

Changing or Leaving Your Course

Firstly, you are not alone! Every year, approximately 16% of students in the UK decide to change or leave their chosen course. They often have a number of reasons, ranging from financial difficulties to emotional problems. They may just have made the wrong choice of course or institution. For each individual it is a tough decision that can only be reached by going through a difficult and often confusing decision-making process. If you need support, there are various options open to you. Some students choose to discuss the situation with a sympathetic tutor, others turn to family or friends, and those who are looking for an impartial environment may visit the student counselling/advice service or the careers service.

WHAT THE CAREERS SERVICE CAN OFFER YOU

- The opportunity to discuss your individual situation with an experienced careers adviser.
- One-to-one guidance on what you might do instead of your intended course.
- Relevant publications and leaflets offering advice on issues involved in changing or leaving your course.
- Access to the internet, course directories, information on employers, newspapers etc, to enable you to research your options.

PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

Deciding to make significant changes to your life can take a lot of courage, especially when faced with peer pressure to stick it out, or friends who are happy with their choices and do not understand how you are feeling.

It can also be difficult to face disappointment from your family, particularly if they were heavily involved in your choice of course or are paying for you to study. However, they will not want you to be unhappy and will usually be very supportive. Researching some alternative options and presenting them with a concrete plan of action may help them to accept your decision.

It is far better to change to a course you will enjoy and do well in, or find a job that will allow you to shine, than to struggle on without any motivation and to scrape through or even fail your degree. (If you are worried about failing your degree, you may have various options open to you. Individual departments will have their own regulations and guidelines so check with them directly.)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Changing or leaving your course will have financial implications. You may well find that you are liable for some or all of your tuition fees and accommodation payments. However; this will depend on when in the academic year you decide to leave. Any funding you

have received in the past will be taken into consideration if you decide to take up another course of study in the future. Your college or university student/advice/welfare service will be able to offer more detailed information on the financial aspects of your decision.

IMMIGRATION IMPLICATIONS

Under the immigration rules institutions are required to inform the UK Border Agency when students leave their course. Therefore, it is essential that you seek immigration advice from your college or university student advice/welfare service before you leave or transfer your studies. Please note that if you are here on a new Tier 4 visa, it is likely that you will require a new visa before you start a course at another institution. www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk/adult-students/changes/

DECISION TIME

Before you can make the decision to change or leave your course, you need to identify what it is that feels wrong for you at the moment:

- **The course:** is the course what you were expecting? Are you finding the work too easy or too difficult? Do you dislike the teaching methods or the assessment style?
- **The place:** is the location of the college/university right for you? Do you miss the city/countryside? Does the institution feel too large or small for you?
- **The emotions:** are you feeling homesick or isolated? Is it difficult to manage financially? Do you feel trapped between your study and part-time work commitments?
- **The career:** have you changed your mind about your future career choices? Do you want to change and concentrate on a specific aspect of your course?
- **The pressures:** as a mature student is it difficult to balance study, family and other home commitments? As a student with health issues or a disability do you need much more support to help you manage your current situation?

If you decide to change your course, you must also choose whether you are ready to start again more or less straight away, or would rather take some time out to go travelling, build up some work experience, etc before beginning your new course.

Before you decide to leave altogether, consider your options thoroughly. Would deferring completion of the course for a year give you time to sort out your problems? If you are nearing the end of your course and the benefits of completing it are clear, can you bear to stick it out?

TRANSFERRING TO A NEW COURSE

The impact on your life will vary depending on what

you choose to do. For example, changing to a different course within the same institution can be done smoothly if the subject of study is closely related to your own and the academics agree that you have made the right choice. On the other hand, changing subject and institution will involve starting again, making new friends, being a different age from your new peer group and so on, and that can be a very different experience.

Action plan

1. Seek support whenever necessary, from the careers service, student advice/welfare service.
2. When you have analysed the problems, you should be able to make a more informed choice about your alternatives, such as:
 - different subject, same institution?
 - same subject, different institution?
 - different subject, different institution?
3. Use the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) Directory (www.ucas.ac.uk) to identify a range of courses in areas that interest you.
4. Investigate these courses in more detail by accessing the relevant prospectuses, either online or by sending off for a paper version.
5. Talk to the admissions tutors of the courses you are interested in before you discuss the matter with your own department. This will allow you to determine:
 - whether there are likely to be places available
 - if you meet the entry requirements of the course
 - if you can move across informally mid-academic year or will have to wait and reapply through UCAS
 - whether direct entry into the second year is possible.
6. When you are ready, discuss your decision with your department. They may be able to talk to the relevant admissions tutor on your behalf and they will certainly be able to explain the practical issues from the department's perspective. Also, your current course tutor will need to provide you with a positive reference.
7. Talk to staff in the welfare and registry offices to find out where you stand with your institution financially.
8. Talk to your LEA about their rules concerning further funding for course changers.
9. When you are ready, formally notify the university and your LEA of your intention to leave.
10. Consider what you will do to usefully fill your time while waiting for the new course to start. Your careers service can help you with this.

LEAVING HIGHER EDUCATION

If you decide not to continue in higher education (HE), the obvious alternative is to look for employment. Inevitably, in some fields your options will be narrower than someone with a degree qualification and you may have to start on a lower salary. However, there will still be scope for

promotion in the right role and there is no reason why you cannot achieve the things you had planned to achieve; it might just take a little longer.

You have already shown that you have the ability to gain a place on a HE course, so now you must show employers that you can offer that same potential to them. Make sure you can give them a positive reason for leaving your course, such as being ready for the challenge of full-time employment or looking to expand your skills in a more practical environment.

Action plan

1. Talk things over with your course tutor, the careers service, student advice/welfare service and, if possible, your family and friends. It can sometimes help to voice your concerns and practical help may solve the problem(s).
2. Consider what you will do next if you leave your course. The careers service can help you with this.
3. When you are certain you want to leave, discuss your decision with your department. They will be able to explain the practical issues from the department's perspective.
4. Talk to staff in the welfare and registry offices to find out where you stand with your institution financially.
5. When you are absolutely sure about your decision, formally notify your LEA and the university of your intention to leave.
6. Visit the careers service to make use of all the facilities and services while you are still eligible.
7. Take notes at all meetings you attend, especially if you are feeling upset or confused. They may help you reflect and review your situation when you are feeling calmer and more clear-sighted.

This leaflet offers a broad overview of the issues involved in changing or leaving your course. Each individual situation is very different and the issues are often more complex than those discussed here. If you require further advice, please visit your college careers service or student advice/welfare service.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- www.prospects.ac.uk/links/change/course Includes case studies and checklists that can help you in your decision-making
- *Changing or Leaving Your Course*, AGCAS Special Interest Series Booklet, 2007
- www.ucas.ac.uk Up-to-date information on course availability

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