range of information is available on the HEON website in three information HUBs including teachers/advisers, students and parents/carers.

National Careers Service - bit.ly/NCSJourney

Different pathways are explained on this interactive webpage

Careerpilot - www.careerpilot.org.uk/information/higher-education-at-18

Packed with information about higher education

Apprenticeships - www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships

A gov.uk page full of information about apprenticeships and how to find one

Careerpilot - www.careerpilot.org.uk/information/apprenticeships

Information on how to find, apply for and make the most of apprenticeships

Moving from BTECs to university study - university.which.co.uk/advice/ucas-application/can-you-get-into-university-if-youre-studying-btecs

Students can explore their options with their BTEC studies

UCAS - search.ucas.com

Students can search through all university courses here

What uni? - www.whatuni.com

A website that compares university and degree courses with rankings, course details and profiles

This guide has been designed by The Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON) in collaboration with Innervate Careers Services Limited. For more information visit us at www.HEON.org.uk

