

2023/24 Edition

# To Go or Not To Go?

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The Hepp Guide to Higher Education



A partnership of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
and the University of Sheffield

# Contents

3 What is higher education?

## **The benefits of higher education**

4 Why should I consider higher education?

6 What could I earn?

7 What else will I gain?

8 What's stopping me?

## **Life at university**

10 How will I learn?

11 Where will I live?

12 Examples of courses

14 Social life

16 Where can I study?

17 Location, location, location

18 Higher education at college

19 Higher level qualifications table

20 Degree apprenticeships

## **Student finance**

22 Let's talk money

23 What could I get?

24 Bursaries and scholarships

25 Payback time!

26 Is it worth the cost?

27 Useful websites

# What is higher education?

Higher education is the next educational step after you finish college or sixth form. The most common higher education providers are universities, but did you know that you can also study higher level qualifications at some colleges or through higher/degree apprenticeships?

Higher education may seem a long way away, but it's never too early to think about your future.

Higher education is an opportunity to study a new subject or a subject that interests you in more depth, hopefully leading to a great career. It also gives you a chance to meet new people and have lots of new experiences.

This booklet will give you an insight into what life in higher education is like.



Sheffield Hallam University



University of Sheffield

**There are currently...**

**350** higher education providers across the UK  
with over **35,000** courses to choose from

# Why should I consider higher education?

Reports show that most people are better off in many ways, including financially, by going into higher education.

- ▶ You can pursue careers that wouldn't otherwise be available to you
- ▶ Graduates are less likely to be unemployed during their working life
- ▶ Without higher-level qualifications, opportunities for high quality training can be limited
- ▶ On average graduates earn more, with starting salaries significantly higher



“The vast majority of young people in the future are going to need a route to higher skills if the UK is going to compete globally.”

Neil Carberry, CBI Director of Education and Skills

Changes in the workplace mean that there has been an increase in the demand for employees with a degree. Graduate jobs have evolved, and there are now thousands of new ones that didn't exist ten years ago. This means that more in-depth and specialist skills are needed in the workplace – and these can be learnt whilst in higher education.

Some examples of jobs that need higher level skills are: **Aerospace Engineer, Nurse, Accountant, Solicitor, Computer Programmer, Data Scientist.**

# ?? Common myths ??

**“I don’t need a degree to get a good job.”**

This is partly true. There are other higher-level qualifications available. However, in order to stay competitive in the job market you often need a degree. A degree apprenticeship can be a way of getting the best of both worlds. A significant number of jobs now require a degree and that is likely to increase in the future.

**“I could work my way up from the bottom to the top.”**

This can be true, as some companies do have internal training and promotion schemes, but this is less common now. In many organisations your progress will be limited by the level of qualification you have. This means that you could be good at your job, but someone with a degree could progress faster than you.

**“I can get a job now and go to university later.”**

This is true and you can be just as successful. However, there’s a lot to be said for going sooner rather than later. You can take advantage of the social life and step into a higher-level job that bit quicker. It can be more difficult to go to university later – you may have financial or family commitments and finding time to study is often harder. Many mature students wish they had gone to university earlier.

If you’re really feeling unsure then you can apply for a place and defer it (push it back) by a year. A gap year can give you an opportunity to earn or travel, gaining new experiences and helping you work out what you want to do.

# What could I earn?



Research has consistently shown that graduates earn significantly more than those without a degree (called the graduate premium). Annual salaries can vary from one job sector to the next – some examples of average graduate starting salaries in the UK are below:

Subject studied	Average graduate starting salary
Art / Design	£22,500
Business / Management	£25,000
Computing	£29,000
Engineering	£29,500
Media, Journalism and Communications	£23,000
Geography	£26,000
Law	£23,000
Medicine / Dentistry	£35,000
Veterinary Sciences	£32,000

*Data source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (updated 2023)*

## How much more do graduates earn than non-graduates?

*Data source: Luminato (2023)*

Statistics from the Department of Education show that the median annual salary for UK graduates was £38,500 in 2022, this was £11,500 more than working-age non-graduates (£27,000), and £6,500 less than postgraduates.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies on the impact of an undergraduate degree on lifetime earnings reveals that the discounted difference in lifetime earnings between graduates and non-graduates is £430k for men and £260k for women. However, once taxes and student loans are taken into account, the earnings premium declines to around £130k for men and £100k for women. This represents a gain in average net lifetime earnings of around 20% for both men and women.

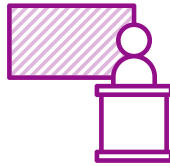
# What else will I gain?

Whatever you choose to study, higher education is a fantastic opportunity to make new friends, try new things and learn skills that will be of benefit to you personally and professionally.

**As a student you will improve your skills in:**



**time  
management**



**presenting**



**planning and  
organisation**



**budgeting**



**ICT**



**team  
working**



**research**



**self-motivation**



**creativity and using  
your initiative**

Almost all universities offer opportunities for work experience, including internships and placement years (often called sandwich courses). You may also want to get a part-time job or do some volunteering, which will be very impressive to employers when you finish your studies!

# What's stopping me?

The best way to find out what university offers and ask questions about any uncertainties and concerns is by attending open days and talking to staff and current students.

**“Nobody in my family has been in higher education.”**



**It doesn't matter!** If you have the ability, you should be applying! There are often bursaries and scholarships available if you're the first person in your family to go to university.

**“My parents hadn't been to uni, but they thought I could do it and it would be the best thing for me, so they encouraged me to go for it.”**

Jamie, University of Sheffield student

**“The work will be too difficult.”**



**You will have to work hard and life won't always be easy.** But you'll be studying something that interests you and offers you great future prospects. Like at school, the progression in your learning will happen in manageable steps and there's a lot of academic support available to students.

You'll be learning from experts, working with like-minded friends and using cutting-edge facilities, so it shouldn't be hard to find the self-motivation that's key to doing well at university.

**“I’m not clever enough.”**



**Anyone who can achieve the entry requirements (the grades needed) for a higher level course is capable of succeeding on it!** A degree is a manageable ‘next step’ after your post-16 courses, so try not to worry too much about that – just get the best grades you can!

**“ Before the course I didn’t consider myself an academic and thought university was something that other people did. However, from day one the support was made available to help me to settle in to the academic side of the course.”**

Lee, Sheffield Hallam University student

**“I have a disability.”**

**Don’t worry - there is a lot of help and support available in higher education.** The disability support team at your university or college can help you create a support plan tailored to your needs. Depending on your disability or condition, you may be eligible for different forms of support – for example, specialist study skills support, exam adjustments or support to record lectures. Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSA) can provide additional funded support such as specialist computer equipment and help with travel to and from university. There is also a range of support available from student support advisers, academic advisers and wellbeing teams.

# How will I learn?

At university you'll learn in lots of different ways, not just in lessons like at school.



## Lectures

Lectures are usually a presentation delivered by an academic teacher to 100+ students in a lecture theatre, and last one or two hours.

## Seminars

Seminars are more like the classes you're used to – between 10 and 20 people, in a classroom. Your tutor might teach from the front (like a short lecture), lead a discussion or set tasks.

## Tutorials

These can be individual or group sessions, where you meet with your tutor to discuss any upcoming assignments, exams or problems.

## Practicals

Many university courses have practical lessons, providing a 'hands-on' approach to learning and requiring you to apply what you have learned in your lectures and seminars. For example, science-based courses will have time in the labs to carry out experiments; for drama courses you will sometimes be in the studios for rehearsals.



## Library

At university you'll have less taught time and more time to study independently. The library is a great place to do this, fully equipped with 100,000s of textbooks as well as computers, printers and the latest technology.

# Where will I live?

Accommodation is usually available for all first-year university students. From the second year onwards you might be able to stay on in student accommodation or instead choose to live in a shared house with friends.

There is a variety of accommodation to choose from. The most common are blocks of student flats, usually with individual bedrooms (and sometimes ensuite bathrooms) and shared kitchen and living areas.



Some accommodation is “catered” which means your breakfast and evening meal are included in your rent. Most accommodation will be “self-catered” which means you cook all your meals yourself – or better still, share the cooking with your flatmates.

Living away from home comes with new responsibilities! Whatever accommodation option you choose, you’ll have to learn to budget your money to ensure you can afford everything you need to pay for, e.g. rent, food, travel, socialising.

# Examples of courses

## Interested in Sport?

### Traditional courses:

Physical Education, Sports  
Coaching, Sport Science, Health,  
Exercise and Sport

### Courses you might not know existed:

Sport Marketing  
Sport Business Management  
Nutrition & Lifestyle  
Physiotherapy  
Adventure Sport Science  
Sport Performance Analysis  
Strength & Conditioning in Sport  
Surf Science  
Equestrian Performance Management  
International Football Business

**There are over 35,000 courses available in the UK! You can choose a subject that interests you, a career-focused course or study something new. Sometimes you need to have studied specific GCSEs and A-Levels (or equivalent) so take advice and do your research.**

**Here are some examples of courses available in certain subjects. For more, see [www.hepp.ac.uk](http://www.hepp.ac.uk) or search for higher education courses on [www.UCAS.com](http://www.UCAS.com)**

## **Interested in Science?**

### **Traditional courses:**

Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry,  
Maths, Forensic Science, Biology,  
Chemistry, Radiography, Physics

### **Courses you might not know existed:**

Marine and Freshwater Biology  
Medicinal Chemistry and Drug Discovery  
Genetics  
Bakery, Confectionery and Patisserie Science  
Climate Change  
Wildlife Conservation  
Astrophysics  
Global Health and Social Medicine  
Integrated Nutrition and Dietetics  
Immunology

# Social life

Universities offer lots of sports clubs and societies which are a brilliant way to meet new people and make friends.

You can give something a go for the first time or continue to enjoy existing interests. If you have an idea for a society that doesn't exist then you can always set it up! They range from football and history to baking and coding.

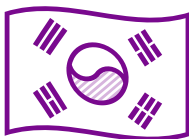
## Here are some of our favourites:



**Harry Potter  
Society  
@ Cardiff**



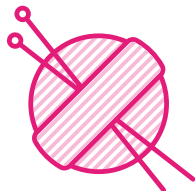
**The  
Northern  
Society  
@ Bristol**



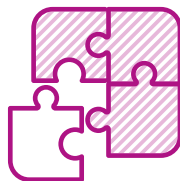
**K-Pop  
Society @  
Southampton**



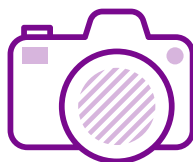
**Coffee  
Society  
@ Leeds**



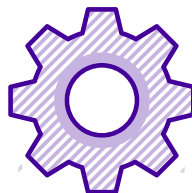
**Knit Like Your  
Nanna Society  
@ Sheffield  
Hallam**



**Tabletop  
Games and  
Roleplaying  
Society  
@ Warwick**



**Photographic  
Society  
@ Sussex**



**Women in  
Engineering  
Society  
@ University  
of Sheffield**



## Socialising with your friends

There's plenty of time to socialise with friends at university. Another great thing about being a student is that you can keep the cost of this down by using various student discounts when shopping and eating out or going to the cinema.



## Volunteering

All universities offer volunteering opportunities. This is a fantastic thing to put on your CV and could also help you get a job – for example, if you want to be a teacher, volunteering in a school can greatly improve your chances.

“Living in Spain was the best thing I have ever done! The chance to live abroad is an amazing opportunity and you learn so much more than the language.”

Medina, University of Central Lancashire student

## Travel

University students have long holidays, making it easier to go travelling - broadening your horizons and giving you a wide range of life and cultural experiences.

But how about a whole year abroad, at university in Hong Kong, New York or Sydney? Many universities give you the option to spend a year studying somewhere else and then return to complete your degree.

# Where can I study?

Higher education offers a great opportunity to move away and start living independently.

There are 143 universities and hundreds of other higher education providers in different towns and cities across the UK. If you want to try somewhere completely new or move a long way from home then you can.

However, if you would rather stay at, or close to, home then that's also possible. You may have less independence and the amount of maintenance loan you receive will be lower, but then so are your costs.

If you study close to home then you can still move into student accommodation, for all the years of your course or just some.

“Don't be afraid to go away from home – it's fun and you get independence! You don't even have to go far away from home.”

Ikra, University of Huddersfield student



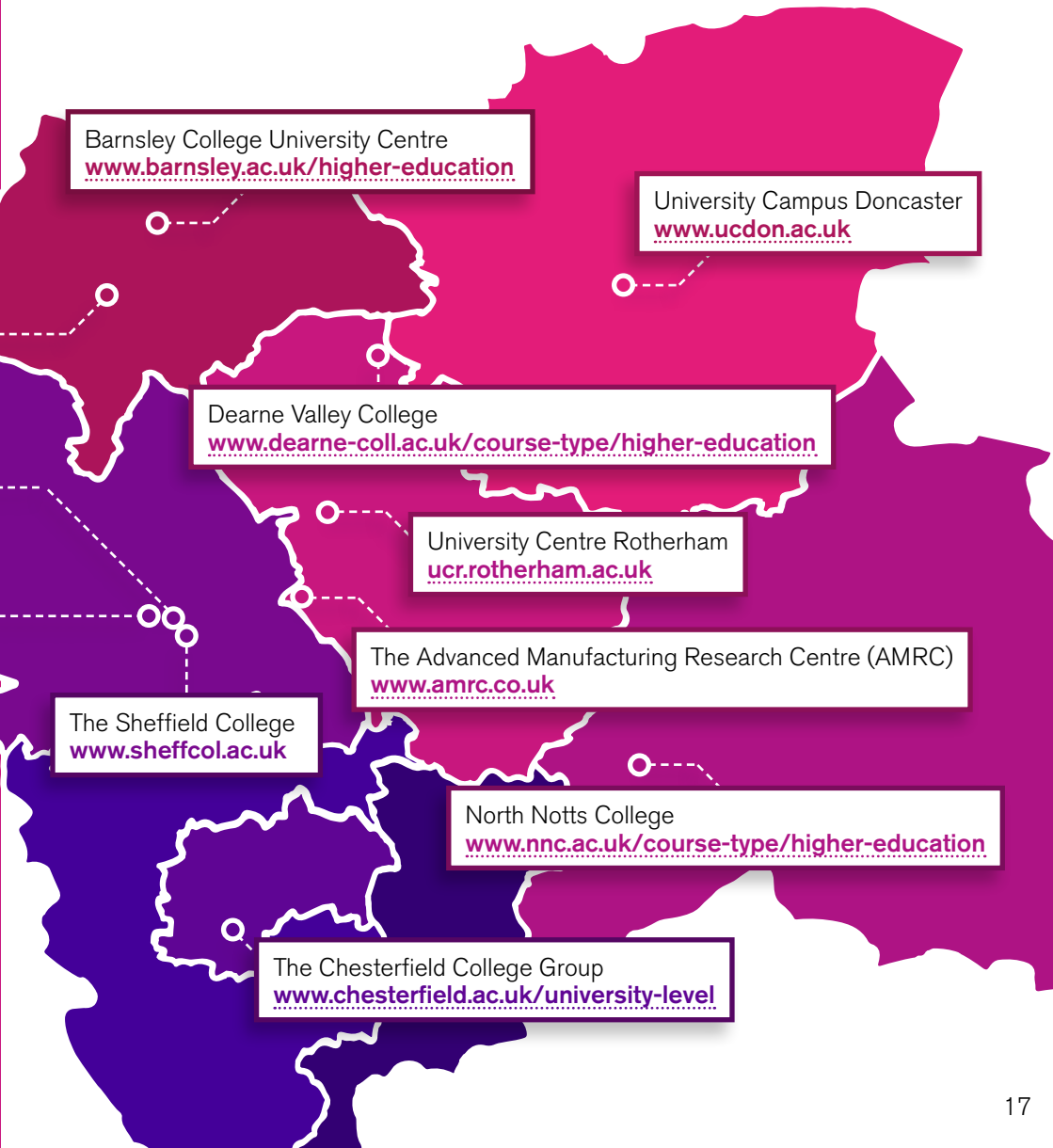
Northern College  
[www.northern.ac.uk](http://www.northern.ac.uk)

Sheffield Hallam University  
[www.shu.ac.uk](http://www.shu.ac.uk)

University of Sheffield  
[www.sheffield.ac.uk](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk)

# Location, location, location

For students in our region, here are 11 places you can study within daily travelling distance.



Barnsley College University Centre  
[www.barnsley.ac.uk/higher-education](http://www.barnsley.ac.uk/higher-education)

University Campus Doncaster  
[www.ucdon.ac.uk](http://www.ucdon.ac.uk)

Dearne Valley College  
[www.dearne-coll.ac.uk/course-type/higher-education](http://www.dearne-coll.ac.uk/course-type/higher-education)

University Centre Rotherham  
[ucr.rotherham.ac.uk](http://ucr.rotherham.ac.uk)

The Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC)  
[www.amrc.co.uk](http://www.amrc.co.uk)

The Sheffield College  
[www.sheffcol.ac.uk](http://www.sheffcol.ac.uk)

North Notts College  
[www.nnc.ac.uk/course-type/higher-education](http://www.nnc.ac.uk/course-type/higher-education)

The Chesterfield College Group  
[www.chesterfield.ac.uk/university-level](http://www.chesterfield.ac.uk/university-level)

# Higher education at college

You don't have to go to university to study higher education.

Many colleges also provide degree-level qualifications, including undergraduate degrees, foundation degrees, higher national certificates and higher national diplomas. Even though your study takes place at a college, your course is validated by a university. The main differences with studying at college rather than university are:

- ▶ Classes are smaller, which can have both academic and pastoral benefits as your tutors will be more accessible and involved
- ▶ Colleges themselves are smaller than universities, so can feel less overwhelming



- ▶ If you've already studied further education at the same college then the transition is easier
- ▶ Both entry requirements (the grades needed) and tuition fees can be lower
- ▶ Colleges are often more local than a university, which makes it easier to stay at home, if that's your preference

“At first, I was anxious about the idea of staying at college because I felt it was time to become an ‘adult’ and gain independence...but it was a fantastic choice! Classes became more relaxed, even though I was studying at the same institution.”

Nick, Sheffield College student

# Higher level qualifications table

Below you can find a breakdown of different qualifications and their levels. Qualifications that are level 4 and above are called **higher level qualifications**.

Level	Equivalent educational level	Apprenticeships
2	Five GCSE passes at grade 9 to 4	Intermediate
3	Two A Level passes, Level 3 diploma, International Baccalaureate, Access to Higher Education Diploma	Advanced
4	Foundation degree, Higher National Certificate	Higher
5	Foundation degree, Higher National Diploma	
6	Bachelor's degree	Degree
7	Master's degree	

# Degree apprenticeships

## What are degree apprenticeships?

Degree apprenticeships are a fast-growing alternative to just studying a degree at university. They combine the full-time paid work and on-the-job practical training of an apprenticeship with part-time higher-level study.

To get a degree apprenticeship you have to apply for an advertised position, just like any job. Your employer will pay you a wage and arrange your training provision, both on-the-job and at a higher education provider. Your tuition fees are co-funded by the government and your employer.



### The main benefits

- ▶ You are employed and paid a wage throughout the course
- ▶ You gain a full degree without needing to pay tuition fees
- ▶ You get a head start in your chosen profession

How the part-time higher-level study is delivered depends on your training provider:

- ▶ Distance learning – where the modules are online and the work is done in your own time
- ▶ Blended learning – where the study is a mix of online and face-to-face
- ▶ Block learning – where you attend your training provider for perhaps one day every week or for a whole week four times a year

An apprenticeship can take between three and six years to complete, depending on the course and level.



## Finding a degree apprenticeship and the entry requirements

Degree apprenticeships are advertised on normal recruitment websites, as well as through UCAS and Gov.uk. Competition can be tough as there are only a limited number of opportunities available and they are often open to people who have already left school as well. However, more degree apprenticeships are being developed each year as demand for them keeps growing.

Like a standard degree, the entry requirements vary depending on the employer and the course provider, so make sure you do your research.

### What could I be earning?

*Vacancies shown on rate my apprenticeship & gov.uk search, January 2022.*

- ▶ Savills, Apprentice Surveyor: £17,000
- ▶ Vodafone, Apprentice Software Engineer: £21,500
- ▶ Jaguar Land Rover, various, starting salaries from: £20,000
- ▶ Manchester Airport, Digital Marketing Degree Apprentice: £17,000
- ▶ Morrisons, Chartered Manager: £20,000

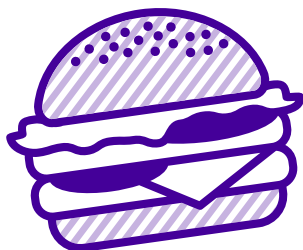
<https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk>

# Let's talk money

## What do I pay for?

There are two main things that you pay for in higher education: **learning** and **living**.

That might sound scary, but don't worry, there are several sources of funding to help you.



Student Finance England is the government organisation who lend students the money to help pay for their higher education study. This is called a student loan. Most UK citizens are entitled to help if they are studying for their first degree or higher-level qualification in the UK.

## Student loans are split into two parts:

### Tuition fee loans

Tuition fees cover things like lecturers' wages and facilities such as libraries, labs and equipment. For most first-time students the loan will cover the full cost of tuition fees and is paid directly to the university or college.

### Living cost (maintenance) loans

Living costs will take up most of your money, but how you choose to live will impact on how much you spend.

This loan helps you cover the cost of your accommodation, travel, food and basic essentials such as toothpaste and washing powder. Although these aren't much fun to buy, they are necessary!

# What could I get?

Your tuition fee loan is not means tested so all eligible students can receive this regardless of household income. How much Maintenance (living costs) loan you might be eligible for is based on your household income.

If you are under 25 years of age at the start of your course, it is likely that how much maintenance loan you receive will be based on parental income. If you are over 25 years of age at the start of your course, you will be classed as an independent student. This means that student finance won't take your parents income into consideration. However, if you live with a partner, they will take this into account instead.

Whether you choose to live at home or away from home and if you study inside or outside of London will also affect the amount of money you receive in each year of study.



## Maintenance Loans in England 2023/24

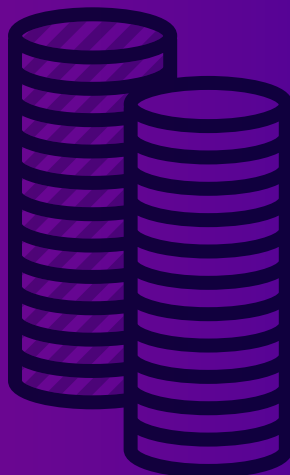
Household income	Living at home rate	Away from home (outside London) rate	Away from home (London) rate
£25,000 or less	£8,400	£9,978	£13,022
£30,000	£7,694	£9,265	£12,297
£35,000	£6,988	£8,552	£11,571
£40,000	£6,282	£7,839	£10,845
£45,000	£5,576	£7,125	£10,120
£50,000	£4,869	£6,412	£9,394
£55,000	£4,163	£5,699	£8,668
<b>£58,291</b>	£3,698	£5,229	£8,191
£60,000	£3,698	£4,986	£7,943
<b>£62,343</b>	£3,698	£4,651	£7,603
£65,000	£3,698	£4,651	£7,217
£70,000	£3,698	£4,651	£6,491
<b>£70,040+</b>	£3,698	£4,651	£6,485

# Bursaries and scholarships

Now for everyone's favourite bit. This is money that is yours to keep and you do not have to pay back – yes, **free money!**

Bursaries and scholarships are given to some students by their university/college or by different charities, based on a variety of reasons, for example if you are:

- ▶ from a low income household
- ▶ the first in your family to attend university
- ▶ especially talented in a particular subject
- ▶ a care leaver
- ▶ a refugee/asylum seeker
- ▶ estranged (not supported by) your family



Every higher education institution is different so it's important to do your research and ask your chosen provider what you might be eligible for. Make sure you get all the help you're entitled to.

Go to <https://www.ucas.com/finance> for more information.



## Hardship funds

Most universities have some funding which students facing unexpected hardship can apply for. All students can apply but priority is given to students in certain groups, such as those with children and/or disabilities.

# Payback time!

So you've learnt a lot, had new experiences and met some amazing people – but now you're starting your career, it might be time to pay back your student loans.

If you're from England and are starting your degree on or after 1st August 2023, your loan will be on Plan 5. This means you don't have to repay anything until you earn over **£25,000/year** (£2,083/month or £480/week) before tax.

Once you earn more than the threshold, you start repaying. However, you only pay **9% of the amount above the threshold**. For example, if you earn £30,000/year (£5,000 above the threshold), you will pay 9% of £5,000 for the year, which is £450.

Your income per year	Monthly repayments*
<b>£25,000</b>	<b>No repayments</b>
£30,000	£38
£35,000	£75
£40,000	£113
£45,000	£150
£50,000	£188

If you have a Plan 5 Student Loan, it will be written off 40 years after you're due to start making repayments.



**For more information on student finance please visit <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance>**

\*Figures correct for 23/24 academic year

# Is it worth the cost?

Higher education is structured so that it is designed to be affordable.



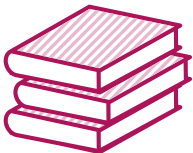
Think of your student loan as a graduate contribution, rather than a debt. Just like tax, the amount you pay is calculated on the amount you earn, not on what you borrowed, and is taken from your wages before they are paid to you. Student loan repayments won't affect your credit rating as they are deducted from your income.

For some people, higher education will be the best, or only, path to the career they want. For other people, it might not be. There can be many other benefits to having a university/college experience as well as gaining a degree-level qualification.

Although it's important to make the choice that's right for you, make sure you keep your aspirations as high as possible (e.g. with entry requirements). Some employers will take into consideration the course you study and where.

It's essential that you do your own research about courses, universities and colleges, careers, extra financial help, etc. as well as speak to careers advisers, teachers, family and friends.

**Only you can ultimately decide whether it's best for you to go or not to go!**



# Useful websites

- ▶ [www.hepp.ac.uk](http://www.hepp.ac.uk)
- ▶ [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)
- ▶ [www.discoveruni.org.uk](http://www.discoveruni.org.uk)
- ▶ [www.gov.uk/student-finance](http://www.gov.uk/student-finance)
- ▶ [nationalcareers.service.gov.uk](http://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk)
- ▶ [www.apprenticeships.gov.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk)
- ▶ [www.whatuni.com](http://www.whatuni.com)
- ▶ [www.theuniguide.co.uk](http://www.theuniguide.co.uk)

...And each higher education institution's website will contain lots of helpful information too. See pages 16 and 17 for details of your local higher education providers.

# The Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp) works across South Yorkshire.

Our mission is to increase and widen participation of our region's learners in higher education.

 [www.hepp.ac.uk](http://www.hepp.ac.uk)

 [@hepp\\_hq](https://www.instagram.com/hepp_hq)

 [/company/hepp-hq](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hepp-hq)

 [/HeppOnline](https://www.facebook.com/HeppOnline)

 [@hepp\\_hq](https://www.youtube.com/@hepp_hq)

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