



EMPLOYERS' GUIDE TO SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION

UPDATED April 2008

EMPLOYERS' GUIDE TO SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION

CONTENTS

Introduction

- Section 1** Background to Scottish Higher Education
- Section 2** Scottish Higher Education Qualifications
- Section 3** Scottish Higher Education Careers Services
- Section 4** Scottish Higher Education Institutions
- Section 5** FAQs

Useful Websites

Sources

Introduction

Many employers, including some who regularly recruit north of the border, may not be fully aware of the distinctive features of Scottish secondary and higher education. This document aims to explain how the educational system in Scotland differs from that in England and Wales, and to help employers assess candidates with Scottish qualifications fairly, based on a clearer understanding of the value of their academic record.

1 Background to Scottish Higher Education

There are 19 higher education institutions in Scotland, including 14 universities the Open University in Scotland and the UHI Millenium Institute. Over 223,530 students are enrolled in higher education institutions in Scotland - in the past ten years, there have been greater increases in the number of postgraduates compared with undergraduates, and in part-time students compared with full-time. This signifies the response of higher education institutions to demands for more flexible forms of learning. Over 68% (152,795) of students undertake full-time study, with almost 32% (70,740) studying part-time. With regard to level of study, around 74% (164,200) of students are enrolled in undergraduate courses, with 26% (59,030) studying at postgraduate level.

Scotland's universities developed in three stages: St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh date from the 15th and 16th centuries; Dundee, Strathclyde, Heriot-Watt and Stirling achieved university title in the 1960s. Glasgow Caledonian, Napier, Paisley, Robert Gordon and Abertay Dundee became universities in the early 1990's. In April 2001, the Scottish Executive granted UHI Millennium Institute (UHI) status of Higher Education Institution, providing university level courses throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Queen Margaret University College became Queen Margaret University in early 2007 and at the end of 2007 the University of Paisley merged with Bell College of HE to become the University of the West of Scotland.

Participation in Scottish Higher Education

Scottish higher education participation rates have doubled in fewer than ten years and almost half of all school leavers in Scotland this year will have experience of higher education by the time they are 21. With regard to overall participation rates in higher education, Scotland has a higher participation rate than the rest of the UK, and compares very favourably with most countries. Coupled with its high participation rate, Scottish higher education has a completion rate of 74% of students starting a first degree course expected to obtain a qualification.

Origins of Students

Although many Scottish students are home-based, most Scottish institutions have a cosmopolitan composition. Year on year Scotland has increases in applications from all UK countries, as well as from the EU and other international countries. Currently, there are 186,405 UK domiciled students studying in Scotland. There are 12,465 students from the European Union and 24,550 other international students in Scotland. In total, overseas students represent 16.5% of the total number of students in Scottish higher education institutions.

Graduates in the Workforce

In 2006-07, 58,535 people graduated from Scottish higher education institutions. The Scottish Labour Force Survey 2004-05 estimated that 21.8% of 25-64 year olds in employment in Scotland are graduates, an increase of 1.5 percentage points on 2003. In a UK-wide system of degree standards assessment, Scottish graduates achieve excellent results and are well equipped for highly skilled employment. In a Futureskills Scotland survey (2004), four out of five firms that employed a new graduate said that they were well prepared.

2 Scottish Higher Education Qualifications

Structure of Undergraduate Degree Courses

In the very wide range of courses available in higher education in Scotland, there is one major divide - between those studies which lead directly to professional and vocational qualifications and those which don't. In the former case, students find themselves with relatively little choice of curriculum, in disciplines such as Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Engineering, Architecture or Surveying for example. Here, generally the course content and order of study are firmly laid down, and are applicable to all students, in order to meet the particular vocational or professional requirements of external bodies.

Elsewhere there is much more flexibility, both where the traditional Scottish faculty-entry system operates and where institutions offer module-based studies allied to shared or common courses in the early years of study. This means that the great majority of students have a wide range of options in selecting their initial subjects before choosing in which one(s) to specialise.

Flexibility has been a feature of Scottish higher education for many years and is reflected in the move across the universities towards the use of credit-based programmes.

Degree Titles

The most frequently attained qualification in Scotland is the Honours degree - usually known as a Bachelors degree (such as BA, BSc or BEng) - although some Scottish universities call their undergraduate degrees, Masters degrees (mainly the MA in the four ancient universities.)

Length of Courses

On average, degree courses in Scotland are one year longer than in England. There are two distinct exit points: Honours degrees take a minimum of four years, but it is also possible to complete an Ordinary degree (also referred to as Pass, General or Designated degree) in three years. It is important to note that some graduates (especially mature graduates) who are capable of achieving an Honours degree opt for a three-year degree for financial or other reasons.

Increasing numbers of courses are five years in length, for example, languages degrees including a year abroad, and the more rigorous enhanced engineering and science degrees offering the award of MEng, MChem or MPhys.

Some degree courses permit direct second or even third year entry to candidates with advanced or appropriate vocational qualifications.

Most institutions also offer Diplomas and Certificates of Higher Education, which are not degree level but which are awarded to students who have successfully completed part of a degree course, and these credits may be used to transfer to another institution. The Certificate of HE is obtained after one successful year, or equivalent number of credits, and the Diploma of HE after two.

Tuition Fees

Eligible undergraduate Scottish-domiciled and EU students attending Scottish universities in 2008/09 are entitled to have their tuition fees (£1,775) paid on their behalf by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS). However, students must ensure that they apply to SAAS have the fees paid. From 2008/09, there will no longer be a requirement to make a payment after graduation (previously called the "Graduate Endowment").

Postgraduate Qualifications

There is very little difference between Scotland and the rest of the UK when it comes to postgraduate study. It should be noted, however, that some courses offer an option to enter a postgraduate course after a three year Pass or Ordinary degree. Dependent on performance on the Postgraduate Diploma course, it may be possible to convert this to a Masters degree by writing a dissertation in a further three months.

3 Scottish Higher Education Careers Services

Most of the Scottish higher education institutions have careers services (www.agcasscotland.org.uk). In addition to their remit to students, graduates and academics, all careers services offer a wide range of services and consultancy to employers:-

- Advice on degree courses in their institutions which are relevant to employers' requirements
- Guidance on the Scottish secondary and higher education systems
- Contact with tutors on courses which employers want to target
- Organisation of careers and recruitment fairs
- Arrangements for employers' presentations and recruitment visits
- Facilities for advertising vacancies via noticeboards, bulletins and the Internet

AGCAS Scotland

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services - AGCAS (www.agcas.org.uk) is the professional association of careers services in higher education, representing all universities and most of the major degree-awarding colleges in the UK and Ireland. AGCAS Scotland (www.agcasscotland.org.uk) is the Scottish branch of this national organisation. Working with employers is considered one of its essential roles and there are several sub-groups working on forging links with employers in Scotland within the financial sector, the legal profession, teaching, science and engineering. In addition, the Employer Relations Group has the wider remit of developing contacts with employers in a broader sense. Further details of these activities can be found on the Professional Bodies, Employers and Funding Bodies section of this website (www.agcasscotland.org.uk/employers), which has been designed to help employers make the most of the information, advice and services offered by the university careers services across Scotland.

4 Scottish Higher Education Institutions

The institutions all publish websites, prospectuses and leaflets which give full details about their facilities, their courses, and the relevant entry requirements. Requests for detailed information should be addressed directly to the institutions:

University of Aberdeen	www.abdn.ac.uk
University of Abertay Dundee	www.abertay.ac.uk
University of Dundee	www.dundee.ac.uk
University of Edinburgh	www.ed.ac.uk
Edinburgh College of Art	www.eca.ac.uk
University of Glasgow	www.gla.ac.uk
Glasgow Caledonian University	www.caledonian.ac.uk
Glasgow School of Art	www.gsa.ac.uk
Heriot-Watt University	www.hw.ac.uk
Napier University	www.napier.ac.uk
Queen Margaret University	www.qmu.ac.uk
The Robert Gordon University	www.rgu.ac.uk
Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama	www.rsamd.ac.uk
University of St Andrews	www.st-andrews.ac.uk
Scottish Agricultural College	www.sac.ac.uk
University of Stirling	www.stir.ac.uk
University of Strathclyde	www.strath.ac.uk
The Open University in Scotland	www.open.ac.uk/scotland
UHI Millennium Institute	www.uhi.ac.uk
University of the West of Scotland	www.uws.ac.uk

5 FAQs

- Which body administers the Scottish schools exam system?
- How is the current Scottish schools exam system structured?
- Can the current qualifications be compared directly with the old ones?
- How do Scottish school qualifications equate to English ones?
- How do Scottish Highers relate to A levels in terms of UCAS points?
- Which routes of entry to higher education institutions in Scotland are available to mature and non-traditional applicants?
- Are there Foundation Degrees in Scotland?
- Does Scotland have its own framework for credit and qualifications?
- What should I know about the new European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process?

Which body administers the Scottish schools exam system?

Scotland has its own schools examination system which, since 1997, comes under the management of the Scottish Qualifications Authority – SQA (www.sqa.org.uk). SQA replaced both the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council and is now the single body responsible for Scottish qualifications other than those offered by universities and professional bodies. SQA develops and awards the qualifications on offer in Scotland's schools, further education colleges, workplaces and education centres.

In the summer of 1999 SQA introduced the system of National Qualifications (also known as the Higher Still development programme) which brought together subjects traditionally thought of as academic or general education, and those perceived to be more vocational and work-related.

How is the current Scottish schools exam system structured?

Standard Grades are generally taken over two years of study in third and fourth year of secondary school (year 10 and 11 in England and Wales) and are recognised as the equivalent of the GCSE examinations in England and Wales. Students often take seven or eight subjects, including Maths and English. In some schools it is possible for candidates to proceed directly to Intermediate 2 level, missing out Standard Grade altogether. Intermediate 2 level courses can be taken in 4th, 5th and 6th year. These one year courses cover the same subjects as Standard Grades and Highers. Some students take the Intermediate 2 as a stepping stone between the two levels of exams.

After Standard Grade, students usually follow a two year programme of Higher and Advanced Higher levels in fifth and sixth year:-

Highers are normally taken at the end of a pupil's fifth year of secondary education. They are also commonly taken at the end of sixth year. Some pupils will have passes in four, five or, in exceptional cases, six Highers by the end of fifth year and may well have obtained the required grade for entry to a Scottish higher education institution. However, many stay at school for a further year to undertake some combination of Advanced Highers and additional Highers and/or free-standing National Units. The number of Highers that pupils can achieve may be affected by a school's timetabling policy.

Advanced Highers are normally taken at the end of sixth year. The number of Advanced Highers that pupils can achieve may again be affected by a school's timetabling policy, and by the extent to which they decide to broaden their knowledge and skills by taking new courses at Intermediate 2 or Higher levels.

Achievements in core skills - communication, numeracy, information technology, problem solving and working with others - are also recognised. A comprehensive guide to the National Qualifications can be downloaded from the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/NQFullGuide.pdf) or National Qualifications Online, managed by Learning and Teaching Scotland (www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq).

Some independent schools in Scotland also offer AS and A levels which are run by the examination boards in England.

Can the current qualifications be compared directly with the old ones?

Yes:-

Current qualification	Equivalent old qualifications	
	Retained	Replaced
Intermediate 1	Standard Grade General	
Intermediate 2	Standard Grade Credit	
Higher		SCE Higher
Advanced Higher		CSYS

How do Scottish school qualifications equate to English ones?

The following chart sets out the key stages of the Scottish qualifications system and the broadly equivalent stages in England and Wales:

Age	Scotland		England and Wales	
14/15	S 3/4	Standard Grade courses	Y 10/11	GCSE courses
15/16	S 4	Standard Grade exams	Y 11	GCSE exams
16/17	S 5	Higher Grade exams	Y 12	AS/A level courses
17/18	S 6	Higher Grade/ Advanced Higher exams	Y 13	A level exams

How do Scottish Highers relate to A levels in terms of the UCAS Tariff?

Under the former UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) points system only an approximate equivalence could be given. With the introduction of the UCAS Tariff, Highers and Advanced Highers have been incorporated into the scoring system. Points can also be aggregated from Standard Grade and Intermediate 2 results.

Current UCAS Tariff

Highers	Advanced Highers	A levels
	A = 120	A = 120
	B = 100	B = 100
	C = 80	C = 80
A = 72	D = 72	
B = 60		D = 60
C = 48		
D = 42		
		E = 40

The former UCAS points system is given below for reference only:-

Former UCAS Points System

Highers	CSYS	A levels
	A = 10	A = 10
	B = 8	B = 8
A = 6	C = 6	C = 6
B = 4	D = 4	D = 4
C = 2	E = 2	E = 2

It should be noted that many graduates with excellent degrees may not have any UCAS points if they entered university as mature students, or after courses in FE colleges.

To download a copy of the UCAS Tariff and to find out more about it, visit the UCAS website (www.UCAS.com/students/ucas_tariff/tariffables).

Which routes of entry to higher education institutions in Scotland are available to mature and non-traditional applicants?

There are many acceptable routes of entry for mature and non-traditional applicants who do not possess Higher or A level qualifications:

- Some may have SQA National Qualifications, HNC or HND qualifications and the level of achievement required in these is specified by individual institutions. Where a specific HND has covered enough of the course work relevant to a specific degree, it may be possible to go straight into the third year of a degree course.
- A few institutions offer their own Mature Entry Test, consisting of written papers and an interview.
- Many students enter after successfully completing Access courses, offered by further education colleges and sometimes linked with particular university curricula, e.g. Access to Education, Access to Arts & Social Sciences or Access to Science.
- Some universities offer Pre-Entry Courses as evening classes, taught and examined by lecturers who teach undergraduate classes.
- Most Scottish universities now offer Access Summer Schools, and these are an invaluable way for adults to improve their skills prior to university entry, and for universities to assess their academic potential.
- A number of Scottish universities now also offer part-time evening degrees that have more open entry than normal. Some students use part-time study (either in the daytime or evening) as a stepping-stone to full-time higher education.
- 40% of Scotland's part-time undergraduate students are studying with the Open University (OU) in Scotland. 25% of their undergraduate students join the OU without standard university level qualifications.

Are there Foundation degrees in Scotland?

Foundation degrees do not exist in Scotland, and there are no plans for them. In Scotland, we are developing better articulation between FE and HE – so a student could, for example, do an HND at an FE college, then move straight into year two or three of a degree at an HEI. Scotland also now has a national qualifications framework (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework – see below), the aim of which is to make progression routes clear. This is a different approach to that being adopted in England.

Does Scotland have its own framework for credit and qualifications?

Yes, working in partnership, Scottish universities have driven the creation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework - SCQF (www.scqf.org.uk).

What should I know about the new European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process?

The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental initiative which aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide. It now has 45 signatory countries and it is conducted outside the formal decision-making framework of the European Union. Decision-making within the Process rests on the consent of all the participating countries.

It was launched in 1999 when Ministers from 29 European countries, including the UK, met in Bologna and signed a declaration establishing what was necessary to create a EHEA by the end of the decade. The broad objectives of the Bologna Process became: to remove the obstacles to student mobility across Europe; to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide; to establish a common structure of higher education systems across Europe, and; for this common structure to be based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Following a meeting in London 2007, the participating Ministers identified employability as a key priority for improvement.

In its drive to improve the quality of higher education and, in turn, human resources across Europe, the Bologna Process will play a key role in contributing to the EU's Lisbon Strategy goals which aim to deliver stronger, lasting growth and to create more and better jobs.

For further information visit the Europe Unit website (www.europeunit.ac.uk).

Useful Websites

www.agcas.org.uk

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services

www.agcasscotland.org.uk

The Scottish branch of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services

www.agr.org.uk

Association of Graduate Recruiters – the collective voice of graduate recruiters

www.europeunit.ac.uk

Sector-wide body which aims to raise awareness of the European issues affecting UK higher education and to coordinate the UK's involvement in European initiatives and debates. Jointly funded by Universities UK and the three funding councils of Scotland, England and Wales.

www.hero.ac.uk

The official gateway site to the UK's universities, colleges and research organisations

www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq

National Qualifications online, managed by Learning & Teaching Scotland (info and resources for those interested in the courses taught in Scotland's secondary schools and FE colleges.)

www.prospects.ac.uk

The UK's official graduate careers website

www.scqf.org.uk

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

www.shafc.ac.uk

The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. (SHEFC's Statistics branch can supply data on numbers of students in specific subjects in Scotland.)

www.sqa.org.uk

The national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees

www.unistats.com

Teaching Quality Information site – access to official information about the quality of higher education in UK universities and colleges.

www.ucas.ac.uk

UK-wide Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

www.universities-scotland.ac.uk

Universities Scotland exists to provide services to its members (Scotland's 21 higher education institutions) and to represent, promote and campaign for the Scottish higher education sector.

Sources

The Open University in Scotland (www.open.ac.uk/scotland)

Scottish Council of Independent Schools (www.scis.org.uk)

Scottish Qualifications Authority (www.sqa.org.uk)

Student Awards Agency for Scotland (www.saas.gov.uk)

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (www.ucas.ac.uk)

Universities Scotland (www.universities-scotland.ac.uk)

Updated in May 2008 by AGCAS Scotland with the co-operation of Universities Scotland.