

Some useful questions...

So, you're thinking of doing a chemical science degree...but which one?

There are a number of things you should think about before making a decision about exactly what and where you want to study. Some of these are listed below. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions – it's just a case of what will suit you best.

Once you have a better idea about what you're looking for, you should ask these questions about your preferred institution and course. The answers will help you make the right decision for *you*.

Some of the questions are things you need to think about and decide for yourself – i.e. which options would you prefer. Others are questions you should ask at university Open Days or should discuss with your teachers or parents or anyone else that can help to give you useful advice.

Degree course options

- What qualifications do I get?
- What are my major choices? – Chemistry or subjects like Colour Chemistry, Polymer Chemistry, Applied Chemistry – or 'chemistry with' subjects like Chemistry with French, Chemistry with Law etc. or 'chemistry and' subjects like Chemistry and Maths?
- Are there opportunities to travel abroad as part of my course?
- What career options will I have when I've completed my degree?
- Should I choose chemistry or a chemical science degree like biochemistry, forensics, materials science, chemical biology etc?
- Will I be able to study other subjects alongside my degree? (Most degree courses allow you to study subsidiary subjects alongside the compulsory content of your main subject in the first year).

What qualifications do I need?

- What are the entry requirements for the course? Am I likely to meet them?
- Are my Year 12 and 13 subjects the ones needed?
- What are the average points scores of people accepted on the course?
- Might a foundation year course be suitable for me if I don't expect to meet the requirements for the standard course I'd like to do?
- Can I switch degree mid-course?
- What is the percentage drop-out rate?

How will I fit in?

- Where will I feel most comfortable? Near home? On a campus? In a city?
- What are the calibre and background of other students on the course?
- Are there many international students at the university?
- What about the location of the University?
- What about accommodation? What types are there?

- What are the facilities like? Are they campus or non-campus?
- Are the accommodation facilities catered or self-catering?

WHAT IS IT LIKE STUDYING A CHEMICAL SCIENCE AT UNIVERSITY?

1 What does a “typical” first year undergraduate programme look like?

- What is the chemistry curriculum in the first year?
- What type of activities will I do – lab work, lectures, tutorials, other?
- How many students will be in a lecture, tutorial etc?
- What will be my total contact time with lecturers/tutors per week?
- How much practical work will I do?
- How many sessions of each type (lectures, tutorials, lab work) will I have?
- How long are they?
- What is a typical student week like?

2 General teaching arrangements

- What is the student : lecturer/tutor ratio?
- Is the style of teaching different to that in schools and colleges?
 - How is it different?
 - What is a “lecture”?
 - What is a “seminar”?
 - What is a “tutorial”?
- Can I get help if I find the work difficult?
- Will the course take into account my study background and experience?
- What mentoring or support systems are there?
- Will I get help with essay writing, study skills, maths?

3 Practical work in the laboratory

- Will I work as an individual, in pairs or as part of a bigger group?
- What kind of experiments will I do in the first year?
- Is there any overlap with school experiments?
- Will I work at my own pace or to a fixed schedule?
- Will I get any help with equipment that I have not used before?
- How do the experiments fit into the lecture course?
- What is the typical student:demonstrator ratio in the lab?

4 Non–contact time

- How much work will I be directed to do each week (in hours)?
- How much other work will I be expected to do?
- Do I need to make my own notes in lectures and at home?
- Will I be expected to use the library?
- Will I be expected to use ICT?
- What are the computer facilities like?

5 Assessment

- Is assessment continuous or do I have exams?
- How is assessment distributed through the course?

- If there are exams, when are they?
- Is there a practical exam?
- What happens if I fail an exam?
- Will I get thrown out for failing a first year exam?
- What assessment contributes to my degree and when?
- How many assignments/pieces of written work are there?

6 How much does it cost?

- What expenses will I have? Books, lab coat, safety glasses, practical work, deposit, other costs?
- How much will it cost me in accommodation and tuition fees?
- When will I have to pay?
- Will I get financial support?
- What are access funds? Who qualifies?
- Are there any bursaries or scholarships available?

CAREER CHOICES

- Is my choice relevant or acceptable as training for my future career?
- What do students typically do after this degree course?
- What percentage of graduates get a job on leaving university?
- When do I have to start making employment decisions?
- What help will I get? Who will it be from?
- How many people complete a chemical science degree and how good are their results?
- How many go on to gain an MSc and/or PhD?
- Is the course designed to produce researchers, industrial chemists or something else?

Once you've got an idea about what you'd like to do, talk to your parents, teachers and university admission tutors about any questions you have. Also...

- Check out the UCAS (www.ucas.com) and individual university websites.
- Go to some university open days – these are a great way to get answers to lots of questions and to find out about the place you'll be living and studying in for the next few years. See www.opendays.com for open day dates and more advice on how to get the most out of them.

Remember the more information you can get the better. It will help you to make the right decision for you.