

Pre-planning: top-up degrees - your questions answered

The following leaflet answers a series of frequently asked questions about top-up degrees.

What is a top-up degree?

Students with higher education (HE) qualifications such as an HND, foundation degree or associate bachelor degree have the option of progressing onto honours degree programmes. This type of progression route is commonly known as a top-up degree.

How long will it take me to complete a top-up degree?

In most instances top-up degrees can be completed in either one or two years. However, because of the cost of studying, many top-up degrees are moving towards the one-year option.

Does a top-up degree lead to a full degree award?

Yes, as long as you complete an honours project, at the end of the course you receive the same degree as a three-year undergraduate.

What classification of degree can I get?

You will graduate with one of a number of classifications, depending upon your performance at university. The classifications are: first class honours, upper second class honours, lower second class honours, third class honours. At some universities it is still possible to do an ordinary degree with no honours.

How will lectures at university be different from those on my HND?

It is likely that at university you will attend lectures in a large class, possibly in a lecture theatre. Class sizes will almost certainly be bigger than on your HND.

Are lectures compulsory?

Not usually, but it is in your own interest to attend.

Would it be possible to sit in on a lecture prior to starting university?

Not usually, but if you would like to, check with your receiving institution.

Would I have access to previous years' lecture notes?

Quite possibly but check with the appropriate module leader/co-ordinator.

Where would I find detailed information on programme and module details?

Check your student handbook, check the university website, ask your module leader/co-ordinator, ask your personal tutor/studies advisor, or ask other students.

What is the difference between the work I do at HND and the work expected of me as a degree student?

You may find there is a big difference in the level of understanding and depth of reading that is required of you at university. You could ask your fellow students if you could have a look at the work they did in previous years. This way you will get an idea of what is expected of you. Additionally, you could ask a member of staff to talk to you about the possible differences.

Who might I turn to for academic help and support at HE?

Your first port of call is your personal/year tutor, if you have one, who will advise you. However, the library and student services will also provide information on where to get all sorts of help, from financial guidance to essay writing.

I've heard about seminar groups. What are these?

They are small group sessions where the lecture is often discussed in more detail. You could well be expected to do additional reading in order to contribute effectively to the discussion.

Some students say that the third year of a degree involves a lot of coursework. How and where do I find out what to expect?

Talk to your personal tutor or the module leader (in certain instances the two might be the same). Or check your student handbook where a description of modules will show how much work you will be expected to do.

Is it true I will need to sit formal exams? If so where can I find examples and help?

You may need to sit exams. If so the library may well hold examples of past papers and fellow students will often explain what is expected of you in exams. Some institutions have sample exam questions plus a range of answers to show you what you need to achieve.

I've heard about a dissertation or honours project, but am unsure of what would be expected of me. Where would I go to find out about an honours project?

Many departments will keep libraries of past student projects that you can look at. There will be regulations regarding length and format of the final project. These can normally be found in your student handbook. Once you've decided on the topic for your honours project you will be allocated a supervisor who will guide and assist you. It is likely that

your supervisor will have an interest in the subject area you are investigating. There may also be information about honours projects on the university website and in the university library.

What marking criteria are used at university?

Marking criteria, which are your guide to the standard of work that is expected from you, will be described in the student handbook and are quite likely to be on the university website. Each assignment will have clear guidelines about the assessment criteria that are being used. If you are at all unsure about what is expected of you, talk to your personal tutor.

I've heard that at university I need to know how to reference in a particular way. Where can I find out what referencing system the university uses?

The student handbook and university website will provide details on the referencing system used by your department. It is likely there will be a key skills handout in the library with samples that you can look at.

Throughout my HND I have acquired a range of skills. How can I compare these skills to those I might need at university?

Some universities have a key skills checklist, or some form of needs analysis so that students can gauge their level of competence. There is also a sample of a key skills checklist on the SPAT website, www.spat.ac.uk.

I'm pretty good on a computer but would like to know more about the software I would use at university. Who would I ask for this information?

Contact the IT department of your chosen university.

Will the university offer me support and training on software?

Yes, most universities run IT courses for students. Often these courses are run during induction so be sure to check prior to the start of the semester. It could be that your university runs a bridging course in the summer and IT courses are included.

I am dyslexic and have been given support and help at my current college. What sort of help might I expect at university and where would I go to find out?

There is a lot of help available at university but it will be up to you to go and ask. Your first port of call would normally be student services, or the students' union.

What financial help is available at university?

All universities provide help and guidance on financial issues. You can get advice on student loans and many other financial matters. Your

college will also be able to offer you advice on financial matters when studying a HE programme.

I am looking forward to the social life at university. Who should I contact to find out about various clubs and sports?

The students' union will provide you with any information you need on student clubs and activities.

You can use the above questions as a guide to thinking about what to expect at university. You could also gain additional information by attending open days at your chosen university or by accessing the SPAT website at www.spat.ac.uk