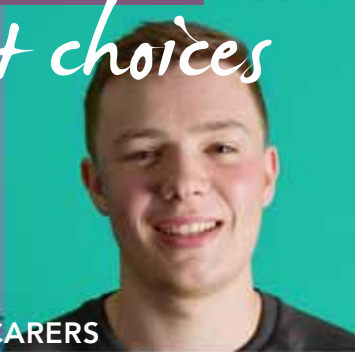




HIGHER EDUCATION

Making the right choices



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS



SHAPING
FUTURES

The Merseyside Collaborative
Outreach Programme



National Collaborative
Outreach Programme



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University of Liverpool Thompson Yates Building

INTRODUCTION

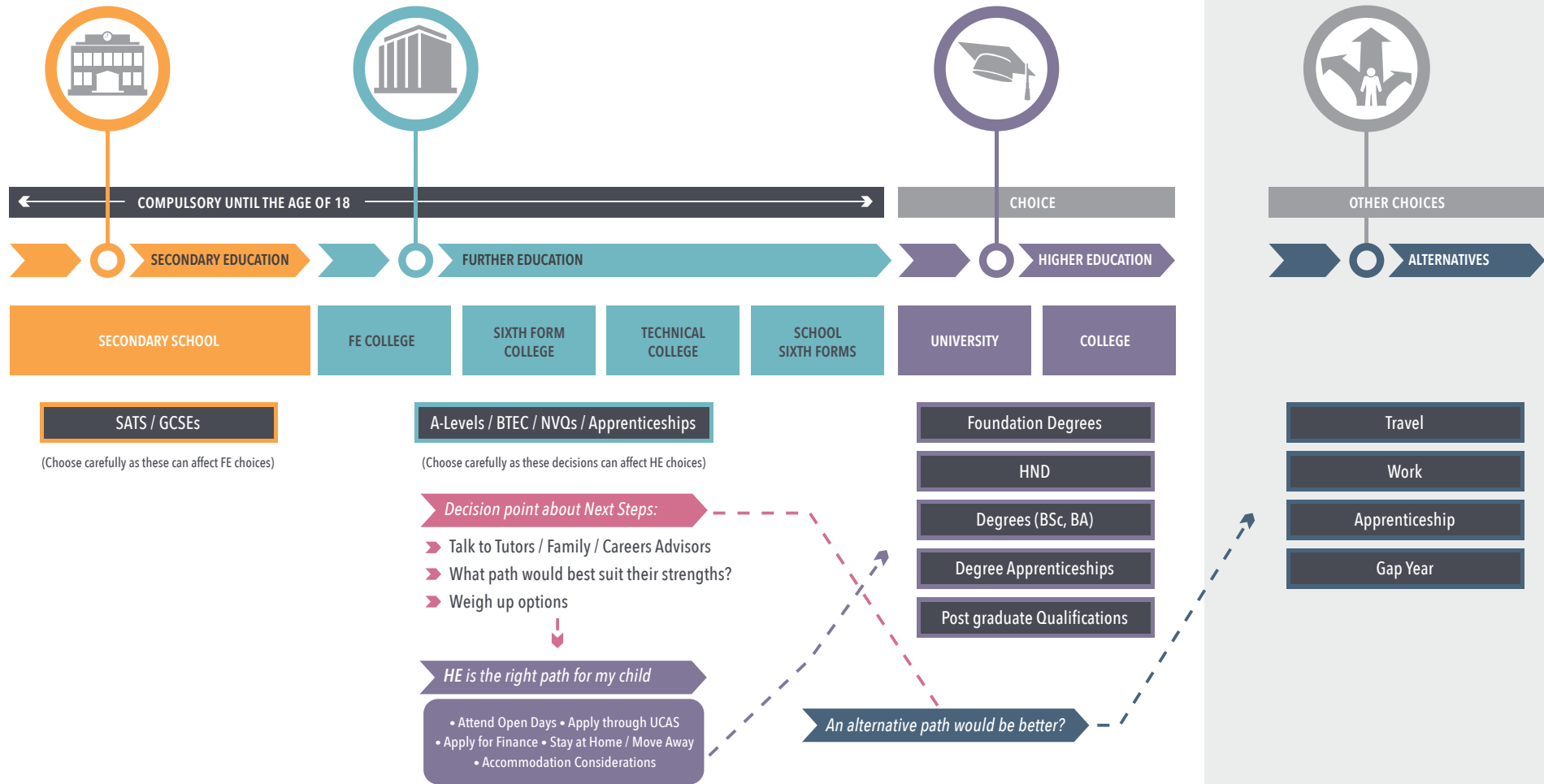
Your child may now be at a point where they are starting to make important decisions about their GCSE subjects or post-16 qualifications and be considering higher education (HE) as an option.

So what is HE? This relates to the qualifications taken after school and college, most commonly at a university. Like many parents and carers, you may have felt a little bit uncertain about how best to support that decision-making process or feel out of your depth or overwhelmed.

This resource has been created specifically to help you support your child in making those decisions. We aim to provide you with a general overview, without overwhelming you with lots of detail, which might go out of date.

We at Shaping Futures believe that it's important to keep an open mind; that EVERYONE with the academic potential should have the opportunity to attend HE, regardless of their gender, sexuality, religion, disability, ethnicity, nationality, class, or financial situation. However, while we are very enthusiastic about the benefits of HE, it is not the only path.

You may decide with your child that an alternative path suits their situation better and is more appropriate for developing their strengths and interests. While this resource will discuss those alternatives briefly, the main focus will be HE, but we will refer you to where you can find out more about alternative pathways.





WHAT IS HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) ?

Zainab Cole - Management Student (Final Year) University of Liverpool

See *Shaping Futures Video* for interview

What is Higher Education (HE)

All qualifications have a difficulty level rating, so the more difficult the qualification the higher the level. They start at Entry Level. Then they range from levels 1/2 (including GCSE 3-1 in the new system [grades D-G in the old system] / GCSE 9-4 in the new system [A*-C in the old system), and level 3 (including A-Levels) to level 8 (including PhDs).

- **HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATES AND DIPLOMAS** - These are level 4 and 5 qualifications which are related to specific skills for a particular job.

DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS:

- **FOUNDATION DEGREES** (Level 5) – Ideal if your child is unsure about taking a full degree or if they want to study while they work. They take less time than a full degree (up to 2 years full time) and can help with specific work-related skills. It may be possible to continue to a full degree.
- **BACHELOR'S DEGREES** (Level 6) – These give a solid understanding of a particular subject and develop analytical, intellectual and essay writing skills. Depending on the topic studied this qualification will be a Bachelor of Arts (BA), a Bachelor of Science (BSc) or a Bachelor of medicine (MB).
- **POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATIONS** - These are taken after a Bachelor's degree including: Postgraduate diplomas and certificates (level 7), Master's Degrees (level 7) and Doctoral level qualifications (e.g., PhDs) (level 8).

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DIFFERENT PATHS TO HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

Liverpool Hope University campus

DIFFERENT PATHS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

It may be that the 'traditional' route to HE does not suit your child for a number of reasons, but this does not mean that the HE path is not for them. We would strongly encourage you to find out more about alternative paths to HE which may suit them better.

These may include (amongst a range of other options):

- Having some time to build up experience, qualifications and skills and applying for an HE course at a later date, possibly as a mature student.
- Gaining access through taking an access course.
- Studying part time.
- Taking a degree apprenticeship.

The different types of HE Provider: - University is not the same as 'college'. Generally college is where Further Education (FE) is studied and university is where HE is studied, although many FE colleges do offer HE qualifications as well.

CONSIDERATIONS:

When thinking about which path to take (e.g. academic or degree apprenticeship) it is important for your child to consider their suitability for a particular path, based on their skills, interests and career aspirations.

What a person studies and how they perform at school may affect what they can study in further education and the same is true of higher education choices. Therefore it is important that special attention is given to these options.

It is also really important that your child does what they can to reach their academic potential early on, as their performance in secondary school may have a bearing on what opportunities are open to them later on, even though post 18 options may feel very far removed from their radar when they are still at school.



ADVANTAGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

Anna Worsley - Careers Adviser, Liverpool Hope University

See *Shaping Futures Video* for interview

Having a higher education experience is often seen as a personal investment with a range of advantages:

FINANCIAL

- Statistics show that on average graduates can earn more than non-graduates.

JOB AND EMPLOYABILITY

- More job opportunities available. Many job roles require a degree. Some careers need a particular degree in a specific subject (see Career Path below).
- Development of transferable skills and demonstration of commitment to study which are valued by employers.
- Possible opportunities to gain valuable work experience, study abroad and meet professionals working in the area they are interested in.

And the benefits are not just about jobs and money.

PERSONAL AND OTHER

- If they choose to go away to university, they can make the transition to independent living in a supportive environment.
- If studying locally and living at home, the other experiences and opportunities of university/HE are still available to them.
- Opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge and skills in a subject they love.
- Their mind will be opened to different experiences and ways of thinking and they will have the opportunity to meet and keep in touch with a variety of people from different backgrounds.
- Opportunities to develop interests, socialise informally and through activities, clubs and societies that may be available.

CAREER PATH

Before going into employment, your son or daughter may decide they want to do a postgraduate qualification to further their skills e.g. for a specific career requirement or to develop their knowledge and understanding further. The following website gives a breakdown of the different degree subjects and the career options open to a person with that degree and whether any further training or qualifications are needed to fulfil that role:

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree>

"We're here to help"



FINANCE

Lynne Condell MBE, - Manager of the Money Advice Team at the Liverpool John Moores University

See *Shaping Futures* Video for interview

FINANCE

Many people find the issue of student finance confusing, so having clear information about this is a key priority. Student finance has been set up to make HE an affordable option for everyone, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Parents do not need to take out a loan

Currently, there is a review of HE funding underway, which might result in some changes. So we have provided some general information, which we don't think will go out of date, which you might find useful:

- Does going to university/HE cost money? **Yes.**
- Is there financial support for students? **Yes, for UK resident students.**
- What's available? Student loans to cover tuition fees and living costs.
- When are they paid back? **When your child has finished university/HE and is earning over a certain threshold. If their salary drops below the threshold, repayments will stop. Any outstanding loan balance is written off after 30 years.**
- How are they paid back? **In affordable monthly instalments which are calculated as a percentage of your child's monthly salary. These are automatically deducted by their employer.**
- Is there anything that doesn't have to be paid back? **This will depend on what your child chooses to study. They can also apply for bursaries, grants and scholarships which don't have to be paid back.**
- The amount of financial support available is means tested, so those with lower family and household incomes receive more.
- A good way to prepare your son/daughter for university/HE is to support them with budgeting early on.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT COURSE & UNIVERSITY/HE PROVIDER

University of Liverpool campus

There is lots to think about when making decisions about what and where to study, which can be quite mindboggling so we have provided some pointers to help with your child's decision making process:

- Choose a subject they enjoy and are good at.
- Consider the entry requirements, are they achievable?
- Consider their desired career path – Is the course appropriate?. Does it have the right accreditations?
- If no fixed career path, choose a generic course to keep options open.
- Seek advice from teachers and careers advisors.
- Is any work experience necessary?
- How long is the course?
- Are there sandwich options, where there is the opportunity to do a year in industry?
- Use the UCAS course search (follow link) to find out which universities offer the course they want to study.
- Choose up to 5 universities/HE providers that ask for entry grades which are no higher than what they are predicted to achieve, including one asking for lower grades (in case they don't achieve their predicted grades) – to be an insurance choice.
- Do they want to stay at home or move away.
- They should think about the type of university that would best suit their needs. (Campus or City-based)
- Look at university/HE Provider performance, e.g., in terms of graduate employment statistics and results from student surveys.
- Attend Open Days at the university/college they are interested in.

OPEN DAYS

These are really important as they will give your child an idea of whether it is somewhere they would like to study, through looking around the facilities (including lecture theatres, libraries, and accommodation), and surrounding area and through talking to staff and students.

*See here for a list of open day dates: www.ucas.com/opendays / or www.opendays.com
Sometimes advanced booking is needed to secure a place.*



STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

Example of student accommodation provided in Halls of Residence (with private bathroom) * Sample picture from Pinterest

There are different options available to students about where to live. When making these decisions there are lots of things to weigh up and consider:

- Staying at home: If you're local to the university/HE provider this may be the preferred option. It benefits from being cheaper and easier, avoids the upheaval of moving, and your child keeps their support network close at hand.

- Halls of Residence (or 'halls'): A room in a purpose built building, with shared kitchen facilities and shared or en-suite bathroom facilities. University Halls of Residence, offered by most universities, are traditionally chosen by first year students as they offer a good 'halfway house' to independent living. There are lots of options available, so you need to check with the university as to what is available.
- Private Halls of Residence. Similar to university halls, but they are owned by a private company.
- Private accommodation. e.g. house and flat shares through a private landlord. These are more popular with mature students or undergraduates after their first year. Sometimes first year students who miss the university accommodation deadline choose private accommodation.

TOP TIPS – things to find out and things to consider:

- Is university accommodation guaranteed in the first year?
- What are the deadlines for applying?
- What type of accommodation is available?
- Would catered or self-catered options suit my child better?
- How much does it cost? What is covered? (e.g. utility bills, broadband etc)
- How far is it from where lectures will be and the town centre?
- Are bathrooms shared or are there en-suite rooms?
- Is it necessary to move out in the holidays?
- Is there a dedicated accommodation service at the university to provide advice?
- Does the university have an approved landlord scheme?
(This will be relevant if and when a child is thinking of a private flat or house share –e.g. after the first year).
- Applying for accommodation early and accepting their offer can improve the likelihood of a student securing a place in University halls, as not everyone is guaranteed a place. It is important to be prepared for this eventuality.



SUPPORT / INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Liverpool Hope University campus

SUPPORT / INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Choosing the HE path can be both an exciting and daunting prospect for you and your child, so it is important for you to be aware of the support that is available if your child is moving away.

Although you will need to check the specifics with each college and university, generally you will find that the following support is on offer:

- Academic Support – Lots of HE providers offer additional support to help with the transition to a more advanced level of study. (e.g. study skills sessions from the Student Union or by the courses themselves)
- Pastoral / welfare support – Access to a personal tutor, university counselling services and advisors for things like accommodation and financial issues, to ensure their overall welfare needs are met.
- Specialist support – For mental health conditions, learning difficulties, disabilities or long-term health conditions, a support plan can be set up in good time if they indicate this on their UCAS form. Students with disabilities may be eligible for a disabled student's allowance (DSA).
- Accommodation of religious and cultural needs – Some providers have specialist 'faith' services and services for international students.
- Careers – All providers have specialist careers services, which can offer support and advice in preparing a young person for their onward employment.



UCAS AND APPLYING

Michael McCarroll - Popular Music Student (Final Year), City of Liverpool College

See Shaping Futures Video for interview

- UCAS (The University and College Admissions Service) is the organisation that deals with applications to university/HE, using an online system.
- Your child's school/college should support them with the application process, but it is useful if you can support them too.

- They will need to have 'done their homework' and know where they want to apply and what they want to apply for.
- Check the application deadline. Most application forms need to be submitted by the January of the academic year that they apply, but courses like medicine are earlier.
- Applicants need to provide their education and employment history, their GCSE grades, their predicted grades, a personal statement and an academic reference, demonstrating that they can meet the course requirements.
- They may need to gain appropriate work experience.
- They will need to give special consideration to their personal statement and ensure they seek support from their school or college with this.
- Some courses may require applicants to sit a test or have an interview.
- From the January they can apply for student finance, as part of this process you will need to provide relevant information (e.g. about household income).
- Successful applications will either be conditional (which means they will have to achieve certain grades in their college/sixth form qualifications) or unconditional. (the offer is open to them regardless of their upcoming performance).
- By around May the student will need to let UCAS know their course and university/HE decision.
- They should apply for accommodation ASAP.
- If your child misses any of the UCAS deadlines they can still apply, (e.g. through clearing, although chances of securing a place on their preferred course are likely to be reduced).
- 'Clearing' is the process where people can apply for courses that still have places available if they do not achieve the grades they need. For more detailed and up to date information.

For more detailed and up to date information please see: www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/parents-and-guardians/ucas-undergraduate-application-process



ALTERNATIVES

We believe that every young person is an individual.

HE is not the right choice for everyone, some young people find that they are better at practical rather than academic tasks.

A young person may decide that there are other paths, which would better suit their situation and skills.

Alternative options open to your child include:

1. **Apprenticeships**
2. **Technical or professional qualifications at a further education college.**
3. **School leaver programmes.**
4. **Work placement.**
5. **Voluntary work.**
6. **Gap years.**
7. **Applying to Higher Education** later, when he/she feels ready after gaining relevant skills and experience from the above list or general life experience.

We also recommend that your child seeks impartial advice from a careers advisor about alternative options which can be arranged through their school or college.

JARGON BUSTER (KEY TERMS EXPLAINED)

Here is a list of terminology to help you understand both the information in this booklet and information provided in other resources:

BTEC - The Business Technology Education Council. These are practical work-related qualifications, which can be studied from Level 2 to Level 7.

BURSARIES - These are sums of money that do not need to be paid back, which are paid to the student in lump sums or annual stipends. They are available to students on a specific course (e.g. Social Work), under-represented groups on a course/job sector or for personal circumstances such as being in financial need.

CAMPUS UNIVERSITY- Is the name given to a type of university where all the facilities including student accommodation, teaching, research and leisure facilities are located on one site. This contrasts with a city university.

CITY UNIVERSITY- Is the name given to a type of university where facilities are situated within the city. These have the advantage of being in the heart of the hustle and bustle of the city and all the opportunities there, but buildings can be very spread out, so getting around can be over multiple sites.

CLEARING - This is how universities fill any remaining places that they may have for the coming academic year. It provides those who may not have an offer a further chance of getting a place at university. This process starts in July.

COMBINED HONOURS (AKA JOINT HONOURS) - This gives a student the opportunity to study more than one subject and combine them into a single qualification. Each provider is different in the way they offer this option.

CONDITIONAL OFFER - Is when an individual is offered a place, on the basis that they meet the requirements, which is usually exam results.

DEGREE - This is the name given to a qualification that someone gains when they have completed most higher education courses. They are classified in different ways. Most degrees are honours degrees which means they are awarded a classification based on average performance in assessed work, typically in the later years of the course (not the first year).

First-class honours (hons) - Abbreviated to a 'first'. Typically an average of 70% or above. The highest classification.

Second-class honours (hons) - the most commonly awarded classification. This is subdivided into:

Upper Second - Abbreviated to a '2:1'. Typically an average of 60-69%

Lower Second - Abbreviated to a '2:2'. Typically an average of 50-59%.

Third-class honours (hons) - Abbreviated to a 3rd. Typically an average of 40-49%.

DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP - These are a new initiative on offer in some universities working in partnership with employers and professional bodies, giving the opportunity for the student to achieve a bachelor's or master's degree as part of their apprenticeship. They combine working part-time and study.

DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCE - This is financial support that is available to students with disabilities, medical conditions, mental health conditions, sensory impairments or specific learning difficulties which affects their ability to study, subject to eligibility.

FRESHER - This refers to a first year student who has recently started university.

FRESHERS' WEEK - This is the first week of university which is filled with lots of different sorts of activities, introductory sessions and opportunities to meet new people and find out about the university.

GRADUATE - This is the word used to describe individuals who have gained a degree.

GRADUATION - this refers to the process where an individual is awarded with their HE qualification / the ceremony when this happens.

HALLS OF RESIDENCE - This is purpose built student accommodation, which is a popular choice for students in their first year. Some is rented through the university, others are rented through private companies. Student halls vary in their set up, what they can offer and their price.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) - This is the optional and last stage of formal education including the qualifications taken after school and college, most commonly at a university. It relates to both the undergraduate level study, and after that, graduate/postgraduate level qualifications.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) INSTITUTION - These are the establishments (universities, colleges etc.) where HE is studied.

HIGHER NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS - These courses have a vocational focus and are provided by further and higher education colleges. There is the option to top up on these qualifications to gain a full degree.

HNC - 'Higher National Certificate'. If studied full time they will take a year to complete and two years if studied part time. Similar subjects are offered to HND qualifications.

HND - 'Higher National Diploma'. These take two years to complete full time and three to four years part time. They are equivalent to two years at university.

POST APPLICATION VISIT DAYS - These are sometime on offer for students to visit the academic department they have applied to, having applied to the university.

POST GRADUATE - These are the qualifications that are studied after a first degree. These include Masters Degrees: Master of Arts/Science (MA/MSc) and Doctorate Qualifications, e.g. PhD.

OXBRIDGE - This is the shorthand word used to describe Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

RUSSELL GROUP - This is the collective term that is used to describe 24 UK universities which have an emphasis on academic achievement and research.

SANDWICH COURSE - These are offered by some universities and is a degree which incorporates a work placement (AKA 'Year in Industry' / 'Placement Year') as part of it, to give students practical experience of that subject. So a 3 year degree would take 4 years if it incorporated a year out doing a work placement.

SCHOLARSHIPS - These are sums of money which the student does not need to pay back and are awarded to those who display academic excellence. They are awarded on a competitive basis and usually have come with conditions, such as working for a particular company after graduation or fulfilling additional duties whilst at university.

SEMESTER - This is traditionally the way the academic year is divided up in HE, i.e. into two terms.

STUDENT LOAN - These are taken out by most students in some format to finance their time at university. There are loans to cover tuition fees, which are paid directly to the university or college and loans to cover living expenses, which are paid to the individual. They are not paid back until an individual is earning over a certain amount.

STUDENTS' UNION (SU) OR GUILD - This is a student organisation in colleges and universities. In HE the SU has its own premises and focuses on laying on social and organisational activities, and provision of student support and representation.

UCAS - (The University and College Admissions Service) - This is the organisation that deals with applications to university.

UCAS Extra - Allows individuals additional opportunities to apply for HE courses for the following academic year, if they have used their original five choices, if the individual has applied for UCAS and does not have any offers or pending decisions on the original applications.

UNCONDITIONAL OFFER - Is when an individual is offered a place regardless of how they perform in their assessments. However, there may still be a few things to sort out.

UNDERGRADUATE - This refers to a student who is studying for their first degree, commonly a Bachelor's Degree, A Bachelor of Arts or Science, (e.g. BA or BSc).

VOCATIONAL - This is education and training providing the skills required for a specific role.

YEAR ABROAD/ STUDY ABROAD - Gives students the opportunity to study in another country at a partner institution, completing modules contributing credits to their degree.

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