

# UNITED KINGDOM

## Higher Education

While the higher education systems in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are similar, the Scottish system is quite different.

After taking the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), students in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland may leave secondary schooling. They may choose to continue their education at vocational or technical colleges, or they may take a higher level of secondary school examination known as AS-Levels after an additional year of study. Following two years of study, students may take A-Level (short for Advanced Level) examinations, which are required for university entrance in the United Kingdom.

Scotland has its own qualification framework. After seven years of primary education and four years of compulsory secondary education, students aged 15-16 may take the Scottish Certificate of Education (SCE). The SCE is recognized throughout the United Kingdom as the equivalent to GCE A-levels and is usually the entry qualification for university.

Undergraduate degrees take three years to complete in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, whereas at Scottish universities they last four years. At the graduate level, a master's degree is normally earned in a single year, a research master's degree in two years, and a doctoral degree in three years.

The idea of an undergraduate being "undeclared" in their major can be very strange to people in the United Kingdom. U.K. students tend to specialize in their field of study early and may even start specializing in their majors during the final year of high school. General education or basic courses are not as common at U.K. universities because they have already been covered at the GCSE level. Many faculties assume that a university student has a basic understanding of the concepts that will be addressed in the course, so it is common for third-year students of other countries (particularly the US) to take first- and second-year courses at a U.K. university. The curriculum in these courses is not considered introductory or lower level.

## Academic Calendar

Full Year: September – May

Semester 1: September – December/January

Semester 2: January – May

Number of classes a typical student takes per term: 3-6 modules (classes)

A typical course load in the United Kingdom will vary from three to six modules (or classes) per term, depending on how many credits each module is worth. The number of hours in class per week will vary by institution. In addition to lectures, students may also be required to sign up for tutorials or lab work. For specific details on a particular host institution, please read the details in student Acceptance Packages and the Country Handbooks.

Number of hours per week a typical student spends in class: 20-25

Number of weeks per term: 11-16 (trimesters may be shorter)

## Grading

Percentage	ECTS Grade	U.S. Equivalent
80-100%	A	A+
70-79%	A	A
60-69%	B	B+
53-59%	C	B
46-52%	D	C
40-45%	D/E	D
0-40%	F	F

Important note: In the U.K. system, it is often more difficult to obtain the higher grade designations than in the U.S. system. Though a grade may appear low according to a home university's grade scale, it may actually reflect very good performance on the U.K. scale.

Grades are given as percentages rather than letter grades. Forty percent is the minimum passing grade and high percentages are rarely awarded. A grade of 70% or higher is considered "with distinction." In general, percentages increase from 40 rather than decrease from 100.

The percentage range for each class varies from institution to institution. Individual modules on the transcript sometimes carry only the percentage mark.

## Credit Equivalent

Credits in the U.K. system are not equivalent to U.S. credits. A full-time student in the U.K. will carry 60 credits per semester, which is usually equivalent to 15 U.S. credits or 30 ECTS.

The system of credits in use (ECTS) is a cumulative calculation of credit points based on the workload of a student. It is a student-centered credit system to measure the workload required to achieve the objectives of a curriculum. One credit point corresponds to 26 hours of study performed by a student (including lectures, seminars, practice, homework, independent work, and assessment of learning outcomes). ECTS credits are allocated to course units and are awarded to students who successfully complete the course. Please see the "European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)" section at the beginning of this guide for more information.