

A GUIDE TO APPLYING TO EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

Entry requirements and application processes in Europe

A Star Future Ltd

Unit 2, 100 Villiers Road
London, NW2 5PJ

Phone: 020 3946 5320
Email: info@astarfuture.co.uk

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Introduction

This guide aims to offer a flavour of some of the key issues that careers advisors will face when supporting students in applying to universities in some of the major European countries. Much of this information can also be found on our websites (www.astarfuture.co.uk, www.studyinholland.co.uk and www.studyincroatia.eu) and [blog](#), where we also post regular updates, but we have formatted it here to give a short but hopefully still comprehensive introduction.

While at first glance, different countries' admissions systems might seem somewhat bizarre in comparison with the UK, it is worth pointing out that every admissions process usually only consists of the same basic elements in some configuration or other: a student's academic record or transcript; a personal statement or motivation letter; a reference from a teacher; an interview or perhaps some additional entrance exams or aptitude tests. The precise emphasis placed on these elements varies tremendously, and the format in which this information must be submitted may also appear strange at times but it is extremely rare that we come across anything completely unexpected. As your familiarity with different systems increases it is extremely unlikely that you will find anything too bewildering.

Much as in the UK with the UCAS system, many countries are forever reviewing the most efficient and effective way to process university admissions. It is quite probable that some of the countries featured in this guide will make major changes to their systems in the next few years. It is even possible that some elements of international systems might be incorporated into UCAS as well. A complete convergence of admissions processes throughout Europe is not to be anticipated, however.

Before we get started...

Here are five key issues that come up time and again when looking at universities abroad so it is worth drawing attention to them before we get stuck into the specifics. There is no other connection between them except for the fact that parents and students will inevitably be looking to guidance professionals for answers to these questions.

1. Recognition and equivalency of European degrees

All degrees within the European Union must be viewed as equivalent in accordance with the Bologna agreement. This offers some reassurance in recommending international higher education but of course it is some way from the full picture. There are good and not so good universities in every country, but at least there is no danger of a degree from within the European Union not being recognised.

As recognition of degrees is not directly connected with membership of the European Union, we would not expect there to be any issues related to the nature of the UK's potential departure from the EU. However, there are professional considerations that might be more important than general recognition. For students of professional or vocational subjects such as medicine, nursing, teaching or engineering, national standards also apply. Where registration with a professional body is required, it is important to pay attention to their guidelines. In some fields such as law, there will be a clear difference from one country to the next.

2. Holidays

Most universities abroad operate the semester system. Students going abroad should not expect lengthy Christmas and Easter holidays. It is not unheard of for European universities to teach right up to 23rd December and family Easter skiing trips may very well become a thing of the past.

The academic year in most European countries is likely to be longer, consisting of two semesters of up to 20 weeks each. A UK university academic year typically will not be longer than 35 weeks and sometimes can be significantly shorter.

3. Maths, and subject requirements in general

Lack of maths A' level or at least AS level could have a major impact on where students can study abroad. The one single piece of advice we would offer to any GCSE student considering international higher education would be to take maths to at least AS level. This does not depend on the intended choice of subject at university and is connected entirely to admissions requirements abroad.

Most countries' education systems require students to take maths right up until school graduation and its absence is one of the biggest differences between British high school leavers and their European counterparts.

In some countries, it is possible to take a local test to make up for a maths deficiency. However, these are rarely a soft option and are occasionally harder than A or AS level. On rare occasions the US SAT Maths test can also be used to meet this requirement.

4. Accommodation

This can be a big issue for British students and parents. Accommodation will hardly ever measure up to British standards. Campus universities are rare in Europe and, except for some smaller private universities and Dutch university colleges, students might find themselves living in many locations around a city. Fully catered halls of residence are almost non-existent. Self-catering options are easier to find but most universities provide international student houses rather than the kind of facilities expected at British universities.

Student accommodation is often significantly cheaper abroad than it is in the UK and will usually include all bills and internet connections. Other facilities might be a little more spartan and cleanliness is as always down to the occupants as much as it is the accommodation itself. Student accommodation can still fulfil its important social role in forming friendships but this does vary from country to country so it is definitely worthwhile contacting current students at any university you might be investigating.

Private student accommodation is increasingly available, much as it is in big student cities in the UK. It is usually the most expensive option.

Some cities in the Netherlands are experiencing major shortages of accommodation as their universities attract more and more international students and structural issues in the job market mean that young professionals are having to stay in student-standard accommodation for longer. This issue is particularly pronounced in [Utrecht](#) and [Groningen](#) but is also starting to affect smaller Dutch cities,

such as [Breda](#). While this might sound discouraging, we believe students will be absolutely fine if they apply early; universities offer a huge amount of advice and support around this issue. However, it does mean that applying at the last minute is not to be recommended and in some countries, it is perhaps better to refer to the accommodation deadline as being the effective deadline even if admissions continue until later in the year.

5. Applying abroad at the same time as in the UK

There is absolutely nothing to stop British students from applying to international universities and British universities at the same time. Indeed, most students who go abroad will also fill out a UCAS form; there is no overlap between UCAS and any of its national equivalents in other European countries.

In some countries there can be difficulties because of the relatively late announcement of A' level results meaning that a gap year becomes necessary (Sweden, in particular but also some Dutch universities and any German university course subject to Numerus Clausus).

Applying abroad can be seen as lining up an additional insurance offer mainly because equivalently-ranked universities abroad will probably have lower entrance requirements than British universities. This creates additional work for careers advisors with responsibility for higher education applications but the good news is that most application systems require similar elements to UCAS and are quite straightforward and none is as complicated as applying to American universities.

The only caveat we have about using European universities as a back-up plan relates to the aforementioned issue of accommodation.

Spain

1. About the higher education system

Spain boasts more than 70 universities throughout the country. Over 50 are public and around 20 are private institutions. Some private universities are affiliated with the Catholic Church. Large cities like Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia are home to the most universities. There are also many institutes of higher education offering more practical qualifications in art and design, for example.

In common with the United Kingdom, students are able to undertake Bachelor, Master or Doctoral Degrees. Most bachelor degrees are now referred to as “Grado en” but the pre-Bologna usage of “Licencio” can still be found on occasion. All degrees are recognised by the Spanish Ministry of Education unless foreign accreditation is made clear. For private universities it is worth checking accreditation very carefully as there are some institutions describing themselves as universities that would never meet the standard required in other European countries. However, the number of such “universities” has declined in recent years.

The academic year is divided into semesters and tends to be similar throughout the country. It starts around the 1st October and finishes at the end of June.

2. Entry requirements

General entrance requirements for Spanish universities can appear to be quite modest. For most subjects, two A levels are the minimum entry requirement or an IB Diploma with 24 points. Since 2018, BTECs are also recognised for some degrees.

However, these are minimum requirements. Many degrees will require a lot more than this. At all public universities (and some private) the entry requirement will be indicated by a score out of 14. For example, at the University of Valencia the lowest entry requirement is 5.0 (this is the pass mark in the Bachillerato) and the highest is 13.04 for medicine. If the entry requirement (nota de corte) is below 10, it is possible to achieve with A' levels. Here is a partial table indicating the conversion:

A Level	Scale 0 - 10
EEE	5.0
CCC	6.36
BBC	6.82
BBB	7.04
ABB	7.27
AAB	7.50
AAA	7.73
A*AA	7.95
A*A*A*	8.41
A*A*A*A*	10.0

If it is above this level students will have to take the Specific Part of the Selectividad (aka PAU). This will require sitting exams in Spanish (even for degrees taught in English) and possibly studying some subjects that are not available in the UK, such as Spanish history. There can be some overlap between these subjects and A' level subject choices, so in effect A' level subjects can be counted twice, but it is unlikely to be exact. In any case, these exams must be taken in Spanish even if they are to be used to apply to an English-taught degree.

This means that it is very difficult for British students to gain access to any degree with an entry requirement of higher than 10 and practically impossible if they don't speak fluent Spanish. Given that so few public universities in Spain teach many subjects in English, the most likely university to cause problems for British students in Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona where the Global Studies degree required 12.35 and the International Business Economics degree required 12.46 in 2018. You can check all Nota De Corte in Spain at the [El Pais](#) website. Please bear in mind that these can change from one year to the next.

Private universities do not have to use the [Selectividad](#) and are able to select students according to their own criteria. These will vary tremendously from subject to subject and sometimes between universities as well.

3. Application process

If a student considers studying at a public Spanish university, it is worth applying well in advance as they are oversubscribed. Moreover, every faculty sets its own set of rules; hence they have to apply directly at each faculty of their choice. Usually deadlines are the following:

- First week of June – for studies beginning in October
- First week of September – for late applications beginning in October
- First week of December – for studies beginning in February

For courses at public universities that require an entrance score of over 10, students need to sit the Selectividad before they can submit a university application. The Selectividad exam takes place in June and September every year. It takes at least one year to prepare for the Selectividad, so a gap year is inevitable.

Many private universities offer rolling admissions throughout the academic year. For degrees in dentistry, most open admissions in January for the following September although one or two are available earlier.

As part of the application process all students educated in EU systems (including A level and IB students globally) have to obtain the Credencial from UNED. This is a statement confirming that your high school diploma gives you the right to be a student in your home country and therefore also in Spain. For British students this means that you need to have three A' levels. For the IB you need the full diploma. Scottish Highers are also well understood. Spain has given us problems with Pre-U recognition in recent years, however.

Students will need to take their diplomas and transcripts to a Spanish embassy or consulate in the UK for certification. Alternatively, they can be verified at the UNED office in Spain or at any British consulate there. British students might want to consider an agent to obtain the Credencial for them,

particularly if they do not speak Spanish. We have worked with Homologation Student Services in Madrid for a number of years and they provide this service directly for many universities. [Universidad Catolica San Antonio de Murcia](#)) has published a very [helpful guide](#) about the process. We cannot guarantee its accuracy for students at other universities.

France

1. About the higher education system

There are 83 public universities in France. Their degrees are accredited centrally by the French Government. Some Universities and specialised institutions are organised into research clusters called PRES. These clusters pool their resources and research to compete internationally.

Completely separate from the public universities are the “Grandes Ecoles”. These institutions typically offer courses in management and engineering although there are also schools in other areas, such as veterinary medicine and political studies. Grandes Ecoles are generally regarded as the best institutes of higher education in France and play a very important role in educating the French elite. Their degrees are essentially equivalent to a Master’s level qualification. Class sizes and facilities are usually far better than in public universities. Grandes Ecoles attract around 30% of state funding for higher education but typically only have about 5% of the total number of students in the country.

There are also numerous business and engineering schools in France, some of which are private or are run by the local Chamber of Commerce. You can also find art and architecture schools.

The number of Bachelor’s degrees taught entirely in English at French public universities is very limited. The best options for students who are yet to achieve fluency in French are likely to be at private universities. Examples of such institutions include the American University of Paris (www.aup.edu) that offers US-style liberal arts degrees with a wide range of majors (not strong in sciences, however).

Grandes Ecoles do offer some options in English but these do not conform to the typical French model outlined above. Instead they are aligned with the Bachelor and Masters cycles agreed in the [Bologna Process](#).

Sciences Po is one such institution. They offer courses with distinct geographic rather than subject focuses. For example, the Europe-North America programme requires students to study politics, history, sociology, language and other subjects relating to the two geographic areas. Students will be expected to spend their final year as a visiting student in North America. Fees are means-tested and range from €0 to €10,250 per year. The university has their own entry requirements that are completely separate from those outlined below. [Ecole Polytechnique](#) has now launched its own degree in English which is called “The Bachelors Programme”. This is suitable for students wishing to study maths at university.

2. Entry requirements

Public French universities are required by law to allow students in a certain geographic area entry to a course of their choosing if they have successfully completed their baccalaureate (the French school leaving certificate). Therefore, generally speaking, A-level passes are all that is required for entry to a public French university. If a student applies for a course that is taught in French they will also need to prove they can speak the language to an acceptable level. The candidate should check with the French institution they are interested in as to what level of French proficiency they expect from students following their courses. They may also need to take a French proficiency test like the DALF, a course administered by the French Ministry of National Education. There are also other French proficiency tests such as the TCF and the TCF-DAF administered by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. British students should visit the French Institute in the UK.

Entry to Grandes Ecoles is not possible with only A-levels if the candidate intends to study in French. Upon completing the baccalaureate French students who wish to enter a Grande Ecole have to take the Classe Préparatoire aux Grandes Ecoles (CPGE). Also commonly known as the Classes prépas or prépas. The CPGE take two years to complete and is a rigorous programme of classes, around 30-35 hours a week with regular examinations. At the end of the two years, students take a highly competitive national exam, the top ranking students from the results can go on to apply to Grandes Ecoles in France.

Depending on the field expertise of the Grande Ecole, students will take different subjects in the CPGEs. For example, if a candidate follows a scientific CPGE, they will take classes in physics, chemistry, maths as well as humanities subjects like foreign languages and philosophy. For more information, visit the www.prepas.org website.

CPGE do not give students a qualification, they are designed to prepare students for entry to the Grandes Ecoles. However, in recent years the CPGE carry European credits (ECTS) which can be transferred to other university courses in Europe.

Some Grandes Ecoles now offer Bachelor's degrees taught in English and these are accessible with A' levels alone. However, they are extremely competitive even if the formal, published entry requirements are EEE at A' level.

3. Application process

If a student is applying to a French business or engineering school they should contact the institution directly. The deadline for applications can be quite late although we would suggest candidates apply in good time as there may be a shortage of places.

For private international universities in France, such as the American University of Paris, candidates should apply directly on their website. The process usually involves only an online application form.

For French universities teaching courses in French, there is a centralised application process roughly equivalent to UCAS: <https://www.parcoursup.fr/>. This replaces the earlier Admissions Postbac system. The website is entirely in French but it should be used by any applicant with an EU school leaving diploma.

Usually, students apply to universities between January and March if they wish to start the following autumn. It can also be possible to apply later and even after students have received their A-level results. Because most university courses do not have any restrictions on numbers, as long as a candidate meets the standard required of local students they will be able to enrol. Some universities coordinate their admissions meaning that if a student applies to Université de Paris, Sorbonne, they might be allocated a place at a different university in Paris if it is oversubscribed.

Italy

1. About the higher education system

The Italian higher education system is divided into the university and non-university sector.

The university sector is made up of 89 university institutions including 58 State universities, 17 non-State universities (legally recognised by the State) and six higher schools specialised in postgraduate university studies.

The non-university sector includes four education typologies with their institutions: higher schools of design (e.g. academies of fine arts and music), higher education in language mediation, higher integrated education (FIS) (programmes of higher technical education and training (IFTS)) and a few specific fields (e.g. archiving, restoration, military studies, etc.) which, along with their respective institutions, fall under the regulation of ministries other than that of Education.

In addition, there are around 77 private institutions in Italy. Unusually in the EU, some of these offer “unofficial” degrees that are unrecognised by the Italian government. This is because many private institutions were operating for many decades before there was any recognition system. As most of these qualifications are in vocational fields such as design and fashion, this has little impact on students’ ability to find work. However, if they were looking to go on to postgraduate study outside Italy it would be advisable to avoid such qualifications. This is a fluid situation as many private institutions are seeking recognition so it is worth checking the current status if there is any doubt.

The academic year in Italy is made up of two semesters - starting in September/October and ending in July. The actual start and finish dates will differ across the universities, however, each semester lasts around 20 weeks and consists of 14 weeks teaching period and a 6 week exam period.

2. Entry requirements

Every institution has its own set of regulations, however the minimum requirements to enter a bachelor’s programme in Italy six GCE passes of which two must be at A’ level. In addition, some competitive courses might require additional qualifications and private universities such as [Universita Bocconi](#) often have their own entrance tests or use the American SATs.

For competitive subjects in Italy, there may be a requirement to sit an entrance exam locally. This may take place only a few weeks before the commencement of the degree so it might be difficult to arrange accommodation in advance. For some bachelor’s degrees, the entrance exam might be in Italian even if the course itself is entirely in English. It is not unheard of for universities to translate the questions and answers into English during the exam. In this case, the questions will be multiple choice.

For public universities offering medicine, there is a standard entrance exam that can be taken in the UK or in Italy in the English language. University places are awarded entirely on the basis of performance in this exam. Currently, this is the IMAT exam and it takes place every year in September, only a few weeks before the start of the academic year. The deadline for applying is in

mid-July so students should not wait until A level results day if they think they will need to go down this route.

3. Application process

With the exception of medicine and dentistry at public universities candidates have to apply individually to the institution of their choice. This can be done mostly online.

For medicine and dentistry, students must register to take the entrance exam (currently the IMAT) and this happens usually within the month of July. You must start the process at the University website www.universitaly.it, which is, helpfully, only in Italian.

Application deadlines at most public Italian universities are between May and June. Letters of Acceptance will be sent out around August. This letter will also include the dates if the candidate needs to take any exams for additional qualifications.

Germany

1. About the higher education system

Students who wish to study in Germany will first have to choose between “Universities” or “Fachhochschulen” (often called Universities of Applied Sciences in English). The qualifications offered at both types of institution are regarded as being equal in value but they tend to offer very different styles of education. Fachhochschulen in Germany are more practically orientated than universities. Normally the Fachhochschulen route takes four years to complete because students have to undertake internships as an integral part of their degree. Technical or artistic subjects are more likely to be taught at Fachhochschulen than at universities.

Fachhochschulen are more likely to offer teaching in smaller groups whereas universities tend to follow the traditional lecture and tutorial approach to learning. Professors at Fachhochschulen have to have a minimum of 5 years working experience to be able to demonstrate knowledge of real case studies. For some vocational courses, it is necessary to have relevant work experience before you can apply to study there although this is not often a restriction on English-taught courses.

As in the UK, most universities offer a more theory-based approach to learning without internship possibilities. However, this also depends on each university. There are public and private examples of both Universities and Fachhochschulen.

2. Entry requirements

Entry requirements depend on the University/Fachhochschule. However, candidates must have finished their A levels in order to be considered. What grades and subjects a student needs also differs. Yet they should consider that if they want to apply for courses like physics and engineering, they will need specific, relevant A' levels.

While A' levels must be recognised by EU law as sufficient for entry to a German higher education institution, they are not comparable with the German Abitur. The Abitur is a much broader qualification closer to the International Baccalaureate in the subject range that it covers. For this reason, German universities usually insist on seeing a grade for maths at either A' or AS level. Without this, many German universities will regard a British student's education to be incomplete. This can apply even where the subject you wish to study has nothing to do with maths. For some courses, particularly in English literature, even where the full degree is taught entirely in English there may still be a requirement to demonstrate knowledge of the German language (and Latin in this example).

Other Level 3 qualifications are often not accepted for entry to German universities and they can reject some A' level subjects on the grounds that they are unsuitable. Some Universities/Fachhochschulen offer one year preparatory courses, in case a candidate cannot meet the requirements. Moreover, if a student decides to study a course that is only offered in German, they have to undertake a language proficiency test, which is normally offered by the chosen institution.

Private universities in Germany are usually a little more flexible with regard to recognition of British qualifications. However, they will usually still insist that relevant subjects have been taken. Specialist

education institutions such as art schools often have their own entrance procedures that mean the rigid A' level requirements might be waived.

For many subjects there is open entry to university or Fachhochschule meaning that a student only needs to have relevant qualifications to be awarded a place. However, for more popular subjects there are restrictions on entry known as 'Numerus Clausus'. This restriction means that, with some exceptions, universities are free to choose the students they wish to accept based on a variety of criteria which may include predicted grades. Usually there will be an entrance exam that applicants are expected to take in addition to their A' levels. Weaker applicants from the UK might struggle to be offered a place on any course that is subject to 'Numerus Clausus' as this is one of the main reasons German students study abroad.

A number of German universities now offer programmes that start in English but then transition into German. This model allows English speaking students to gain admission to their institutions without speaking German at the time of application. However, we would recommend that students only apply to these programmes if they already have basic German skills because becoming fluent in a language in just one year is certainly not easy.

Entry requirements to German universities can be summarised as follows:

General requirements

- You must have studied three or four different subjects to A level. If you have only studied three A levels you must also present your grade in one AS level. Qualifications in the same subject (maths and further maths, for example) will only count as one subject. General Studies is not counted as one of your A levels.
- The four subjects that you offer at A and AS level must include a language and maths or a natural science. The language does not need to be German but it can be (unless you are a German native speaker in which case it will not be accepted). Please bear in mind that almost every Bachelor degree in Germany is offered in the German language.
- A' levels that are perceived to be less academic are often not accepted eg. design and technology.
- You cannot gain access to a German university with vocational qualifications such as BTECs unless you have completed at least one year at a university in the UK or elsewhere outside Germany.

Subject specific requirements

- For social sciences, law, economics etc, one A level must be in a related subject. Maths A level is a minimum required for economics and social sciences.
- For science, engineering and maths, Maths A level is essential. Also, you will require at least one A level in the sciences (chemistry, physics, biology, computer science)
- For medicine, you need three of the following four subjects at A' level: Maths, Biology, Chemistry, Physics. Your fourth subject can be anything else.

Other factors

- Two AS levels can replace one A level.
- Vocational Certificates of Education will not be taken into consideration although there is some evidence that universities might be more flexible in future.
- You can commence your studies before you receive your A level certificates as long as you have your "Statement of Results" or "Candidate Statement of Provisional Results". Original certificates must be available before the start of the second semester.
- Cambridge Pre-U qualifications are accepted as alternatives to A levels with Principle Subjects compared directly to A levels and Short Courses to AS levels.
- The International Baccalaureate is usually accepted without difficulty unless you have taken Maths Studies. HL Maths is seen as broadly equivalent to A level, SL to AS level. Your choice of 6th subject can have an impact on where you can study.

The guidelines above are adapted and translated from the Anabin website www.anabin.kmk.org. From time to time these can change slightly so if you speak German you might want to refer to them directly.

3. Application process

If a candidate wants to register for a programme at a German University/Fachhochschule, it used to be the case that they would have to organise this individually for each institution of their choice. This is still the case for some universities but international students are often required to submit their documentation to a central body for verification. This organisation is called Uni-Assist.

Students can either start in summer or winter. Please see below the time period, in which candidates can apply. Please note university application deadlines in Germany fluctuate by Bundesland (federal region) and University/Fachhochschule.

For Fachhochschulen

- Summer Semester: generally March to August (for courses begin: 15 March)
- Winter Semester: generally September to February (for courses begin: 15 September)

For Universities

- Summer Semester: generally April to September (for courses begin: 15 April)
- Winter Semester: generally October to March (for courses begin: 15 October)

There are some changes to the application process to courses subject to Numerus Clausus and courses in medicine, veterinary medicine etc. For details on how to apply to these courses please see the Hochschulstart website. This website will only be relevant for students looking to study in German as there are no English-taught courses that currently require use of Hochschulstart.

Some German universities use a centralised admissions system, Uni-Assist, for the processing of international applications. You can find a list of which universities use Uni-Assist [here](#). If your students need to use Uni-Assist [here is a summary of the application process](#).

Ireland

1. About the higher education system

There are seven universities in Ireland. All seven are in the top 650 of QS World University Rankings. There are also 14 Institutes of Technology. All of these institutions are able to award full degrees. In addition to public institutions, you can find a number of private universities in Ireland.

2. Entry requirements

Entry requirements vary from course to course. Students will usually need to achieve specific grades in their A' levels, IB or other qualifications. Irish universities do not make conditional offers; no one receives an offer from an Irish university until they have received their grades. If the UK were ever to adopt a system of Post Qualifications Admissions it would probably resemble the current Irish system.

3. Application process

If a student wishes to apply to an Irish university they must do so through the Central Applications Office. This performs a similar function to UCAS in that it is a centralised application process. It differs in many respects, however. A candidate can apply for up to 10 courses at Irish universities. They can change their mind about the courses they wish to apply for at certain times throughout the year but can never apply to more than 10 courses.

Applicants will not receive conditional offers from Irish universities. Places at university are not awarded until the results of the Leaving Certificate are known. This is usually the same week as A' level results are announced in mid-August.

Places are awarded at Irish universities according to the results of the leaving certificate. A levels and IB Diplomas are awarded points that correspond to equivalent to the Irish Leaving Certificate. However, these points differ from the UCAS tariff. It is quite possible for popular courses in Ireland to require a points total that is only achievable with 4 excellent A levels and with the bonus points that come with having studied maths.

Please check the CAO website www.cao.ie for further details about the application process.

Please contact the individual universities for an indication of the grades that are likely to be required for admission to particular courses. These will never be exact because the precise score required can change according to students' overall performance in the Leaving Cert and demand for places. However, wild changes from year to year are not common.

Denmark

1. About the higher education system

There are eight universities, ten university colleges and nine academies of professional higher education in Denmark. All three types of higher education institution teach some courses in English although the range is limited.

The Danish higher education system is quite different from the British system in that it offers two distinct undergraduate qualifications.

Universities teach three-year Bachelor's degrees in line with the European norm. Academies of Professional Higher Education and University Colleges typically teach 2-year Academy Profession (AP) programmes. Most of these can then be topped up to full bachelor status by further study. The total duration of these bachelor degrees is between 3 and 4.5 years. These are Professional Bachelor's degrees and they differentiate themselves from three-year bachelors in that they always include work experience in order to combine theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

Most bachelor programmes of both kinds give access to postgraduate education.

The Danish University Colleges are quite different from institutions with the same status elsewhere. They perform a similar function to Universities of Applied Sciences in Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland etc. Since 2013 University Colleges have expanded their remit beyond the teaching of vocational subjects to develop applied research in their fields of excellence. These are usually still directly related to particular professions such as business, teacher training, physiotherapy, engineering, applied ICT etc. Previously, research and development, within specific professional areas were undertaken solely by universities. In addition to carrying out applied R&D, the University Colleges must ensure that the new knowledge is transferrable into practice by delivering more research-based teaching.

2. Entry requirements

Completion of secondary education at an advanced level, equivalent to passing the exam at the end of Danish upper secondary school, is the basic requirement for entry to Danish universities and university colleges.

If a candidate has A' levels they should be eligible for entry to a Danish university. However, it is always worth checking directly with the university to which they wish to apply as there are exceptions. Some courses require that certain subjects have been taken to A' level or to a level equivalent with the local requirement.

The precise requirements listed on the Danish Department of Higher Education website are: General Certificate of Education (with an examination in 9 subjects including at least 6 different subjects and at least 3 are A' levels. The 3 A' levels can, alternatively, consist of 2 A' levels + 2 AS levels, 1 A' level + 4 AS levels. BTECs may also be acceptable if they are directly related to the course for which you wish to apply.

For further information please visit: <https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/find-assessments/entry-to-higher-education>

3. Application process

In Denmark, each institution is responsible for its own admissions. There is a central admissions process that will handle the administrative side of the application process but we always advise that candidates let their chosen institutions know that they will be applying. The application deadline for most courses is 15th March.

Each course is subject to a restriction on the number of admissible students and these restrictions on EU students are currently leading to a shrinking in the size of Danish higher education. Chances of getting into a Danish university are lower now than they have been in the recent past, particularly in non-STEM subjects.

For further information please visit <https://www.optagelse.dk/admission/index.html>.

Sweden

1. About the higher education system

In Sweden, there are 14 universities and 11 public university colleges. The country also has three private universities.

All institutions are typically referred to as universities and they all have the ability to award bachelor-level qualifications.

Bachelor's degrees in English offered at Swedish universities tend to be in STEM or business, although Malmö University has a wide range of social sciences degrees. There is very little on offer in creative subjects aside from some niche subjects such as Wood Orientated Furniture Design at the University of Gothenburg.

2. Entry requirements

Completion of secondary education at advanced level, equivalent to passing the exam at the end of Swedish upper secondary school, is the basic requirement for entry to Swedish universities and university colleges.

If a candidate has A' levels they should be eligible for entry to a Swedish university, although each university is free to determine its own entry requirements and they will need to contact each university directly to find out what these are. In some cases, the combination of subjects expected by Swedish universities can be surprising. For example, Lund University' BSc in Geography requires maths, physics, chemistry and biology at A level. Geography is not required.

Admission to all undergraduate education is limited. All study programs and courses have a fixed number of places, which are usually exceeded by the number of applicants. Every university and university college has its own procedure for selecting among eligible applicants. The criteria applied include: grades obtained, results from previous courses, assessment of work samples, interview results, special admission tests and work experience. These criteria vary from institution to institution.

3. Application process

The application window opens around mid-October. Deadlines may vary but typically students need to apply by 15th January for entry in the following September. This deadline is sometimes flexible. Some courses also have a second application window but international students are advised to apply in the first session.

There is a centralised application organisation called University Admissions (www.universityadmissions.se) that is used by all universities so in theory, candidates should apply centrally. However, we often hear of students who have applied outside of this centralised system so it is always worth checking directly with the university to which you are applying.

The application process in Sweden is complicated by the fact that universities do not make conditional offers as they do in the UK. Offers are made either unconditionally or only after school leaving certificate results are announced. As A' level results come out only a matter of days before term starts in Sweden, technically there is no way that British applicants can start university straight after they finish school. Most universities are able to be flexible. Unfortunately, Lund University which has the most to offer British students is not one of them. The situation in Sweden is becoming more accommodating to international students so do check if this is still a problem.

Offers in the first round are usually made in March and you need to confirm by April.

The Netherlands

1. The higher education system

The Dutch higher education system is offered described as being binary and split into two categories: research universities and universities of applied sciences (hogescholen in Dutch). Research universities offer a more academically rigorous education that focuses on specific subjects. Universities of Applied Sciences offer profession-orientated programmes that are designed for students who are looking to enter a particular career upon graduation.

Undergraduate degrees at research universities typically take three years to complete and usually do not include work experience. There are 13 Research Universities in the Netherlands and 12 of them teach bachelor's degrees in the English language. Between them, they now offer around 150 Bachelor's degrees in English. The [University of Groningen](#) has the widest range of English-taught programmes not only in the Netherlands, but also the whole of Europe.

Undergraduate degrees at Universities of Applied Sciences typically take three or four years and will always include a work placement and usually a period of time studying abroad. It is possible therefore to spend up to 18 months of a four year degree in the UK but this is not recommended. There are 41 universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands although they vary in terms of their size and focus. Some are very small and specialise in a particular area such as agriculture, design, theology or teacher training. These smaller, specialised universities may offer one or two courses in English in their area of expertise.

The largest universities of applied sciences typically offer a range of courses in English. One advantage of choosing a Dutch higher education is that the universities usually offer courses in English in areas where they have extensive experience and an excellent reputation within the industry concerned.

In addition to the two main categories of universities in the Netherlands you can also find private universities and university colleges. Private universities typically specialise in particular areas such as hospitality and tourism and charge higher fees than other Dutch universities. A good example in this category is [TIO University of Applied Sciences](#), which provides training exclusively in the business hospitality, event management and tourism.

University colleges are more often affiliated with public universities and specialise in teaching liberal arts degrees following the US model of undergraduate education. University colleges usually charge additional fees and require students to live on campus.

2. Entry requirements

If you are used to the UK system, Dutch entry requirements can appear a little bizarre at first glance because, with very few exceptions (i.e. courses with Numerus Fixus – see explanation below), all students are entitled to a place to study at a Dutch university if they have an appropriate school leaving certificate. For British students, this typically means that the candidate has completed at least 3 A' levels plus 3 GCSEs (A*-C or 9-4) for research universities and 2 AS levels and 4 GCSEs (A*-C

or 9-4) for universities of applied sciences. BTEC Level 3 Extended Diplomas will be considered for courses in the same area at universities of applied sciences although they will not be treated as equivalent to A' levels. BTEC Level 3 qualifications that are only equivalent to one or two A' levels are not recognised at all. Some universities might accept students with 2 A' levels and 2 AS levels in four different subjects but you cannot automatically assume this would be the case.

The reason for this slightly confusing picture lies in the binary nature of Dutch secondary education. Only around 20% of students take the VWO diploma needed for entry to a research university, far lower than the proportion of UK students taking A levels or Highers. This automatically has the effect of limiting the number of students who are eligible to apply to research universities, but not to the extent that it removes all problems. More students take the HAVO which prepares them for entry into a University of Applied Science. VWO students take 13 years to complete their school education, HAVO students require 12 years, hence the requirement for AS levels rather than A levels for Universities of Applied Sciences. It is fair to say that while this might be a literal equivalency, it is not perhaps entirely logical, particularly given the current status of AS levels in UK secondary education.

Dutch universities have recently introduced a process called 'matching'. At the moment this applies mostly to Dutch students although it might be extended to international students in the future. As any student with an appropriate school leaving certificate can apply to most university courses, the university will speak to students informally to see if they are correctly 'matched' to the right course. As a result of this process, a university might recommend that you study somewhere else. This is non-binding but is designed to make sure that students have thought about why it is they want to study a particular subject and whether they are sufficiently motivated to be successful.

It is entirely possible that Dutch entry requirements might change in the next few years as universities seek to become more selective. However, there is also pressure to ensure that this does not remove access to university for all high school graduates.

While Dutch universities cannot yet select fully based on grades, some are starting to use subjects as a filter. It is possible that for certain degree programmes at certain universities, some A levels are not recognised. This is particularly the case at Leiden University at the moment but others might follow.

It is worth remembering that while entry requirements might be lower at Dutch universities, standards are not. It is much more common for students to drop out at the end of the first year because they do not reach the required standard. Please think very seriously about whether the university your student is applying to is the right one for them. Just because the university will make them an offer is not a clear indication of this. The standard question that you might use in the UK - what grades do I need? - may not be the best one to ask. Instead you should think about whether you will be able to cope.

There are Dutch universities suitable for all academic abilities and career objectives but just because a university will let a candidate in doesn't mean it is the right place for them. On the other hand, it does mean that the candidate might be better able to get a world-class education in the Netherlands than in the UK if that option is denied to them here.

3. Application process

[Studielink](#) is the central application organisation for Dutch universities. Applications to Dutch universities should usually be made via Studielink. However, we would always recommend that candidates let the universities they are applying to know that they will be sending in an application. The university may be able to help the candidate because although Studielink is a central application process each university can have slight differences in the information they want to collect from you.

Studielink is not the same as UCAS and it serves a slightly different purpose. Candidates can apply for up to four courses at a time, of which only one or two can be subject to Numerus Fixus. However, applicants can change the courses they wish to apply for at any time before the enrolment deadline. This gives them the flexibility to ensure they actually end up studying where and what they want.

4. Numerus Fixus – programmes with restricted number of places

Numerus Fixus refers to programmes with restricted number of places. Demand for these programmes is extremely high, so selection has become necessary to ensure they are not oversubscribed.

Most of the courses taught in English are not subject to Numerus Fixus. The exceptions include medicine, psychology, international business, international relations and physiotherapy. However, it is to be anticipated that the range of courses that are affected will increase. To reflect this growth, it is now possible for students to apply for two such programmes in the future. It used to be the case that you could only apply for one at a time and this is still true for medicine.

The process by which universities choose their own students is known as “Decentralised Selection” and it is probable that you will come across this description, or “Limited Enrolment”, more often than Numerus Fixus. Decentralised basically means controlled by the university rather than the government.

At the same time that the overall process of selection is changing, the procedures for each individual course are often also changing, so it is very difficult to generalise from one university to the next. It is even possible that different degrees at the same university will have different selection criteria and timetables. As a result, we cannot outline a nationwide policy regarding Numerus Fixus, but we can certainly give you a rough idea of what to expect.

The first thing to note for courses with Decentralised Selection is that the application deadline is likely to be earlier, typically 15th January for the following September. Students applying before the deadline will definitely be considered. Those applying after the deadline will only be considered if there are places remaining. Candidates will have to create an account with Studielink before this date. Once the university has been notified of their application, they will be sent further details of the next steps the candidate need to take, assuming the candidate meets the minimum entry requirements. It is likely that the next step will involve the submission of a motivation letter and a cv, as well as any specific application form for the chosen course.

After completing the necessary paperwork, there will probably be an additional step to the application process. This could be taking part in an assessment day at the university or the completion of an online exam of some sort. It might also include a formal interview. This would probably happen in late

February or March. While it is often not obligatory to attend the assessment day in person unless the candidate is resident in the Netherlands (or occasionally within 300kms of the campus), we would certainly recommend that British students take this assessment day as a perfect opportunity to visit the university if they haven't done so already.

After the assessment day, the university will consider the performance of all candidates in the exam or other activity they have utilised. Students will be ranked numerically based on the overall strength of their application as well as their performance. Students who are ranked up to the limit of places on the course will be made an offer via Studielink, usually in mid-April. This offer must be accepted or declined within two weeks. Students who are ranked just outside the limit of places will effectively be placed on the waiting list and students who are not even close to the limit will now have to consider their alternatives.

The selection process at University Colleges, and for some English-taught courses such as medicine, has largely been run along these lines for many years already (except for the fact you can now apply to two such courses rather than one). These changes will mostly have an impact on students on Dutch-taught degrees in competitive fields.

Universities publish their rules regarding Numerus Fixus and decentralised selection on their websites. These are in Dutch.

Croatia

1. About the higher education system

Croatia is an ideal place for students wishing to enjoy a friendly atmosphere with a fine mixture of European bustle and a relaxed Mediterranean lifestyle. There are seven public universities and 12 polytechnics as well as a growing number of private universities and colleges. There are only a few options in English at this time; students can choose between public universities, which have long-standing reputation in health sciences, and private universities, which provide excellent training in business and tourism.

In the next few years, Croatia could challenge countries such as Bulgaria to become one of the most popular destinations for good British students looking to study [medicine](#), [dentistry](#) and [veterinary medicine](#) abroad. Thanks to its spectacular Adriatic coast, Croatia could also be an attractive choice for [tourism](#) students.

2. Entry requirements

It is difficult to generalise about the entry requirements for Croatia universities as this aspect of the application process varies widely from one university to the next. Most universities are also decentralised meaning that each individual faculty can determine its own admission process, particularly for English-taught degrees.

3. Application process

Students applying to Croatian universities ordinarily have to take the State Matura exam if they intend to study a Bachelor's degree in Croatian. Students gain access based on their performance in this exam when ranked against all other candidates. For a rough idea of the level of the Matura in comparison with British qualifications, this summary from the UCAS website might be of interest.

However, for English-taught Bachelor's degrees, the process is different. Most private universities will accept direct applications from international students. Assessment will be based primarily on previous education. For British students, this will ordinarily mean A' levels. BTEC Level 3 Extended Diplomas may be accepted for some subjects but not for medicine, dentistry and veterinary studies.

If a candidate wishes to apply to study medicine or dentistry in English at a Croatian university, they will have to take an entrance exam. These exams are rarely held in the United Kingdom but are occasionally offered in Germany. This might change as more British and Irish students consider Croatia every year. The entrance exam typically includes questions in biology, chemistry, maths and/or physics. The first exam is usually held in March or April for admission the following October. A second exam might be offered in July if there are still places available.

For veterinary medicine, there is currently no entrance exam. Assessment is based entirely on existing qualifications and work experience. We are able to advise students on their likelihood of success based on their previous education.

About A Star Future

A Star Future was founded in 2006 with the sole aim of encouraging British students to take part in international higher education. Over the last 13 years, the higher education landscape has changed tremendously, particularly in the use of English as the language of instruction in many countries around the world.

As students have started to enquire about a growing range of destinations, our knowledge of different entry processes has increased. We cannot claim to know everything but we usually have a good idea of where to look for answers.

While we work predominantly in the UK, we can also advise students in international schools around the world, particularly those offering a British curriculum or the IB.

Please do feel free to contact us if you would like to know more about our activities in particular and English-taught higher education in general. We aim to visit around 200 UK schools per year and in recent years, have also visited schools in Ireland, Belgium, Spain and the Czech Republic.

Mark Huntington

Managing Director

E: mark@astarfuture.co.uk

Tel: +44 7769 581149