



How I got into university in England as an expat

After dropping out of a communications degree in the Netherlands, I decided to dive into the deep end and follow my crazy dream of studying English literature in England. Studying abroad is getting more common, but usually this is either as part of an exchange program, an internship abroad or for no longer than one academic year. I wanted to pursue my full degree abroad, like one of the locals. Maybe a bit crazy but definitely not impossible. In the summer of 2018, I graduated with a 2:1 and this crazy dream came true. Today, I share my journey into higher education in the UK.

A-Levels or no A-Levels?

Deciding I wanted to study in England was easier said than done. The school systems in the Netherlands and England are very different. The Netherlands don't have A-levels, which UK universities ask for when applying. I graduated high school with pretty good grades and because I got into my communications degree in the Netherlands, I didn't think it was going to be a problem. Unfortunately, after the admission department looked at my diplomas, I was very disappointed to find out they were not equivalent to A-levels. My

five university choices declined my application and I was recommended to complete said A-levels at college in the UK before reapplying.

A-level usually take two years to complete, and I wasn't very keen on adding another two years to my plan. Being almost 19 at the time, I also didn't want to join a group of 16-year-olds students who just started their A-levels. After doing the necessary online research, I came across the 'Access to Higher Education' (HE) diploma, a course designed for mature students who want to get back into education. Anyone over 19 can apply and gain the diploma in one year, it seemed like the perfect alternative for me.

Access to Higher Education

Enrolling onto an Access to HE course came with some struggles, too. I applied to more than 10 different colleges in the Manchester and Liverpool area, most of which didn't reply to my application. A few replied saying that a non-native English speaker would not be able to keep up with the fast pace of the course. In the end, one college decided to give me a chance.

The Access to HE course was indeed in-

tense. It was basically fitting two years' worth of A-level material into one. At any point during that first year in the UK, I was working on three separate assignments, completing 18 in total. It was hard work but it did an amazing job preparing me for university. It also didn't feel like hard work because I was doing something I was super passionate about. It just felt right.

The course also helped me with my university application. From start to finish, my tutors made sure I was meeting the application deadlines. After securing my diploma, I received an unconditional offer from my dream course – English and Creative Writing – at Manchester Metropolitan University. In September, after finishing college, I started my degree.

Tips for getting into university in England as an expat:

- First, you have to decide what course you want to do and what universities would be in your top five. After that, you should contact the university and see what the requirements are for foreign students. Most universities are pleased to have foreign students on their courses and are able to see if your certifi-



Manchester Metropolitan University www2.mmu.ac.uk

cates and diplomas match the equivalent of A-levels. If you are able to go to university in your home country, you are almost always able to do this in England, too. You might have to get a certificate to prove your level of English but you can get those in your home country.

- If your preferred university doesn't accept your diplomas, you can always look for an Access to HE course. It can be tricky to get into but if you start applying on time (and not a few months before you're planning to move, like me) you should be fine. There are also options to get the equivalent to A-levels in your home country that will help you get into university in the UK straight away, but make sure to check these with the university.
- Applying for English universities is done via UCAS, which I experienced as a very easy and accessible website. It's pretty straightforward but if you have any questions you can get on the help chat with UCAS.

- One year at English universities usually costs £9,250 in tuition fees. As I was a European student, I was able to get a loan for my tuition fees from the English government. I didn't get a maintenance loan, so with a part-time job on the side I was able to pay for rent, food, etc. Once I start earning over a certain threshold, I start paying off my student loan. You might also be able to get some sort of financial help or loans from your home country so make sure to double check that.

Even though I was disappointed about not getting into university straight away, the Access to HE course made a world of difference for me. It really prepared me for university in a way that made the next three years a lot easier. It helped me to get used to the English standard in essays and exercised me to study in my second language. I feel really grateful for the opportunities I had and being able to get into my dream course. Living and studying abroad can be difficult but it has been the best decision I've ever made! It's helped me to grow and do what I love doing the most.



Nele van Hout is a travel and lifestyle blogger sharing free travel guides and expat tips. Follow her adventures at www.thenavigatio.com