

# Plot a course.

## A guide to comparing Universities



Discovering the right course can be easy for some applicants. However, with over 50,000 courses to choose from and many institutions offering very similar programmes, it is essential that applicants compare and analyse to ensure they attend the very best institutions that will challenge them academically and engage them socially.

This guide provides an overview of organisations and services designed to help applicants investigate and examine courses and institutions. It also contains useful links to their websites.

## Information for finding a course or University:

### UCAS

UCAS should be the first place to start gathering information and facts about the courses you are interest in. The website also contains institutional guides and a useful section for parents and guardians who may be new to the UCAS and Higher Education process.

[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

Guide for Parents : [www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/parents-and-guardians](http://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/parents-and-guardians)

## Information on the teaching, research and quality of an institution:

### REF

The REF is the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. It replaced the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), last conducted in 2008.

The primary purpose of REF 2014 was to assess the quality of research and produce outcomes for each submission made by institutions:

- The four higher education funding bodies will use the assessment outcomes to inform the selective allocation of their grant for research to the institutions which they fund, with effect from 2015-16.
- The assessment provides accountability for public investment in research and produces evidence of the benefits of this investment.
- The assessment outcomes provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use within the higher education (HE) sector and for public information.

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

### QAA

“We conduct reviews of institutions and publish reports detailing the findings. Our institution reports help people make a choice about where to study. They help colleges and universities set up systems to improve the learning opportunities they offer students. They also allow institutions to share good practice across the higher education sector.”

[www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports)

## Information on statistics and league tables:

### **The Complete University Guide**

“The Complete University Guide has been publishing league tables online since 2007, the league tables are compiled by Mayfield University Consultants. Our independent UK University League Tables & Rankings give you a good guide to which university is best for you, overall and by subject. We work closely with all main UK Universities and UCAS”

[www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings](http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings)

### **Unistats**

“Unistats lets you search, review and compare official information about universities and colleges in the UK, and the subjects they offer. It includes results from the National Student Survey – where more than 220,000 students give their views about the quality of their higher education experience.

In this way, Unistats is different to league tables - for example, those that are found on the Guardian, Times and Sunday Times websites.

The information on Unistats is provided by

- the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
- the FE data service
- the National Student Survey (run by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)).”

<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk>

### **Guardian League Tables**

“All UK universities ranked by the Guardian according to teaching excellence. Eight statistical measures are employed to approximate a university’s performance in teaching each subject. Measures relate to both input, eg expenditure by the university on its students, and output, eg a graduate’s probability of finding a graduate-level job. The measures are knitted together to get a Guardian score, against which institutions are ranked. For those prospective undergraduates who do not know which subject they wish to study, but who still want to know where institutions rank in relation to one another, the Guardian scores have been averaged for each institution across all subjects to generate an institution-level table.”

Indicators of performance:

- a) National Student Survey – teaching
- b) National Student Survey – assessment & feedback
- c) National Student Survey – overall satisfaction
- d) Value added scores
- e) Student-staff ratios
- f) Expenditure per student
- g) Entry scores
- h) Career prospects

[www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2014/jun/02/university-league-tables-2015-the-complete-list](http://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2014/jun/02/university-league-tables-2015-the-complete-list)

### **QS World Rankings**

“The QS World University Rankings® are among the most trusted university rankings available. Here you can find all you need about the QS World University Rankings® now including university fees information. View the world’s leading overall universities in the world, the best universities by subject rank area, and the best universities as voted by employers”

[www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings](http://www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings)

### **Times Higher Education – Table of Tables**

“Each year since 2008, Times Higher Education has compiled a “Table of tables” to offer a snapshot of how the UK higher education sector is viewed by the national newspapers.

The “Table of tables” was calculated by giving the top 30 institutions points corresponding to their position in The Times, The Guardian and the Complete University Guide tables (30 for the top place, 29 for second and so on).

The total scores determined the overall positions of the institutions.”

[www.timeshighereducation.co.uk](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk)

## University guides and other information

### **UCAS**

UCAS provides a good summary of each institution within its various guides

[www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/find-course/how-choose-between-similar-courses-and-unis](http://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/find-course/how-choose-between-similar-courses-and-unis)

### **The Guardian**

The Guardian also provides specific information about each institution:

[www.theguardian.com/education](http://www.theguardian.com/education)

### **Opendays.com**

“Opendays.com was started in 1999 and has established itself as the definitive source of university and college open day information in the UK. We list open days for every UK higher education institution - both universities and colleges - and provide all of our information free of charge to users. You can also book your place at many open days, free of charge, direct from this web site.”

[www.opendays.com](http://www.opendays.com)

## Student Forums:

### **The Student Room**

“The Student Room is a thriving free student discussion forum, if you can think of a topic there will be somewhere for you to discuss it on TSR.

The student Room is the world’s largest and fastest growing student community, with over 250,000 members and more than 16,000,000 posts on our forum. We also have the TSR wiki which has thousands of pages of revision notes, hundreds of sample UCAS personal statements and articles on everything from gap years to coping with long distance relationships”

[www.thestudentroom.co.uk/uniprofiles/university-of-southampton](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/uniprofiles/university-of-southampton)

### **Yougo**

“‘yougo’ is a website available to students thinking of applying, already applied to or currently in higher education and provides students with a comprehensive information resource and social networking opportunities just for students.”

<https://yougo.co.uk>

## What’s happening within Higher Education

If you are interested in keeping up-to-date with what’s going on within Higher Education, you may find the following sites useful:

[www.timeshighereducation.co.uk](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk)

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/education](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education)

[www.guardian.co.uk/education/higher-education](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/higher-education)

[www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher)