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Connect2...Access to University

This factsheet is for any adult looking for an alternative to A levels and who plans to go to university or study at higher education level in N Ireland. Most adults who do not have A levels but want to go to university, complete an Access course. Access courses are offered by all further education colleges in N Ireland and lead to the award of a Certificate in Foundation Studies or an Access Diploma.

What are the entry requirements for Access courses?

There are normally no specific entry requirements. For some colleges, you will need to have been out of full time formal education for more than two years, before you can apply. Check with the colleges for further details.

There may be a short, informal interview and you may also be asked to write a short essay or take a basic test in English and Maths.

I have no qualifications – what are my next steps?

If you have no qualifications or haven't studied for some time, it is important to think about how you will cope with classes, coursework and independent study. If you don't feel confident about taking on an Access course at this stage, you could consider starting with an Essential Skills class (English and Maths), computer class or a Preparation for Access course (see below).

How long are Access courses?

Access courses last one year full time or two years part time. If you have no formal qualifications, some colleges may recommend you take two to three years to complete your Access course. Belfast Metropolitan College, for example, offers a Preparation for Access course.

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This is aimed at students who want to build up their study skills before starting a full Access course.

Are courses offered during the day and evening?

Courses are offered during the day and evening, depending on demand.

Some colleges run Access courses in the mornings and may offer crèche facilities.

Do I have to choose an Access course which relates to the degree I want to take?

Most adults applying for an Access course already know what degree they want to progress to. When you have decided on your degree subject, you need to check the degree entry requirements to make sure you pick a suitable Access course. For example an Access course in Biological Sciences would be suitable for a Nursing degree. For entry to a BEd (Bachelor of Education) degree, it is necessary to study at least one national curriculum subject.

Queen's University's undergraduate prospectus and website gives detailed information on the acceptability of Access courses for each of their degrees and the percentage marks needed. Visit www.qub.ac.uk/ado and click 'Undergraduate Admissions', 'Entrance Requirements' and then 'Access/Foundation courses'.

Contact University of Ulster Admissions directly for details of their entrance requirements.

What percentage mark will I need to progress to a degree?

In most cases, you will need to achieve a specific percentage mark for entry to the degree you have chosen. This could range from 55 – 80%. Percentage marks will be higher where there is more competition for places. Speak to your Access course tutor as soon as possible if you think you may have difficulty achieving the required mark.

Are Access courses acceptable for all degrees?

In Northern Ireland, A levels are still required for entry to some degree courses. For example, Access courses are **not** accepted as an alternative to A levels for degrees in Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy.

What will I study in an Access course?

Access courses are offered in different subject areas, for example:

- Computing/Information Technology
- Engineering
- Humanities (this can include English Literature and History)
- Science
- Social and Behavioural Sciences (this can include Psychology and Sociology)
- Women's Studies
- Access to Teaching
- Access to Nursing

You may also have to study a range of compulsory modules. These could include:

- English Language
- Study Skills
- Information Technology
- Mathematics

College websites or prospectuses will give full details of course content and choice of modules.

I don't have any Maths or English qualifications – will they be included in my Access course?

Maths

If you do not have Maths GCSE grade C or equivalent, you may need to choose an Access course which contains a suitable Maths module. If GCSE

grade C or equivalent in Maths is required for a degree, or if entry to a degree is particularly competitive, then it is advisable to look for an Access course which includes NICATS Maths modules.

NICATS Access Maths modules have been validated by Queen's University and the University of Ulster and are recognised as a Level 2 equivalent for the purpose of entry to higher education in Northern Ireland.

Some very competitive and demanding degrees, like Nursing, will accept NICATS Maths modules, but may ask for a higher percentage mark in that particular module.

English

In general students who successfully complete their Access course are regarded as having demonstrated an acceptable level of English. However it is always advisable to check with the university you wish to attend as some degrees may require a specific English Language module.

If I change my mind about going to university, will an Access course help my job prospects?

Access courses are specifically aimed at adults who want to progress to university. However, an Access course **may** be acceptable if you apply for a job asking for evidence of a Level 3 qualification or a qualification equivalent to A levels. Bear in mind that Access courses may not be familiar to all employers.

If you are not sure about going to university, you may want to consider working towards an alternative higher education qualification such as an HNC or HND (Higher National Certificate/Diploma). These have a more vocational (job related) focus and it is possible to top them up to a degree at a later stage.

Is there any financial support?

If you study a full time Access course you should not have to pay any tuition fees. You may also be eligible to apply for a discretionary Further Education Award and help with childcare costs. Further details are available in EGSA's Connect2..... Full Time Further Education factfile.

If you choose to study a part time Access course you may be eligible for help with tuition fees, a small grant towards course costs and help with childcare costs. Further details are available in EGSA's Connect2..... Financing Part Time Further Education factfile.

The colleges also administer Hardship Loans to help students aged 19 and over who are in severe financial difficulty. Speak to the Student Finance Officer at your college to check if you would be eligible to apply.

Money for Life Project

As part of this project, EGSA can offer advice if you are concerned about financial support and/or how this might impact on your benefits. For further information contact Paulette Lennon on T: 028 9024 4274 or E: moneyforlife@egsa.org.uk.

Money for Life is a unique partnership between Lloyds Banking Group, the Money Advice Service and the Further Education sector partners in the four nations of the UK. EGSA is the lead partner for Northern Ireland.

Are there any other routes into higher education?

Queen's University (QUB)

Part time evening Certificates and Diplomas from the School of Education may enable you to transfer to linked degrees at QUB. Part time courses attract credit (CATS) points which can be used to contribute towards a degree in a related subject. We recommend you discuss your plans with QUB before following this route.

Open University (OU)

There are no specific entry requirements for OU degrees. Courses start at various times throughout the year, usually in February and October. OU courses are studied at home, at your own pace.

Can I switch from an OU degree to a full time degree at another university?

120 OU credit points at Level 1 should be acceptable for entry to most universities, depending on the subject. This involves about two years of home study. However it is important to contact the Admissions Department of the University you eventually intend to study with to check that the subject and content of the OU course are suitable. This is particularly important if you do not have any GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.

How do I apply for a degree?

Ask your Access course tutor about the application process. For most degrees, you will need to apply online through UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admission Service) – www.ucas.com. There are exceptions to this - please check with your choice of university. Apply as far in advance as possible and give yourself plenty of time to find out about and apply for financial support. EGSA produces a series of higher education funding factfiles which can be downloaded from our website.

What else do I need to know?

In addition to achieving a specific percentage mark for entry onto your degree, you **may** also need to meet other requirements. For example:

- Attending a successful interview
- Submitting an Access NI form (if your degree will involve working with children or vulnerable adults)
- Passing a medical
- Supplying references

Before you enrol on an Access course we strongly recommend you contact the University you intend to study with, to make sure your choice of course is acceptable for degree entry.

Useful contacts

Colleges

Belfast Metropolitan College

www.belfastmet.ac.uk

Northern Regional College

www.nrc.ac.uk

North West Regional College

www.nwrc.ac.uk

Southern Regional College

www.src.ac.uk

South Eastern Regional College

www.serc.ac.uk

South West Regional College

www.swc.ac.uk

Universities

Open University in Ireland (Belfast office)

T: (028) 9024 5025

www.open.ac.uk

Queen's University Belfast (Admissions Office)

T: (028) 9097 2727

www.qub.ac.uk/ado

Queen's University Belfast (School of Education)

T: (028) 9097 3323

www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/

University of Ulster (General Enquiries)

T: 08700 400 700

www.ulster.ac.uk

I'm still not sure if an Access course is right for me – where can I get further advice?

You can discuss your career and learning options with an EGSA adviser. Our services are aimed at adults and our advice is confidential and independent.

Visit our website to find out more: <http://egsa.org.uk/helping-you/>, phone us on T: 028 9024 4274 or E: info@egsa.org.uk.

While EGSA makes every effort to ensure that the information in this factfile is correct at the time of going to print, we can't accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. Before enrolling on a course, please check full details with your choice of learning provider.