

What if I want to leave my course early?

Maybe you have got to university but you find yourself wondering:

- Did I choose the right course?
- Am I at the right university?
- Can I afford to do this?
- Am I bright enough?
- What will the course lead to at the end?

If questions like this cross your mind and you are tempted to leave, you can at least take comfort from the fact you're not alone. Every year around 8% of students in the Southeast decide to leave the course they have started. And in some parts of Britain it is more like 20%.

Many things may contribute to this dilemma:

- Away from school and the influence of teachers, parents and friends you may have realised your choice was based on other people's opinions rather than your own.
- Taking a gap year may have given you new ideas.
- If you are a mature student, perhaps with a mortgage to pay and family to care for, you may have discovered that juggling the demands on your time and finance is harder than you imagined.
- Perhaps the content of the course, the learning style, even the final qualification are not quite what you expected
- Once Fresher's Week is over, the hard grind may have revealed that you need more skills. This could be anything from broad study skills to more Maths or IT or English.
- Maybe you need to do a part-time job to have enough cash, but find you can't fit your studies and student life into the remaining available time.

Any of these factors could be leaving you feeling reluctant to take on another 3 years of study.

So what should you do?

First, don't be rash and withdraw in a hurry, but equally don't leave it too late. The sooner you address the problem the easier it should be to find a solution.

There are people available to talk through your situation with you. So identify what the main problem is and arrange to speak to the most relevant person, whether that is academic staff, counsellors, student services or a careers adviser.

- **If the problem is course related**, talk to students in a higher year and to your tutor. The course may have a general first year followed by a choice of modules that you will find more interesting. If you need some learning support or study skills your tutor should be able to help you.

- **If you are having doubts about the outcome of the course**, look at the course destination lists showing where previous students have found employment. You could also visit the Careers Centre to explore other ways of using the degree.
- **If you are finding it hard to survive financially**, speak to Student Welfare to check whether you qualify for any further help. Explore the part time job vacancies advertised in the university and make use of the Student Union.

What are the financial implications of leaving?

This depends on who is paying for your study:

If you have a Tuition Fee Loan from the Student Loan Company:

- and you leave within the first month, the university will not charge
- from then until 1st December the university will calculate your attendance for which the Student Loan Company cannot pay the fee.
- from the 1st December, if you have a tuition fee loan from the Student Loan Company and you have notified the University Registry of your loan, the SLC will cover the cost. But it will be seen as a normal student loan requiring repayment by instalments once you are earning £15,000 or more per annum.

If you are making independent payment directly to the university:

- within the first month the university will not charge
- after 4 weeks the Registry will calculate the pro rata cost

If fees are paid by the Local Authority:

- no repayment is necessary

Note:

Cancelling a course and the attached funding is likely to mean that in any future application you will be considered to have had one year's support already.

Other Bursaries and awards will have their own rules about repayment. This includes the NHS Bursaries for medical courses.

Other implications of withdrawing from a course:

Accommodation:

- University Halls of Residence make an agreement with the student for a full academic year. You would only be released from this if another student can be found to take your place. This is easier to arrange within the first term.
- Rented accommodation. Look at the tenancy agreement to see how much notice you need to give the landlord. If you were sharing, your fellow students may wish you to find a substitute. Once you cease to be a student you are liable to pay Council Tax.
- Ask the University Accommodation Service for advice.

Career:

If you're changing course or university you will probably have career ideas. But if you are reconsidering your options you may want to use the information in the Careers Centre and possibly have a one-to-one session with an adviser

Other:

There will be implications for bank and credit cards, rail cards and possibly UK residency if you are from overseas

Important!

If you have been on the course long enough to sit exams or hand in assessed pieces of work, make sure you ask for a transcript of your credits. This will be important for you should you apply to any university in the future or if you want to apply in the future for 'Accreditation of Prior Learning'.

A useful booklet called: "New Directions: Changing or Leaving your Course" is available from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) at www.agcas.org.uk