

# **Studying for your Education Degree**

**CRITICAL  
STUDY SKILLS**

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# Chapter 1

## Studying education in higher education

### Learning outcomes



#### After reading this chapter you will:

- have gained knowledge of higher education and its place in the UK education system;
- understand some of the terminology and 'jargon' used in higher education;
- have gained knowledge of institutions which set standards for education training;
- have gained knowledge of levels and qualifications in education;
- understand the relevance and importance of lifelong learning and continuing professional development;
- understand the importance of student autonomy and independent learning in universities;
- have gained knowledge of how courses are structured and delivered.

This chapter will develop your knowledge and understanding of the study of education in UK universities. It will outline the 'qualification frameworks' that are relevant to becoming, and developing as, an educator, and discuss the role of important educational and professional bodies. In addition, you will be introduced to the types of teaching and learning that you will encounter as a student teacher.

Before you read the chapter, test your knowledge with the **Quick quiz** below. You can revisit the quiz as you read, or come back to it after reading the whole chapter to see if your answers have changed. Key words in this chapter are highlighted in **bold** and can be found in the Appendix.

#### CROSS REFERENCE

Appendix,  
The language  
of higher  
education

### Quick quiz



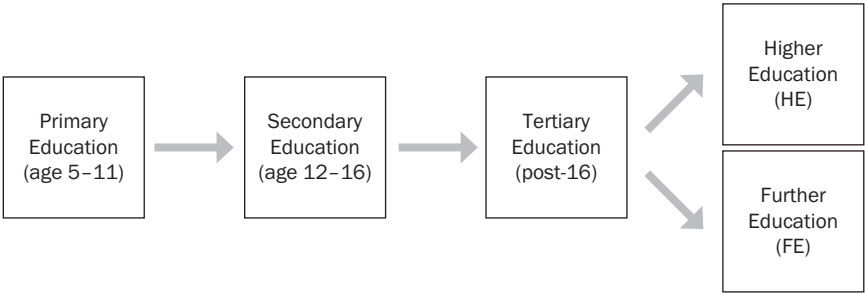
- 1) What does HE stand for?
- 2) How is HE different from FE?
- 3) What are the main qualifications offered by universities?
- 4) Which is the higher level qualification, a *degree* or a *diploma*?
- 5) What is the minimum academic qualification you need to become a qualified teacher?



- ↑
- 6) What mark (percentage) do you usually need to obtain a *first-class* degree?
  - 7) What are 'credits' and how can you get them?
  - 8) What is 'lifelong learning'?
  - 9) What are the most common types of assessment in universities?

## What is HE?

**HE** stands for '**higher education**', one of two options in UK **tertiary education**, ie education available to people of 16 years or above.



**Figure 1.1: The UK education system**

HE is mainly provided by universities, and principally awards **degrees** and **diplomas**. In contrast, **further education (FE)** is provided by colleges, which deliver courses and award qualifications which are **vocational** in nature (NVQs; City & Guilds; BTEC), preparing people directly for the workplace. However, in recent years, there has been a blurring of the line between the two types of institution, with many FE colleges, sometimes in association with partner universities, also offering degrees. This is one way of making degrees accessible to a wider range of people, some of whom may find it convenient to attend classes in a local FE college or to study in the evenings. Recently introduced 'degree apprenticeships', which offer the potential to obtain a degree while learning on the job, also blur the boundaries between vocational and academic learning.

## Your education degree

Teacher training, which forms part of most education degrees in the UK, is today fully integrated into the HE sector. There are some routes into teaching in which the universities' involvement is more limited, but these tend to be at postgraduate level and require trainees to possess a degree qualification. Although there is a large vocational component to teaching, based on practical teaching skills, teaching also requires highly developed intellectual skills, and universities are considered to be the

best place for undergraduate students to acquire and develop these. Education is thus an academic subject, equivalent to any other, such as medicine, engineering or English literature, and therefore measured against the same standards.

## Qualification frameworks

HE qualifications, sometimes called ‘academic awards’, are regulated across the UK via two frameworks: the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (QAA, 2008), and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (QAA, 2014). These frameworks help institutions and employers judge the value of an individual’s education and help ensure equity between academic subjects. Table 1.1 shows the academic levels

**Table 1.1: An overview of academic levels in relation to education study in HE**

UNDERGRADUATE STUDY			
England, Wales, Northern Ireland	Scotland	Award	Notes
Level 4	Level 7	Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)	
Level 5	Level 8	Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) Foundation Degree (FdD)	
Level 6	Level 9	Ordinary Bachelor’s Degree eg BA Education	
	Level 10	Bachelor’s Degree with Honours eg BA Education, BA (Hons) Education with QTS	BA Education with QTS is the usual qualification at undergraduate level to teach.
POSTGRADUATE STUDY			
Level 7	Level 11	Master’s Degree eg MSc, MA, MPhil Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE)	PGCE is the HE qualification at postgraduate level to teach.
Level 8	Level 12	Research Doctorate (PhD) Professional Doctorate eg DPhil Education, PhD Education, EdD	Sometimes undertaken by practising teachers and often taken by teacher trainers in HE

assigned by the QAA to each stage of HE, and provides information on how they relate to a study pathway in education.

An undergraduate degree has four classifications. These are shown in Table 1.2, along with the marks usually required at each level.

Table 1.2: Bachelor’s degree classifications and typical required marks

CLASSIFICATION	MARKS REQUIRED
1st	Above 70%
2:1	60–69%
2:2	50–59%
3rd	40–49%
Fail	Below 40%

Courses and credits

You can see from Table 1.1 that, in order to enter the teaching profession, you must obtain a degree from an HE institution, usually a university. If you study full time, it will take three years to obtain an honours degree (or four years in Scotland). However, universities recognise that timescale is not possible or ideal for many people, so they have flexible learning systems which allow students to fit study into their lives in a practical way. This can involve:

- **distance learning**, where the student mainly studies from home via correspondence, using web-based resources – perhaps occasionally attending university workshops etc;
- **blended learning**, which combines traditional classroom study and web-based learning;
- **part-time study** (including the new degree apprenticeships mentioned earlier).

Flexible learning is facilitated by the **credit** points system which underpins HE education. Each course **module** that you study has a number of credit points attached to it. Each credit is equal to 10 hours of study, either in class, or through self-study (QAA, 2008, 2014). These credit points build up to eventually form your degree, whether over three years’ full-time study, or over a longer period if you study part time. Table 1.3 shows that a student has to earn 360 credit points in order to be awarded an honours degree.

Table 1.3: HE qualifications in relation to credit points

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION	CREDIT POINTS REQUIRED
CertHE	120 at Level 4 (Scotland Level 7)
DipHE	120 at Level 4 (Scotland Level 7) + 120 at Level 5 (Scotland Level 8)

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION	CREDIT POINTS REQUIRED
Degree with Honours (Ordinary Degree in Scotland)	120 at Level 4 (Scotland Level 7) + 120 at Level 5 (Scotland Level 8) + 120 at Level 6 (Scotland Level 9)

Look at the QAA frameworks (2008, 2014) online to see descriptors detailing exactly what is expected of a student at each level. Note that not all universities offer the CertHE. Some universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland may offer an ordinary degree without honours to students who have obtained a certain number of credits at Level 6. A four-year Scottish Honours Degree requires an additional 120 credits at Level 9/10.

Universities provide students with information on each module with regard to its academic level and the number of credit points it carries. Many modules, often called 'core modules', will be obligatory; some modules will be optional. All modules are organised around the following:

- a set of **learning outcomes** which identify what you will be able to do or understand by the end of the course;
- a process of **teaching and learning** which will help you achieve the learning outcomes;
- **assessment** which will measure your achievement and provide evidence of it.

## Top tips



### Thinking about 'the big picture'

Learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and assessment will be aligned, so you should think about 'the big picture' and consider them together. When preparing for assessments, for example, look again at the learning outcomes to check what you will be expected to demonstrate. In class, think about how the classroom activities are partly preparing you for assessment, and ask if you are not sure.

## Lifelong learning and continuous professional development

The flexible approach to study outlined above is underpinned by the much-valued educational principle of **lifelong learning**. Lifelong learning, by definition, extends beyond your degree, and may involve postgraduate study or **continuing professional development (CPD)**. CPD in teaching can be provided by a range of organisations, including local education authorities, private consultancies, multi-academy trusts and higher education institutions. It is important to discuss your CPD needs with your line manager or mentor once you have begun teaching.

Case study



How is CPD demonstrated in the personal account below?

I have been teaching for five years in two primary schools, having moved after my third year to take up a post as literacy co-ordinator. During this time, I have attended a range of courses in order to address aspects of my practice where I felt I could develop my skills and knowledge. After attending a series of twilight workshops at my local university's school of education, I joined the United Kingdom Literacy Association and went to a conference with two colleagues. This stimulated two of us to enrol at the university to take a master's degree and to focus, for our dissertations, on aspects of literacy. My studies have enabled me to look at the way in which spelling is currently taught in schools and to consider strategies for developing spelling in my own school. This was a key focus following the school's last Ofsted inspection, and the school is subsidising my tuition fees as it considers that my research will benefit teaching and learning.

Reflection



What do you think your CPD priorities might be when you are a qualified teacher?

Being a university student

Reflection



What is your previous experience of study? Which of the following have you experienced? Was your experience positive or negative? Why was this?

- 1) Big classes where the teacher talks a lot and the class mostly listens
- 2) Large lectures with hundreds of students
- 3) Small seminar groups where people discuss topics or articles
- 4) One-to-one tutorials with a teacher

University culture and practices may not always reflect your past educational experiences. Some students may find it difficult to work things out at first.

Case studies



Do you think these students have a good understanding of what is expected of them at university level? What advice would you give them?





- 1) “My course looks quite easy – there aren’t many lectures and I don’t have to hand in any essays until the end of the semester. So it looks like I’ll have a lot of free time!”
- 2) “The lecturer puts some things on Blackboard after the lecture, but I’m not very confident with technical stuff so I haven’t seen it.”
- 3) “It doesn’t matter if I miss lectures – I can get all the information I need from reading textbooks.”
- 4) “I’m very nervous about speaking in front of people so I tend to keep my head down in seminars and just get through them without drawing attention to myself.”
- 5) “I’m disappointed in my essay mark and don’t understand what I did wrong – I worked really hard on it! But there’s nothing I can do about it now. Maybe I’m just not cut out for this.”

The students quoted above have some common misunderstandings about university life. These areas of confusion are dealt with in the following sections, to demonstrate, among other things, how study is not just about the time you spend in the classroom, why it is important to go to lectures, when and how you should seek support from academic staff, and why, sometimes, you might just need to push yourself beyond your comfort zone in order to achieve your full potential!

## Study time

At university, you will encounter a range of teaching and learning methods, including those which involve face-to-face contact with academic staff, ie **lectures, seminars and tutorials**. However, you may find that there seems to be a lot of ‘free’ time on your timetable. Hence, it is important to understand that the time you spend with your lecturers is only a small part of your study. A 10-credit module is seen to represent approximately 100 hours of actual work (QAA, 2008, 2014). So if you attend, say, 30 hours of lectures on a particular 10-credit module, this still leaves 70 hours of study to complete outside the classroom. This may involve searching the library, reading, planning and writing essays, improving your computer skills, or collaborating with other students on a group project.

CROSS  
REFERENCE

Chapter 2,  
Strategies  
for effective  
learning

## Top tips



### Getting the most from your study time

Try thinking of your full-time studies as a typical ‘working week’ of about 35–40 hours a week, 7–8 hours a day, and plan your time accordingly. (Adapt this if you are studying part time.) Take sensible breaks throughout the day, just as you would if you were working – maybe cook a nice healthy lunch to give you energy, or take the dog for a walk to give your brain some much-needed downtime!