

Complete list of questions about Further Education in the UK

What is the difference between an FE college and a private college?

There is a difference between FE colleges and private colleges. Only FE colleges are subject to regular government inspection to ensure that their courses meet national standards for quality. Private colleges are not subject to such regulation and may reflect variable quality as a result. In contrast, some universities retain the word 'college' as part of their titles. These HE institutions are not the same as private colleges but have full university status.

What is the difference between an FE college and a university?

FE colleges offer courses from GCSE level upwards, including some courses at higher education level. Universities mainly offer programmes at higher education (HE) level which include some pre-undergraduate programmes as well as undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. Both kinds of institutions may offer adult continuing education classes, which may or may not be accredited.

How is studying in an FE college different from studying in a university?

Although there are some very large FE colleges, in general, universities are bigger institutions. Studying at a college is likely to require less independence but you are also likely to be involved with a smaller more close-knit community in your own subject area where daily contact and systems of support are likely to be stronger.

How much choice will there be about what I study on my course in an FE college?

Courses in FE colleges are likely to be more directed and offer a limited choice of modules or options. In accordance with the kinds of courses on offer, there is unlikely to be scope for research if you are studying at an FE college, although more practical subject-related investigations may be possible.

What is IELTS?

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is the most widely recognised examination system in English language taken by international students wishing to come and study in UK further or higher education. Students applying for courses in FE colleges need to show evidence of competence in English language and [IELTS](#) is the most commonly used system for doing this, although others such as [TOEFL](#) or some Cambridge exams may also be accepted.

What score in IELTS is required for study in FE colleges?

Before beginning studies in FE, international students are required by their college to show evidence of having reached a minimum level of 5.5 or, in some cases, 6.0 in IELTS depending on which course they are applying to do. This is equivalent to B1 level on the [Common European Framework](#). Equivalent scores in other examinations, besides IELTS, are also likely to be accepted by your college. In contrast, most universities will require a minimum of 6.5 in IELTS for undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. Lower scores may apply for non-degree programmes at university.

Can I do a higher education level course in an FE college?

11% of UK higher education courses are taught in FE colleges. In some cases, the first year or two of a degree programme can be done at an FE college before transferring to a university for the rest of the programme. Some complete degree courses are also taught in FE colleges. These are accredited by a university.

What are vocational courses in FE colleges?

Many of the courses offered in FE are vocational. This means that they are likely to include actual workplace experience (such as foundation degree programmes) or are designed to train you in skills which apply closely to one or more specific workplace environments.

What is a foundation year programme?

Many FE colleges offer one-year international foundation year or 'access' programmes. These programmes have different discipline-specific modules and prepare students to enter an honours degree programme at undergraduate level. They also include modules that can help international students reach the required level in English language and develop the study skills needed for degree level study.

What are the benefits of doing a foundation year programme in FE?

If your aim is to study on an undergraduate degree programme at university, a foundation year programme may help provide you with access to this. Many universities prefer students who have completed foundation year programmes first, and may even accredit or have official agreements with colleges offering them. This means that you may be guaranteed a place on a course at a particular university, provided that you pass the foundation year.

What is a foundation degree course?

A foundation degree programme is a vocational degree course which combines academic study and work-based learning. FE colleges offering these university-accredited courses collaborate with local employers so that students can develop their skills in the real workplace as part of their course. They may be full-time or part-time, and involve modular elements, distance learning or online learning. Two-year foundation degree programmes can often be topped up with a further year of study if students wish to receive an honours degree, often at a university with which your FE college is in partnership.

Which other students will I meet at my FE college?

FE colleges attract a wide range of students with different study backgrounds. Many of these will be from non-traditional study backgrounds. For example, some students may be older and/or already in employment, or be studying part-time and/or with families. Other international students are also likely to come from different study backgrounds.

How big will my FE college be?

FE colleges are generally smaller in size than universities, although there are also some very big colleges in the UK too (the largest - which is an interconnected group of smaller colleges - has about 20,000 students). Generally, FE colleges tend to have more close-knit communities where you may feel that there is a more supportive and family-like environment for your studies.

Will there be an orientation or induction programme to help me settle in when I arrive?

All FE colleges are likely to provide an induction programme for home and/or international students at the start of the academic year. This may be a one-day induction or last for several days. It is likely to include an orientation to the college and some of the study skills you will need on your course. It will allow you to meet key people from the college and make friends with other students.

Where can I find pre-departure information about my college and course?

Your FE college website is a good starting point for information about college life and your course. There will be practical links, information about all aspects of college life and possibly a downloadable welcome pack. Alternatively, your college may send you a college handbook by post or email.

Will someone from college be there to help me when I arrive in the UK?

Many FE colleges operate a 'Meet and Greet' service at major airports in the UK. This means that they will meet you on arrival and take you to the college by coach or minibus. You should be able to find information about this service on your college website or by emailing your college directly.

Where will I live when I arrive at college?

Accommodation options will vary depending on the location of your FE college. Common options include staying in a college hall of residence, sharing a house or flat with other students, finding a private bedsit, or living with a homestay family. Not all of these options are available through every college. You should contact your college accommodation office to find out what options are available for you in the location where you will be studying.

Can I attend extra language or study skills classes during my course if I need them?

Many FE colleges provide some study skills or language support for international students. There may be regular classes, a self-access centre (for self-directed study) and/or advisory service or online support. In some cases this will be free, and in others there may be a charge for extra services. You should be able to find out what language/study skills assistance your college provides from its website or by looking in their international prospectus.

How much support can my FE college give me if I want to find a job?

Many colleges put an emphasis on providing courses that increase their students' opportunities for finding work afterwards, especially through their links with local industry. There is likely to be a careers centre in your college that can advise you about future employment opportunities. You may also be able to find some part-time work locally while you are studying if you need to, and your college may be able to help with this.

Can I get help with improving my technical skills particularly in using computers during my course?

All FE college students are expected to have a certain level of computer literacy for their course. If you need to improve your technical skills for your course, your college is likely to have a computer service department and/or an IT training section which can support you in developing them further.

What about my personal safety while studying at college in the UK?

FE colleges are particularly concerned about the welfare of their international students and want them to feel safe and secure while studying in the UK. Your college website or handbook may provide advice about what to do and what not to do while living in the UK. Security should also be covered during your induction programme, and there should be someone available at your college (often your personal tutor) who can answer any particular questions you might have and advise you.

If I am under 18, are there any special arrangements that my FE college will make?

Some FE colleges may accept students who are under 18 (minimum 16) on certain courses. These colleges will inform parents directly about college regulations and procedures for students who are under 18. Parents may be asked to sign an agreement with the college before you start your studies or asked to appoint a guardian for you in the UK. Your parents may be required to provide 24 hour emergency contact details or give their legal consent for you to participate in certain college activities.

Will my FE college provide a social programme during my studies?

Most FE colleges arrange some tourist visits or excursions for their students during the academic year. These are usually one-day or weekend trips. There are also likely to be some cultural and sports events, which are often organised by the college student association. Some colleges have mentoring schemes and will pair you with a UK student to help you settle in and make friends. There may also be opportunities to join in social activities based in the local community.

Will my college be able to help me if I want to apply for higher level studies in the UK?

Most FE colleges provide advice and help with applying for university courses. They will be able to help you choose a UK university and fill in your [UCAS](#) application or prepare your CV if you are considering a particular career path. Depending on the college, this help will normally be available through the college careers centre or student support service, international office or your personal tutor.

What are ESOL courses in FE colleges?

Many FE colleges run programmes in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These are government-funded programmes aimed at students who have come to live in the UK for non-study related purposes (usually immigration). These are not normally open to fee-paying international students whose aim is to study in the UK. This is because the focus is on the functional language for day-to-day living and **not** on the English language needed for study.

What are Key Skills and adult literacy classes in FE colleges?

Key Skills classes are government-funded courses run by FE colleges, which include teaching in basic adult literacy and numeracy. These classes are for people (usually British) who are coming back into education after a long break and so they are not generally appropriate for international students.

What are HNC and HND courses in FE colleges?

Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) courses are offered by many FE colleges. These are level 4 (HNC) and level 5 (HND) qualifications and are normally equivalent to 1st and 2nd year level of university degree programmes. They have a vocational focus (e.g. travel and tourism) and are quite popular with international students. The content is modular and often involves continuous assessment. Their qualifications are awarded by external bodies with high standings in different professions. Students applying to do an HNC/ HND will usually need to already have good 'A' level passes (the equivalent of level 3) or have successfully completed a Foundation Year Programme.

What are EFL courses in FE colleges?

FE colleges offer a wide range of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses. These are courses in general English rather than academic English. Many of these are not associated with any particular test or exam but some can lead to particular accredited English language qualifications if students choose to take an independent exam (e.g. the Cambridge Advanced English [\[CAE\]](#) or Proficiency [\[CPE\]](#) exams) at the end of their course. Pass grades in such exams sometimes meet university entry requirements for higher level study. The minimum level for entry onto EFL courses in FE colleges is now level B1 in the [Common European Framework](#).

What is a Sixth Form college and why is it relevant to FE?

Sixth Form relates to the final 2 years of secondary education in the UK. Sixth Form colleges focus on preparing students for pre-university exams. These are 'A' levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or Scottish Highers in Scotland. Younger international students aiming to study on undergraduate programmes and who have not obtained the equivalent to 'A' levels in their own countries may choose to study for 'A' levels at a Sixth Form college in the UK. Some Sixth Form colleges also offer Foundation Year Programmes. Generally, their courses are less vocational and involve more prescribed study than those at FE colleges.

What links do FE colleges have with their local community?

FE colleges generally have strong historic links with their local communities. This can be particularly beneficial for international students as there may be opportunities to become involved in life outside the college with clear advantages for language practice. In addition, many of the staff and students at an FE college are likely to be local and this fact may also help you develop interests and links with your college's local community.

What is a college summer school?

Many FE colleges run summer schools between July and September. These are mainly in EFL but IELTS preparation programmes are also popular, especially with international students who are applying for degree or higher level programmes. Groups of international students from a particular country as well as individual students may choose to study at summer school. Some vocational courses may also be offered during the summer months. Some colleges offer pre-sessional courses during the summer to prepare students for Foundation degrees.

What is an English Language Plus programme?

Some FE colleges offer English Language Plus programmes. This means that students can follow a main course involving English language and study skills combined with modules in a particular professionally-related area such as hotel management or electronic engineering. A B1 level of language competence in the [Common European Framework](#) is usually required for entry onto these courses.

What are the main routes followed in FE for entrance to university level studies?

There are two main routes followed by international students attending FE colleges to gain acceptance on undergraduate university degree programmes. One is by completing a Foundation Year Programme. This will normally be tied to acceptance on a course at a particular university with which the FE college has links. Alternatively, international students may choose to study for 'A' levels, usually over a two-year period. Another popular route is the one-year [Access to HE Diploma](#).

Who will be the key contacts for me in my FE college?

Besides your individual course tutors and lecturers, you can expect to have contact with a number of other key staff in your FE college. These include staff in the college international office. Key staff may have titles such as 'international personal tutor', 'international finance officer' and 'international manager'. International students can also expect to have contact with the EFL team in their college including teachers and other support staff. You can also expect contact with advice and guidance staff, the careers section, and counselling service if required.

How many other international students will there be in my FE college?

In general, less than 10% of students on UK further education courses are from overseas and usually less than 5% come from any one country (Education UK, British Council, 2010). However, the number of other international students on your course will vary depending on the popularity of the course itself.

Do employers have links with FE colleges?

As well as industry, many small businesses and large corporations have direct links with FE colleges in the UK. These include BAE Systems, Nissan, Hilton Hotels and British Nuclear Fuels. Companies provide feedback on courses too. This relationship with the work sector benefits students on the courses as well as employers.

Can a qualification from an FE college help me get a job?

Most FE college courses are designed to be vocational and blend teaching about the subject with real work experience in a profession, industry or in the commercial or technological sector. Many professional bodies accredit courses that FE colleges provide or recognise certain qualifications. Many large employers also train their own staff through a college so ties are often very strong.

Will I get personal support and help when I need it?

FE colleges like to use a student-centred approach to teaching and learning. You can also expect to be assigned a personal tutor who will provide academic guidance and personal support while you are studying at the college.

What size classes will there be on my course?

FE colleges prefer to teach students in smaller groups where possible. This means that you are likely to experience an average class size of 15 for teaching.

How will I study on my course?

You can expect to be taught using progressive teaching methods on your course. This will include learning methods such as working in groups with other students and using self-access learning resources. You can also expect to receive an introduction to the study skills needed for your course.

Are course start dates flexible?

FE colleges often provide a more flexible choice of start dates for courses where possible. This can be more convenient for many international students. Your FE college will be able to provide further information about whether or not this is possible for the course for which you are applying.

Will I be able to choose several courses or units rather than just one?

FE colleges offer quite a lot of flexibility in terms of the courses that you can 'mix and match' in your programme of study. For example it may be possible to follow vocational and academic courses together. English Language Plus is often available combined with an International Foundation Year programme.

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