

The Complete Guide to Foundation Degrees



Foundation degrees: the basics

Want a flexible qualification that combines academic study with work-based learning? A foundation degree may be for you

A foundation degree (Fd) is a flexible qualification that combines academic study with work-based learning and can be studied full time, part time or by distance learning.

There are two main types of foundation degree:

- **Part-time courses** designed for those already in work. These enable you to gain a qualification that recognises the experience and skills you already have and to help with career progression.
- **Full-time courses** designed for those who wish to enter a specific area of work. A foundation degree usually takes two years to complete full time. Part-time courses may take longer and distance learning takes up to four years.

Some foundation degrees are designed to address local, regional or national skills needs, or are for a specific organisation or people doing a specific job. So when you study these courses, you can be confident that you're gaining skills that are desirable to employers.

For example, Network Rail in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, has developed a Foundation Degree in Railway Engineering for track design engineers. This includes placements in design consultancies and Network Rail teams.

What subjects can you study?

Foundation degrees cover a wide range of subjects. Key areas include:

- **Animal management**
- **Art and design**
- **Business management**
- **Computing**
- **Construction management**
- **Counselling**
- **Countryside management**
- **Early years**
- **Education**
- **Engineering**
- **Health and social care**
- **Hospitality management**
- **Horticulture**
- **Logistics**
- **Multimedia**
- **Public services**
- **Retail management**
- **Science**
- **Sport**
- **Veterinary nursing**

How do foundation degrees compare to bachelor degrees?

A foundation degree is equivalent to two-thirds of a bachelor's degree and is worth 240 credits. A full bachelor's degree is worth 360 credits.

There is a clear progression route from a foundation degree to a bachelor's degree,

often by studying a one-year top-up course. You may have to study a short bridging course after completing your foundation degree and before starting your top-up year. Sometimes progression is into the third year of a bachelor's degree - or in some cases the second year. Most universities provide a clear progression route within the same institution or at a partner college.

How do foundation degrees fit into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)?

- **Foundation degree - level 5**
- **Bachelor's degree - level 6**
- **Master's degree - level 7**

What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying a foundation degree?

Benefits include:

- Courses are designed in partnership with employers, so the skills you gain will be what employers want. If you are already in work the course can boost your career progression and promotion prospects.
- Flexible study options, such as part-time, block release and distance learning mean you can fit study round other commitments, such as work and caring for dependants.
- No standard entry requirements. Some courses have formal qualification requirements but may also accept evidence of previous relevant work experience for entry, especially if you are aged over 21.
- A nationally recognised stand-alone qualification with clear study progression routes. The credits gained from completing a foundation degree can be used in the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS).
- A route to gaining a bachelor's degree

Popular foundation degrees

According to Prospects, the most popular foundation degrees studied are:

- **Academic studies in education (for example, courses for early years teachers or teaching assistants)**
- **Subjects allied to medicine (for example, audiology, paramedic science, healthcare science)**
- **Business studies**
- **Sport and exercise science**

if you don't initially have the entry requirements for a full degree or don't want to commit at this stage to three years of study. At a later date you can then top-up to a degree.

Possible drawbacks include:

- In order to enrol on some courses you may need to be in relevant employment or have access to a suitable workplace.
- Courses are not usually taught on a main university campus but at smaller further education colleges or sixth-form centres in partnership with a university, or even at private training providers. However, the qualification you gain is usually awarded by the university.
- You may need to top-up to a degree to be eligible for employer graduate schemes.



Is a foundation degree right for me?

Whether you're employed or want to get into a specific area of work, a wide range of flexible study options make it easier to find the right course

There are two main types of foundation degree:

1 Courses that are aimed at those already in work

For example - Foundation Degree (Fd) in Health and Social Care (assistant practitioner) for those in support roles in the NHS who want to train for the assistant practitioner role.

This might suit you if:

- You would like to have your knowledge and skills recognised and accredited.
- You'd like to progress to a degree later.
- You want a flexible qualification you can fit around existing work commitments or other personal circumstances - you may not be in a position to stop work in order to study.
- You want to develop your skills, gain promotion, take on new responsibilities or boost your confidence in your abilities.
- You are considering a shift in career direction within the company you work for.

2 Courses that are aimed at those considering a specific area of work

For example - Foundation Degree (Fd) in Business Management

This might suit you if:

- You don't have the formal entry requirements for a full degree.
- You are not sure about studying for a full

three years.

- You would like a course that includes practical hands-on learning through work placements or work modules including real-world projects.

How is a foundation degree structured?

There is no national syllabus, so courses will differ in content, delivery styles and assessment methods. There are a variety of study patterns but all have some work-based or work-related learning.

You may:

- Be employed and do much of your learning in the workplace with blocks of time at university.
- Be employed and complete course modules by distance learning.
- Be based full-time at university with work placements each year.
- Be based full-time at university with one or more work-based modules that include real-world projects, relevant to the workplace.

There are a wide range of ways to study:

- Full time
- Part-time day or evening
- Part-time day release from work
- Part-time block release from work (often periods of a few weeks)
- Distance learning
- Mixed mode



Personal experience - why I chose a foundation degree

Hannah Gamble is studying an early years foundation degree at Sheffield Hallam University. She explains why she chose to study a foundation degree:

"I had been working in a school nursery for four years and felt that if I knew more about early years as an academic subject I could put reasoning behind children's behaviours and be more effective in helping them develop. Previously I had done a Level 3 Apprenticeship and enjoyed studying for a CACHE Diploma in Early Years Education and Care."

What benefits do you think this will have for your career?

If I am better trained I can provide a better service and most importantly better outcomes for the children I work with. Currently the nursery doesn't have a fully qualified early years teacher so I hope to continue studying beyond foundation degree to gain Qualified Teacher Status.

What tips would you have for others applying for foundation degrees?

Don't hesitate - go for it! Initially I thought university study would be endless lectures but it is very different. I study one afternoon a week at university and much of my learning is done through working at the nursery. I have met lots of new people and challenged myself with many new experiences. It is rewarding to see yourself change and develop - I am now much more confident as a person.

The course may include academic skills, such as academic reading and writing, researching and referencing for those who haven't studied for a while.

How will I be assessed?

Courses include a mix of practical and written assessments. In the workplace you will be assessed to ensure you have the competencies needed for a specific area of work. This may include learning how to reflect on tasks in order to evaluate your own and other's practice. You may have to keep a personal development portfolio to document the

competencies you have achieved. As well as exams and written work you can expect assignments relevant to the workplace, such as reports for business-related areas and posters or presentations for health roles.

Top tip on finding the right foundation degree

- The Ucas foundation degree search allows you to look for courses that offer the study style that suits you best. Visit: <http://fd.ucas.com/CourseSearch/Default.aspx>

Finding a course, applications and funding

Entry requirements vary widely and previous work experience may be just as important as formal qualifications

What will I need to get on a foundation degree?

Entry requirements differ, so always check university websites carefully. For those under 21 without substantial work experience, courses often ask for one or two A-levels or equivalent vocational qualifications. For those who are older and have work experience relevant to the course they want to study, formal qualifications at this level may not be needed. For example, for FdA Tourism Park Management, you need two years' relevant experience and a minimum of four GCSEs (A-C) or equivalent. You may, however, need to demonstrate you have the potential for university-level study.

For most courses, some prior work experience will be required to show you have an interest in, and some understanding of, the area of work.

If you have already been working for several years in a career area relevant to the course you want to do, you may be able to gain credits for previous work by a process called accreditation of prior learning (APL) and you may not need to study the whole course. Ask university course admissions tutors for more information. In some cases you may be able

to accredit your experience with foundation degree status without studying at all.

What is the competition for courses like?

Competition for foundation degrees varies too. If you are work-based you may have to approach your manager with a strong case for why a part-time foundation degree would be good for your career development, and outline the benefits it could provide for the company you work for. If your employer offers funding for courses, the application process may be quite competitive.

For full-time university-based courses you may find competition for places is lower because of the flexibility of entry requirements. However, bear in mind that you may need some relevant experience or to be working in a particular setting to be eligible for entry.

How do I apply?

- For full-time foundation degrees you need to apply through UCAS.
- For part-time foundation degrees you apply directly to the university, college or training provider offering the course. If you are employed and want funding support from your employer you should speak

to your line manager first. You may have to use an internal company application process.

- For some work-based schemes, such as the Network Rail Star track scheme for track design engineers, and for higher apprenticeships that lead to a foundation degree, you apply through employer websites.

Is funding available?

Students on foundation degrees are eligible for the same student funding support as full degree students. Be aware that, similar to degrees, funding entitlement for part-time study differs from full-time. There may be extra funding if you are a parent, have an adult dependant or a disability. For those in work your employer may provide full or part funding for a foundation degree.

Which employers help fund foundation degrees?

- Balfour Beatty
- BT
- BMW
- JCB
- Network Rail
- NHS
- Radisson Edwardian Hotels
- RAF
- Specsavers
- Tesco
- Tui Travel

How much does it cost?

The fees for studying a foundation degree vary according to the university or college running the course. Fees may be lower for a foundation degree offered at a partner college affiliated to a university and for part-time courses - look at the institution's



website to find out more.

Foundation degree students are eligible for the same funding support as full degree students.

Tips for applications

Sarah Rawding-Ward

- Senior Lecturer Early Years, Sheffield

Hallam University says:

- Show enthusiasm for the area of study.
- Find out as much as you can about the course beforehand.
- Think about ways in which your professional or personal experiences will enable you to study at this level. For example, time management skills, leadership skills and communication skills.
- Give examples of your work or experience that will back up where you claim to meet the selection criteria.

"These qualifications tend to be work related so applicants need to really focus their personal statement around the experience they have alongside the qualifications they have obtained to date. Demonstrating enthusiasm for the programme and an understanding of what the course may lead onto should be explicit in the statement too."

Katie Jenkins - Director, Future Students at the University of the West of England

Career prospects and next steps

A foundation degree can get you into a specific area of work, help you progress in your career or be the first step to a full degree

You have many options after completing a foundation degree - here are some of them:

- **Continue to a full degree**, by taking a one-year top-up course or entering the second or third year of a relevant degree course.
- **Study for professional qualifications**. As part of your foundation degree you may have gained some entry level professional qualifications and you could build on these.
- **Find employment**, perhaps with the company you have been on work placement with.
- **Progress in your current career** or change to a new work setting.

How to sell a foundation degree to employers

When applying for jobs or drafting your CV it's important to show the practical skills and hands-on experience you have gained through your course. Emphasise how you will be valuable to employers from day one and can hit the ground running. Show you have worked for companies relevant to the area of work you want to do - this will often set you apart from other candidates.

As well as relevant skills you will have transferable skills from university study, such as:

- Critical reasoning
- Self-motivation from independent study
- Commercial awareness from work placements
- Organisational skills
- Professionalism
- Communication skills from working in real work teams
- Dedication to your chosen industry

Top tip

- Some employers directly recruit from specific foundation degrees, such as the Fd Travel Operations Management. Employers are often involved in the design of such courses so know students will be trained according to their needs.



What employers and universities think of foundation degrees

"At BMW we have found foundation degrees a useful way of supporting candidates for whom a traditional three to four year university degree is not attractive. In particular, for us, the modular nature is helpful and we have used Fds with success to allow apprentices to access higher qualifications alongside their vocational training. The nature of a foundation degree allows a natural break in learning before potentially moving to a full degree and this suits the career path of many people."

Sarah Heaney - Head of Communications, BMW Group

"A foundation degree offers a unique opportunity to gain a university-level qualification whilst developing knowledge and skills which relate directly to the workplace. Successful completion of a foundation degree opens up many opportunities; having gained real world skills they can be applied directly in a work environment or alternatively they can lead onto further study to achieve a degree level qualification."

Katie Jenkins - Director, Future Students at the University of the West of England

"The links between university study and work enable students to effectively complete their academic studies, often whilst working full time and balancing other commitments. This link also provides students with the essential association between theory, research, policy and practice and most importantly the skills to become reflective practitioners who can seek and find information and use this to evaluate their own and others' practice."

Sarah Rawding-Ward - Senior Lecturer Early Years, Sheffield Hallam University

What do foundation degree students do next?

Here is what leavers from foundation degrees in 2014 went on to do:

	Full-time Fd	Part-time Fd
Work only	33.3%	52.9%
Work and further study	17.9%	29.9%
Further study only	44.2%	12.6%
Unemployed	2.5%	1.7%
Other	2.1%	2.9%

*from 2013/14 HESA Destination of Leavers Survey

The main roles that foundation degree graduates from 2013/14 went into, as a proportion of all foundation degree employment:

• Teaching assistants	8.9%
• Nursery nurses and assistants	4.6%
• Sales and retail assistants	4.3%
• Teaching and other educational professionals	3.8%
• Paramedics	3.6%
• Nursing auxiliaries and assistants	3.3%
• Police officers (sergeant and below)	2.2%
• Health associate professionals	2.2%
• Educational support assistants	2.0%
• Primary and nursery education teaching professionals	1.8%
• Nurses	1.8%
• Managers and proprietors in other services	1.5%
• Mechanical engineers	1.4%
• Child and early years officers	1.4%
• Youth and community workers	1.4%
• Welfare and housing associate professionals	1.4%
• Care workers and home carers	1.3%
• Clergy	1.2%

*Figures provided by HECSU



Useful websites

- Prospects - options with your foundation degree: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/getting-into-university/choosing-a-course/options-with-your-foundation-degree>
- Prospects - getting into specific career areas with a foundation degree: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles>
- Which? University - guide to higher and degree apprenticeships: www.which.co.uk/apprenticeships
- Ucas - allows you to look for courses that offer the study style that suits you best: <http://fd.ucas.com/CourseSearch/Default.aspx>