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AIM HIGHER

# Advanced Highers & University Entrance

Information for parents, teachers  
and careers staff



## INTRODUCTION

This information pack is designed for everyone — teachers, parents, careers staff — who is involved in advising school pupils or adults who are considering making an application to a degree course at a Scottish university. It aims to answer some of the most commonly asked questions and to indicate where more information can be accessed. The information pack includes case studies of six students at Scottish universities who have taken up the offer of direct entry into the second year of a degree course.

## HISTORY OF ADVANCED HIGHERS

Advanced Highers (AHs) were introduced into the secondary sixth year ('S6') curriculum in 2001. Their purpose is to allow pupils to take the knowledge they've already gained at Higher to a deeper level. The number of candidate entries for AHs has grown steadily since 2001 — there were around 18,000 in 2006.

AH was designed to be used not only as a qualification leading to further study at university but also, for some students, as an exemption from part of their higher education courses. This was reinforced when AH was placed at level 7 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) — the same level as a Higher National Certificate and the first year of the Scottish degree. You can find information about the SCQF at [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

Higher education institutions welcomed the introduction of AHs. Many offer applicants with AHs advanced standing (ie direct entry to second year) for certain degree programmes.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER: SECOND YEAR ENTRY TO UNIVERSITY

### WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES TO THE STUDENT OF DIRECT SECOND YEAR ENTRY?

- Because the course length is reduced by one year, the overall cost of going to university will also be reduced: a direct entry student will spend less on fees, subsistence, etc, and consequently is likely to graduate with a smaller student loan and other debts than a first year entrant.
- A second year entrant can substitute a gap year for university first year and still enter the workforce at the same age as contemporaries who opted for the full university course. **A well planned and executed gap year can make a CV more attractive to potential employers.**
- A second year entry student can start earning one year earlier than those who completed the first year of the course.
- It can be demotivating for some learners to cover the same ground twice. The first year curriculum of some university courses duplicates the syllabus of corresponding Advanced Highers. Direct second year entry enables the university student to start learning new and stimulating material from the outset of their time at university.
- Some students will simply feel that they have saved a year of their life.

### WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS OF DIRECT SECOND YEAR ENTRY?

- At university, students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning, and this is very different from school. Even on AH courses school pupils receive considerable assistance from teachers. Some young people may find the gap between S6 and second year university study too great.
- For many young people university study coincides with leaving the parental home. Coupling this change with the need to integrate with a socially cohesive group of second year students, most of whom have been together for the first year of the course, may make too many demands on the direct second year entrant.
- Direct second year entrants may miss out on the structures and activities set up by the university to smooth entry into university social and educational life, eg Freshers' Weeks, guided tours round university facilities and 'how to study' courses.

### INFORMATION ON THE CHOICE OF ADVANCED HIGHER SUBJECTS, COURSES AND UNIVERSITIES

Not all universities, and certainly not all courses, permit direct entry to second year. Where AHs are accepted by a university for direct second year entry, a general rule of thumb for the minimum entry requirement is two AHs at A or B grade. (In most cases the candidate will also have a set of very good Higher passes in related subjects.)

In practice, university entrance policies have a degree of flexibility. Direct entry to second year is dealt with in a case-by-case manner in some universities. Other universities demonstrate a more clearly stated commitment to it. School pupils who are interested in direct second year entry should be given help in fifth year to research the universities and courses where it is possible so that they can make the best choice of AH subjects for S6.

### WHICH AH SUBJECTS ARE MOST WIDELY ACCEPTED FOR DIRECT SECOND YEAR ENTRY?

Although any one of the AH subjects may be accepted for a direct second year entry to a particular course, it is clear from discussions with university admissions officers that the most commonly accepted AH subjects lie in the Mathematics, Sciences, Business Studies and Modern Languages areas. Research in 2005 with Scottish universities showed these AH subjects as particularly useful in gaining direct second year entry:

Accounting & Finance	Geography
Administration	German
Applied Mathematics	History
Biology	Italian
Business management	Mathematics
Chemistry	Physics
Computing	Politics
Economics	Russian
English	Spanish
French	

### WHICH COURSES ARE MOST LIKELY TO MAKE OFFERS OF DIRECT SECOND YEAR ENTRY?

There is no general rule here since each university has its own policy. However, there appears to be a tendency for direct second year entry to be most common in:

Biological sciences  
Business studies  
Engineering  
Mathematics  
Modern Languages  
Physical sciences

### WHICH UNIVERSITIES ARE MOST LIKELY TO MAKE DIRECT SECOND YEAR ENTRY OFFERS?

A number of universities clearly publicise direct second year entry with AHs, but only for certain courses.

Most universities will offer direct entry to later years on the basis of additional qualifications. In some universities, AHs will be accepted for direct second year entry, but only on a case-by-case basis.

In specialised institutions, such as the Art, Drama and Music Colleges, direct entry to second year is not considered to be possible because of the nature of the courses.

Research in 2005 found that direct entry to second year was most common at these Scottish universities:

Heriot Watt University  
Queen Margaret University College  
Robert Gordon University  
University of Aberdeen  
University of Abertay  
University of Dundee  
University of Edinburgh  
University of St Andrews  
University of Stirling  
University of Strathclyde

### WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT, APART FROM QUALIFICATIONS?

There are personal characteristics that will be important and are indicators of a successful candidate for direct entry to second year at university.

Because the student will omit the first year of university studies, they will miss any sort of gradual transition from school to university. Success therefore depends on the student being highly motivated and being able to study independently, ie coping without spoon-feeding from teachers.

It will also depend on good social skills. The successful student is likely to display self-confidence and be able to communicate easily with fellow pupils, teachers and others.

### WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION PROCEDURES FOR DIRECT SECOND YEAR ENTRY?

Generally, school pupils who will take AHs in S6 will make university applications on the basis a set of Highers gained in S5. An unconditional acceptance to first year of University will then be issued. If application is made for direct entry to second year, a conditional acceptance will be made dependent on the AH performance sat in sixth year.

Some universities will instigate an offer of direct second year entry to a candidate with good AH passes. But not all do this. So, you should make school pupils aware of the possibility of direct second year entry and the fact that they themselves may need to raise this possibility with their chosen university.

### WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ON DIRECT SECOND YEAR ENTRY?

- The annual publication **Universities Scotland and UCAS Entrance Guide to Higher Education in Scotland** is the most comprehensive information source. For each course at each university, it shows whether direct entry to second year with AHs is permitted. It usually tells you the AH subjects and grades of pass required. For more information log onto the website at [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)
- Information can be obtained from the prospectuses and websites of individual universities. However, information on direct entry to second year of courses is not always featured prominently or in the most logical place.
- Links to the websites of all Scottish universities and higher education institutions are found at [www.universities-scotland.ac.uk](http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk)
- Once a choice of university has made, the applicant should communicate with the admissions officer and clarify the position regarding direct entry.