

Snowball: How much studying do you have to do?

The amount of studying that you have to do varies greatly between courses and institutions, so there's no one answer to this.

Generally, college HN courses (HNC's and HND's) and the first year of university have more classes and less free time. Later years at university tend to involve much less time in classes, but you are definitely expected to study during the time away from them. Course tutors can offer advice on how much time you should be studying.

Ultimately, it's up to you, but remember that not doing enough will impact on your results!

Snowball: How much does it cost?

LIFT OFF says: Scottish students who study at a Scottish college or university do not pay fees. Financial support is available to students in the form of Student Loans and Bursaries. The amount you are eligible for will depend on your household income and is designed to cover your maintenance costs for the weeks you are on your course. If you study away from home, you will receive more than if you stay. You can also apply for various grants and scholarships to help cover the costs (for example, travel, Disabled Student Allowance etc.).

If you are a Scottish student and study at an institution in England, Wales or Northern Ireland you will have to pay tuition fees, but you can apply to SAAD for a loan to cover these. There are other costs that you should take into account when researching your options, such as accommodation, food, travel, socialising and books and stationary as these all vary from place to place.

For more information you should contact the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) at www.saas.gov.uk.

Snowball: How much do students spend per week socialising?

LIFT OFF says: There is no fixed answer to this question. It depends mainly on who the student is, and where they are studying! Someone who likes to go out 7 nights a week in London will spend more than someone who goes out once or twice a week in Dundee. An educated estimate would be approximately £20 - £40 per week. Remember that Students' Unions are good places for cheaper entertainment, and many pubs and clubs run

weekly "student nights". Activities run by clubs and societies are cheaper for members, too.

Snowball: Do you get any of your travel costs back?

LIFT OFF says: Yes! You can apply to SAAS for assistance in covering costs in travelling from your term-time address to your place of study. The amount you receive is also based on your household income. If you are living at home, you can apply for the cost of public transport from your home to your place of study. If you are in rented accommodation you can apply for the cost of public transport between this address and your place of study, as well as three return journeys between your term-time address and your parents' home over the course of a year.

Snowball: Do you get your own room?

LIFT OFF says: Halls of Residence are student accommodation, usually in large buildings where students all live together, and come with a range of services (like "catered" as opposed to "self-catering") at a range of prices. They are popular with students in 1st year as services such as food and cleaning are provided, the cost usually includes bills and it's a great place to meet new people. Most rooms in halls are single (some are even en suite!), but there are still a few twin rooms in the older halls of residence. Twin rooms tend to be cheaper than single rooms, and many people who share a room end up becoming good friends. If you do not want to share with someone, you can make this choice known on your accommodation application.

Snowball: Are there lots of exams?

LIFT OFF says: Very broadly speaking, university courses will usually use exams as a means of assessment more than colleges, but as ever there is big variation depending on what you are studying and where you are studying it. Colleges and universities often use a mixture of exams and continual assessment (course work) to assess students. You should remember, though, that even those rare courses that set very few exams will demand a high level of input from students (course work, projects, presentations, etc) so don't think few exams = an easy course. At university, most courses have exams at the end of each semester, though some modules can be assessed completely by coursework.

Snowball: When do you get holidays?

LIFT OFF says: The dates and length of holidays differ from institution to institution. Students at university usually have long summer holidays (sometimes up to 4 months), and a

few weeks at Christmas and in the spring. There are also Reading Weeks, where there are no classes, but students are expected to do private study. College holidays are more like those of schools, but a little longer.

Snowball: What qualifications do you get at the end of college?

LIFT OFF says: It depends what you sign up for! If you want to study at Higher Education level, you can choose to start with a Higher National Certificate (HNC), which you are awarded after a year. If you complete another year beyond this, you would be awarded a Higher National Diploma (HND). Colleges also offer a massive range of Further Education (sometimes called "non-advanced") courses. Check out the websites and prospectuses to find out more.

Snowball: How do I know what course is for me?

LIFT OFF says: To start with, you need to ask yourself a few questions:

Do you know what do you want to do as a career?

If so, do a bit of research to find out what sort of qualification or training would be most appropriate for you. Look at the Careers Scotland website for some help (www.careers-scotland.org.uk).

What subjects at school do you enjoy / are you good at?

There's no point in studying something after school that you don't like. Do you like any of your school subjects enough to think about taking them further?

Do you have any interests or hobbies that you might want to take further?

Loads of hobbies can transfer into a college or university course if you're enthusiastic and (let's face it!) good enough at them. Drama, sport, music and art are some examples.

Do you know what options are out there?

There are SO many courses out there, many of which are not studied at school. You need to take the initiative here and go fishing for info. It's really worth while spending time online, looking at the college and university websites to find out what's available. Don't make a decision until you have all the information.

You should also make use of the resources that are available to you. Speak to people (guidance teachers - it's what they're there for, career advisors and college and university Admissions staff, for example).

There's nothing wrong with taking a gap year between school and college or uni either. You can get a job, save some money, volunteer, travel and buy a bit more time to decide (but don't use this as an excuse to put things off).

Snowball: Is college or uni
just like school?

LIFT OFF says: Not at all. The big differences are below:

You choose to go to college or university

You are much more personally responsible for getting work in and studying (lecturers are very approachable, but don't offer the same amount of help and support as teachers do)

You choose what and where to study

You have a much greater choice of what to study

Usually you will have less time in class through the week and will be expected to study outside of classes

Snowball: Do you get a lot of homework?

LIFT OFF says: Hmmmm. Again, this will depend on the course and the subject, but it's daft to think that there will be no homework. You usually get your deadlines well in advance, which should help you to plan the workload. If the module or unit you are sitting has no exam at the end of it, you are likely to have to do more course work. All those stories you hear of students "pulling an all-nighter" at the library, are about people who haven't planned properly. We at LIFT OFF never left our course work to the last-minute!

You should also remember that you need to do a lot of reading for classes, so even when you don't have an essay deadline you still need to hit those books!

Snowball: Is it scary?

LIFT OFF says: Most people will be a little anxious about starting a new course, meeting new people and maybe moving away from home, but the great thing about college and university is that everyone is in the same boat when they start and there are lots of people around to support you. So while it is perfectly normal to feel a little anxious, most

people get over this very quickly and make lots of new friends.

Snowball: Do people listen to you and not judge you by the way you look or talk?

LIFT OFF says: University and colleges are full of people of all sorts of backgrounds and tastes. The chances are that you will find someone who has similar likes and dislikes to you. Students tend to be who they want to be and do what they like. In fact, this freedom and independence is one of the great attractions!