



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Mature Students *Guide*



www.bcu.ac.uk

Welcome to Birmingham City University

Welcome to our guide for mature students, designed to help you make an informed decision on what to study at university.

About *Birmingham City University*

We welcome over 22,500 students from over 80 countries to study with us.

- Over 65 per cent of our students are classed as 'mature' (over 21) – with 25 per cent over 30.
- We have a higher number of Access students than any other university (Open College Network)
- Many courses can be studied part-time.
- Opportunity to gain industry experience through work placements, mentoring schemes, Erasmus years and sandwich courses.
- 90 per cent of undergraduate students and 92 per cent of postgraduates were in employment or further study within six months of graduating (DLHE survey 2012/13).
- We work with companies and organisations like Microsoft, Cisco, and Cartier to develop cutting edge curriculums and to collaborate on course projects.
- We are mid-way through a £260 million investment plan, including a major expansion of our City Centre Campus.

Why study as a *mature student*?

People return to study for many reasons – perhaps you did not have the opportunity to study at this level before, or you want to gain further qualifications to change direction or progress in your career. Or maybe it is simply for the personal enjoyment and satisfaction of increasing your knowledge of a subject you are passionate about.



The benefits of studying as a *mature student*

Gone are the days when mature students were a small minority in higher education. Now, people of all ages and backgrounds see the benefits of returning to study, and universities also appreciate the insights such students can contribute.

- Transferable skills – whatever you did before joining us, you are likely to have gained skills in areas such as time management, working under pressure and working as part of a team. You may also have gained practical experience of the subject you are studying. This will all be valuable during your course.
- Life experience – whatever your background, you are bound to have picked up lessons in life which you can apply to your course. Whether it is a greater knowledge of the world around you, or the dedication shown in raising a family, you may have more relevant experience than you think!
- Commitment – deciding to return to study is not a decision you will have taken lightly, and that is likely to be reflected in your commitment to the course.
- Flexible entry requirements – many courses will accept work or life experiences in lieu of formal qualifications, meaning you could be accepted straight onto a degree, whatever your previous experience of education.

Timetable

There is no typical timetable when it comes to studying at university; each course has its own individual study pattern usually comprising of lectures, seminars and tutorials which can vary in duration between 12-25 hours a week.

Lectures are at set times but there is usually some flexibility with timings for seminars and tutorials. Many of our courses offer work placements, including courses such as Nursing and Midwifery which feature full-time practical placements. You will also need to factor in time to spend working independently and group study.

Timetables will be sent to you in advance of starting your course. However, to give you an insight in to what your timetable might look like, here is an example:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9am	Lecture		Lecture	Seminar	
10am			Seminar	Lecture	
11am	One-to-one tutorial				
12noon		Lecture			
1pm				One-to-one tutorial	
2pm		Seminar			
3pm					Lecture
4pm				Seminar	
5pm	Lecture				
6pm					

What is *higher education*?

Higher education (HE) is used to describe the level of study beyond further education (A Levels or equivalent), usually at the age of 18 or over. Studying takes place in universities, higher education colleges and some further education colleges.

At Birmingham City University we offer over 170 courses across our four faculties:

- Faculty of Arts, Design and Media
- Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment
- Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences

Study options

Many courses offer you the option to study full-time or part-time.

Full-time study lets you complete a course in a shorter amount of time but part-time study is less intensive in terms of the number of hours and days you study each week. Part-time courses can allow you to work while you learn.

At the end of your course, the qualification is the same irrespective of whether you studied full-time or part-time.

Student support

Like all universities, Birmingham City University offers a wide range of non-academic help and support to ensure our students' time with us is as happy and successful as possible.

Our friendly Student Services team offers expert advice on a wide range of practical and personal issues including finance and childcare.

Available throughout your student career, each of our services is designed to enhance your experience, respond to your needs and provide you with the very best advice available.

To support you in achieving your full potential, our Centre for Academic Success is available to help with your study, literacy and numeracy skills. You can book a one-to-one tutorial to discuss aspects of your work, or attend a variety of study skills and English language workshops.

Facilities and *resources*

You will find that the resources at university consist of far more than libraries and lecture theatres – important though they are.

At Birmingham City University, we have a wide range of learning facilities, designed to reflect the workplaces our students intend to enter, including:

- Mock operating theatre, radiotherapy suite, birthing room and home environment room for our health students
- Replica classrooms and school gym for use by our trainee teachers
- Mock law court and virtual solicitor's office for law students
- Industry-standard TV and radio studios, plus Europe's largest 'green screen' studio.

Employer *links*

As a student at Birmingham City University, you start on your career path the minute you join us.

A combination of industry-standard facilities and lecturers with relevant industry experience means that our graduates are among the most employable around.

Our close links with business and the professions mean that our courses are always relevant, up-to-date and meet the exact needs of the current marketplace and, wherever possible, we involve employers in planning the curriculum.

Many household names welcome our students on placement including Bosch, BMW, John Lewis, Canon, Harvey Nichols, British Sky Broadcasting, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the NHS, Hewlett-Packard, National Grid, Reuters and Vauxhall.



Fees and *funding*

Most students take out a loan to cover their tuition fees, and often their living costs as well. There is no age limit on accessing tuition fee or maintenance loans, meaning that as long as it is the first time you have studied for a degree, you would be able to access both modes of support.

Full-time UK undergraduate students who are studying at university for the first time **do not have to pay anything until they finish their studies and their earnings pass a certain threshold** (currently £21,000 and set to begin rising in line with average earnings from 2017) – and then only as a percentage of any earnings above that figure.

Payments are normally taken automatically, via the tax system, at a rate of nine per cent on any income above £21,000 – so if you were earning £25,000, you would pay back nine per cent of £4,000 per year (£360 per year, or £30 per month).

If your income drops back below the minimum threshold, for example because you take a career break or become unemployed, payments will be automatically halted. If your loan has not been repaid after 30 years, any outstanding balance will be written off.

Regarding your loan's impact on other borrowings, the Council of Mortgage Lenders has advised that a student loan is 'very unlikely' to have a material impact on an individual's ability to get a mortgage, while Student Finance England do not share student loan information with credit reference agencies.

For more information on our fees, and the latest updates, visit www.bcu.ac.uk/tuitionfees.

Choosing the *right course*

Studying for a degree will take at least three years, so it is important that you choose the subject that's right for you. Here are some of the points you may wish to consider.

Career options:

Some courses are designed to prepare you for specific careers, and in some cases are a requirement. A vocational course aimed at preparing you to work in a certain sector may be more likely to offer industry-standard equipment and good links with potential employers, but it could restrict your career options if you later change your mind about what you want to do.

Personal interest:

If you are not sure about your future career plans, the best option may be to take a degree in a subject that interests you. If you already have knowledge of, or interest in, the subject, you may be more likely to get good marks, and studying it in more depth may give you new ideas of how you could work in a related field.

Entry requirements:

Entry requirements will vary between universities, so it is worth looking at which courses match the results that you have, or expect to get. Some criteria will remain the same wherever you study – for example, many mathematics courses require previous study of the subject, while to study teaching you need at least a GCSE grade C in English language, mathematics and a science. The UCAS website, or the university's own site, is usually the best place to check requirements.

Teaching methods:

Think about how you prefer to learn. Some courses rely heavily on lectures and seminars while others feature more hands-on, practical work. Many universities have industry-standard facilities, allowing you to gain work-related experience in a realistic setting. Consider whether the tutors have experience within their industry or sector.

Writing your *Personal Statement*

The UCAS application form used for most full-time courses includes the **Personal Statement**, while most part-time application forms will include space for similar information.

The Personal Statement offers you the best chance to 'sell' yourself, by explaining why you are applying for that particular course and why the university should want you to join them! While this may seem a little daunting, as a mature student you may well find yourself at an advantage, as you have more life experience to write about.

Things to remember

- Good spelling and grammar is very important; it may be a good idea to ask a friend or careers adviser to take a look over it.
- Give evidence for your claims – don't just say you have good organisational skills; try to provide an example.
- Don't be tempted to copy parts of someone else's statement or lift ideas from the web – UCAS operates a Plagiarism Detection Service, which checks forms against a statement library and web sources to ensure all statements are personally written.
- Make sure you keep a copy of what you've written as it may be referred to at an interview (if you have one) – or the information may be useful in future job applications.



Getting started: the 'three sheets' approach

This technique may help you consider what to include on your Personal Statement. Note down your ideas on a separate sheet of paper.

Sheet one – Experiences and achievements

- Include voluntary work, paid employment, field trips, hobbies, interests, activities, qualifications.
- Don't discount anything at this stage – editing can be done later.

Sheet two – The skills a 'perfect student' for the course would have (a person specification)

- Include planning and organising, time management, working under pressure, social/people skills, meeting deadlines, practical skills, persistence.
- Conduct further research via university websites if needed.

Sheet three – combine sheets one and two to form the first draft of your personal statement

- Match your experiences and achievements (sheet one) with what would be required of the perfect student for your chosen course (sheet two).
- If applicable, relate these to the career that the course leads to.
- Remember to always justify your claims with examples.



Preparing for *interviews*

Preparing in advance

If you do not have much experience of interviews, it may be a good idea to speak to a friend or relative who has recently been to one, or speak to a careers adviser for advice and perhaps a mock interview.

Make sure you have looked at the University's prospectus or website and know a reasonable amount about the University and course. We would expect that any student planning to study here will have done some background research.

Prepare answers for some of the most common interview questions – such as why you have chosen that course and University, what you like to do in your spare time and your plans for the future. Also, try to think of a couple of questions to ask the interviewer – you will probably be asked if you have any at the end of the interview, and asking good questions is a way of demonstrating your interest.

Try to get a good night's sleep beforehand – if you stay up half the night preparing, you won't be at your best on the day.

On the day

Dress smartly – jeans and trainers aren't a good idea! You don't necessarily have to wear a suit, unless you want to, but it's good to look like you have made an effort.

Ensure you have the date and time right and know exactly where the interview is going to take place. Aim to arrive in plenty of time – it is better to be early than late.

Make sure you can remember what information you put in your application, as you are likely to be quizzed on your background and reasons for applying.

During the interview

The interview isn't designed to catch you out but to find out more about you and your reasons for returning to study. While academic qualifications and/or work experience are important, we will also want to hear about your interests and activities outside of work, to give us a more rounded picture of your character.

During the interview, you may be nervous but try not to let it show. Listen to the interviewer's questions and don't be afraid to pause before answering, or ask them to repeat anything you are unsure about. Maintain eye contact and try to smile!

Don't be unnerved by difficult or challenging questions; the interviewer is not trying to trip you up, but we do want to see how you react in certain situations.



UCAS *timeline*

1 September	Opening date for UCAS applications
15 January	Main closing date for applications
February	UCAS Extra process for those without an offer to make additional application(s)
End of March	Deadline for universities to make offers
April	Deadline for applicants to accept one firm and one insurance offer
Mid-July	Clearing process for those who have not yet secured a place
Mid-August	A Level results published

Student *profiles*

"I was concerned I would stand out because of my age, but it wasn't like that at all. There were people on my course from all kinds of ages and backgrounds, and the teaching was excellent from day one – all of the staff always made time for us and if you were clear on what your ambition was, they would help you to come up with a plan of action to get there."

Matthew Christie

BA (Hons) Media and Communication

"Support from staff has been fantastic – very much an open door policy. Without being patronising and chastising, they still encourage me to be pro-active and work things out for myself. The Personal Development Department acts as a supportive backup for those struggling with academic writing, and the lecturers are so knowledgeable and passionate. My placements have been incredibly varied and relevant."

Emma Linden

BSc (Hons) Mental Health Nursing

Should you have any further queries regarding joining us as a mature student, please feel free to contact our Course Enquiries Team on 0121 331 5595.



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