

# Article

## How to Enter a British University

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### Introduction

British education has a long distinguished history with the venerable universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the top five according to world rankings: 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Indeed, as all Japanese students know, the kanji chosen for England is the one used to mean excellence. England has been the chosen destination for study of many members of the Japanese royal family. Crown Prince Naruhito studied at Merton College, Oxford, Princess Mako of Akishino has been studying a Masters at the University of Leicester, and recently Princess Kako has just begun her studies at the University of Leeds. Although the number has been declining, still around 50,000 Japanese students choose to live and study in the U.K. This article attempts to explain about the British university system and provide a basic guide for students how to enter one.

How many public and private universities are there in the UK?

There are 130 universities to choose from in the UK, 109 of them in England. Almost all of them are public. The UK has only 5 private universities.

How many terms are there and how long are they?

Generally speaking there are 3 terms. The key thing to remember is that the academic year begins in September. The vacations are known as the Christmas, Easter and summer holidays. As an example, the following was taken from the website of the University of Leeds:

- Autumn Term

Monday 25 September 2017 to Friday 8 December 2017

- Spring Term

Monday 8 January 2018 to Friday 16 March 2018

- Summer Term

Monday 16 April 2018 to Friday 15 June 2018

What subjects can students study?

In Britain, most university students must choose one major area of study to specialize in. Students will then study that subject in depth.

Japanese students might be interested in courses such as Tourism Management, Business Management, Early Years Education or International Relations to name but a few.

How long are the courses?

Most British degree courses last for 3 years. In Japan or the US they are usually 4 years, so students could save some time and money this way by choosing the UK. The 4-year courses that are offered are often referred to as 'sandwich courses'. This involves students spending one of those years, (usually the third) in a job placement or in a foreign country. For example the student may study their chosen subject for 2 years (one slice of bread), then spend a year in a job placement (the filling) and then come back to study in the final year (the other slice of bread).

Students can also take short courses known as Higher Education Diplomas, which could take one year. An HND (Higher National Diploma) is a shorter version of a degree course, which usually lasts 2 years. Students whose English language level is not yet sufficient can enroll in a Foundation Degree course, which is usually one year.

What qualifications and English language level do students need?

Students' graduation from high school or university in Japan will be valuable. With regard to English language level, the test to take is the IELTS (International English Language Testing System). The examination tests all four skills. It typically takes a whole day and costs around 25,000 yen. Unfortunately, the TOEIC is not well known nor widely recognized in the UK. Requirements vary between colleges and courses, but to get onto a typical degree course a score of around 6.0 in all 4 skills is a requirement. To give an idea of the type of level needed, this table of equivalency was taken from Wittenborg University in Holland:

IELTS	TOEFL Paper	TOEFL Internet	TOEIC*	
			Listening and Reading	Speaking and Writing
7.5	625	113	790	400
7.0	600	100	780	350
6.5	575	90	720	310
6.0	550	80	670	290
5.5	525	70	620	260
5.0	500	60	600	240

Is it difficult to graduate?

There are a great many differences between the styles of teaching and learning in Japan and those of the UK. These differences will need getting used to. In particular, students will not receive credit for simply attending classes. In addition, professors will assume students have understood if they have not told their professor of any difficulties or asked questions. If students have difficulties they must be active and seek out academic support, which is available at all colleges. Every year students who have not reached the required standard fail courses. The following quote is from The Times Higher Education:

Six per cent of first degree entrants aged under 21 who enrolled in 2013-14 did not continue their studies beyond their first year, according to data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency

How much does it cost?

For many students, this question of major concern and the answers can vary depending on the course students take and the region and area students choose to live. Studying medicine in London for example would be prohibitively expensive for many students. According to UCAS, fees for international students average at about 11,000 pounds per year. At 150 yen to the pound, that works out at 1,650,000 yen per year.

Living costs have risen recently. Rents in particular are a major expense. Other costs include utilities such as water, gas and electricity, then there expenses for clothes, food, transportation and leisure activities. The website, Top Universities gave the figure of 12,000 pounds per year, equivalent to about 1,800,000 yen to set aside for living expenses. However, UCAS gave a figure of between 8,000 and 11,000 pounds.

How do students apply?

Fortunately, students need not make multiple applications to all the universities they are interested in, nor do they need to sit any entrance examinations. There is one organization to go through: UCAS (University and Colleges Admissions Services) and the application process can be done through its website: [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com). Students can look at all the courses and check the requirements and costs. Each applicant can fill out the application form and apply for a maximum of 5 courses or colleges at a total cost of 24 pounds (3,600 yen). UCAS then contacts the universities. Each of the 5 universities then considers the application and passes their replies back to UCAS. UCAS then inform the student of their decision: acceptance, rejection or conditional offer. A conditional offer means their place may depend on the outcome of an examination such as the IELTS or a forthcoming result such as a GPA score from a Japanese university.

How do students fill out the form?

There are various agencies, which students can pay to assist them with the application. Alternatively, students can do it themselves with the assistance of teachers or any suitably qualified person. Once on the website, first, students should register in order to receive newsletters and updates. The application form does not need to be filled in all at once. It can be filled in little by little, or section by section, and students can make changes at any time. Students will need to fill out sections related to academic background and employment history and will need to write a personal statement.

Academic background: The application form asks students to supply information from secondary education onwards. For a Japanese student, this would mean from junior high school onwards. In preparation, it makes sense for students then to carefully save all their school and university end of term reports so as to accurately submit their grades on the form. It is also useful to know that these documents can be issued in English by high schools and universities. These will be useful when replying to universities directly if they contact students requesting proof of qualifications.

As most Japanese educational institutions are not on the UCAS database, students will have to fill in the information manually. Likewise, Japanese educational qualifications are also not on their database, one exception being high school graduation certificate, which is listed as " Kotogako Sotsugyo ". Students are advised not to try and find and select what they think is an equivalent for their Japanese qualifications in English. Therefore, this process

may take considerable time.

**Employment history:** In this section, students are invited to list any employment they may have had. This should include as much as possible, especially jobs which may relate to the student's chosen field of study. Colleges will also be impressed by any unpaid volunteer activities students may have done. Students should also note that jobs they may not consider worth mentioning might in fact be considered valuable as they may show qualities such as self-discipline and work ethic.

**Personal statement:** This maybe perhaps the most difficult section. It invites students to explain why they have decided to study their chosen subject, and why they have chosen to do so in the UK. UCAS states:

The personal statement is an important part of the UCAS application. It's your chance to describe your ambitions, skills, and experience.

British universities would like to sense the student's excitement, positivity and sense of uniqueness, supported by evidence to show they can succeed on the course they have chosen. It should consist of up to 4,000 characters or 47 lines. Students are also advised that plagiarism (copying from work of another person) even a small a part, will result in your application being rejected. UCAS have specific software to detect this. It is also a good idea to have a teacher read it to check for grammar errors and other structural or stylistic mistakes before you submit it.

What else do students need?

Students will need to supply a reference in English. A homeroom teacher or professor could provide this. Students should supply the person's contact details, and then UCAS contacts the referee in order to obtain the reference. Students cannot submit their application until the reference has been received.

Once a student has been accepted, then a student visa needs to be applied for. The cost is 322 pounds (48,300 yen)

Where can students live?

Once accepted, the university can assist students in finding accommodation. Students in

their first year of study are often offered accommodation in "student halls" which are dormitories. These can be good chances to get to know other students. Other options could be private halls or dormitories, or rooms in shared private houses. Many students start off in halls where they meet future housemates.

Is Britain dangerous?

Much of the crime committed in Britain takes place in areas most students would have no reason or interest in going to. General common sense should be enough to ensure that students have a trouble free, productive and enjoyable experience studying in the UK.

Conclusions

Education is a valuable asset to anyone and investing in the future is a high priority for successful young people. Moving to another city and living independently is a challenge in itself. Moving abroad to do so in another country in another language is a bold and courageous decision. The intention of this article has been not to persuade or dissuade, but to inform. Each student needs to make the best decision for themselves from a range of options of which studying in the UK may be one.

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