



Wrong Course? 2007 – 2008:

False Starts & Transfers

NB: The information in this leaflet applies to full-time undergraduates on their first course. Anyone else, including students repeating a part of their course or those studying or wishing to study a part time, should seek advice from the Student Advice Centre.

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1 THE PROBLEM

First-time students often feel unhappy at the beginning of their studies, and many suspect that they have made the wrong choice of course.

There can however be other reasons for this feeling which have nothing to do with your course as such but rather with insecurity resulting from a new environment, with homesickness, loneliness, separation from partner, etc. Or it may be the unaccustomed work load or pattern of study at university that is causing anxiety, or a feeling that the new work is too easy, difficult, repetitive etc. Perhaps even you cannot pinpoint the true source of your unease. If you experience any of these feelings or uncertainties talk things over with your **Personal Tutor**, with **on fellow students on your course**, and/or with students in later years. This will give you some idea of how others feel/felt and whether things are likely to get better with time. It would also be wise to consult the **Student Counselling Service**, the **Careers Advisory Service** and/or the **Student Advice Centre**, who singly or together may help you unravel the tangle of feeling that students often have to contend with.

If you feel that you need help with **Study Skills** call at the enquiry desk in the **Robinson Library** and ask what aids are available (e.g. packages on time management, IT skills, targets setting, communication skills etc. Explore the Library's website at www.ncl.ac.uk/library under information

skills - student skills). Request assistance with these if you are not confident how to use them.

If you believe nevertheless that you could indeed be on the wrong course, then read on, bearing in mind that it could be misguided to abandon or change course if the course itself is not the real problem.

2 YOUR ACADEMIC OPTIONS

One of the first places you should contact is the **Careers Service** (2nd floor Armstrong Building) not only to make use of their information and resources but also to talk to an adviser. You don't need an appointment, just go. Ask them for a copy of their **Changing Directions Workbook**. This will help you consider your options in a completely impartial way. The **Careers Service** website is useful too - www.careers@ncl.ac.uk

a) Continuing your present course:

When Students first raise doubts about their choice of course they are often advised to 'stick it out' or 'give it a fair try'. This may be sensible advice if you are unsure about what you really want to do: your initial unease may be due to only temporary factors such as those mentioned in section 1 and you may indeed get to like your course.

However, if you are experiencing stronger negative emotions about your course, such as feeling that you are trapped in a groove, going in a totally wrong direction, or living out your parent's or teacher's or school careers adviser's life rather than your own, then continuing against your own inclinations could result in demotivation or depression and possibly in financial complications.

b) Withdrawing:

If at any point you become convinced that the initial course you have enrolled on is the wrong one for you, yet **you are still unsure as to where your true vocation lies**, you have the option of withdrawing. Subject to Section 3 this may be seen as a 'false start'.

c) Transferring Courses:

If you have come across some other subject that attracts you more, perhaps one that your school or sixth-form college did not offer (such as Accountancy, Agriculture, Anthropology, Archaeology or Architecture just to mention the 'A!'), then during the very early stages of the first term you may be able to arrange a transfer straight onto the other course, either in the same department/university or elsewhere. However, as time passes your chances of doing this diminish rapidly and you may have to settle for a transfer to the start of your preferred course in September of the next academic year, in which case you would normally leave your present course now - see Section 3.

The Undergraduate Prospectus (available from the **Registrar's Office**) lists all the courses available at this University and the entry requirements for each. Prospectuses of other UK Universities can be accessed from **UCAS** website www.ucas.com/instit/index.htm which gives hotlinks to their homepages.

d) To arrange a Transfer:

Discuss it with your **present Tutor** and obtain the necessary **Departmental Approval** "on educational grounds". However, you may wish to leave this until you have first contacted the **Admissions Tutor** or **Degree Program Director** of the course you want to transfer to. If you don't get accepted this year try for a written unconditional offer for next year. If you don't get such an offer you should **re-apply through UCAS** and ask your LEA to extend the deadline for arranging your transfer, if necessary, pending the outcome. You should try to get your application to UCAS in, well ahead of the January deadline for new applicants. Even if you do get a written Offer, the new institution will normally require you to apply again through UCAS. In that case it will be a mere formality and you should only enter the details of your newly-chosen university and the particular course agreed.

3 PROTECTING YOUR SUPPORT RIGHTS

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT ANYONE THINKING OF CHANGING COURSE SHOULD SEEK UP-TO-DATE ADVICE BEFORE ACTING.

The information in this section refers to the situation in **England** and **Wales**; students from **Scotland** and **Northern Ireland** may find the regulation affecting them differ in some respects. Consult the SAC.

If you began your course before September 1998, or take that month as a 'gap-year' student or similar under the old Regulations and you wish to change course you should consult an adviser at the Student Advice Centre as to your options and their consequences.

The guidance in this leaflet may not apply to you.

a) Previous Study: Withdraw or Transfer?

If you choose to withdraw without first arranging a transfer this 'false start' previous study will be taken into account when your future eligibility for funding is considered. You will still be eligible to transfer from your new course (subject to the usual rules) if it too is not right for you.

If you get the required consent/recommendation for a transfer 'on educational grounds' from both your present and the new academic institution before the deadline date you will be eligible subject to the usual criteria and means-testing, for funding support for the full length of your new course.

b) Deadlines

You must have written permission for your intended transfer 'on educational grounds' from both your present and prospective departments **before the first day of the second year of your original course**. **If you miss/ed your deadline you will probably have to self-fund** your new course seek advice from the SAC if this happens.

If you have registered for an integral Foundation + Bachelor's Course it is your Foundation year that counts as the first year of study for the above purpose.

c) Procedures:

If you leave your current course either because you have arranged a transfer to a new course starting next year or because you have made a false start, you should always inform your **Tutor**, your **Degree Programme Director**, the **University Student Progress Section**, your **LEA** and the **Student Loans Company** (if you applied for or received a loan). Failure to do any of these could cause you problems later.

However you should also notify them of any important decision by Recorded Delivery letter and keep the posting receipt for future reference.

Beware too of believing any information/promises you think they have given you without first asking for confirmation in writing.

4 IMMEDIATE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

a) Fees:

If you have already paid your own fees, or part of them, you may be entitled to a partial refund, depending on the date you leave your course. This University policy is that up to 6 weeks there is no charge, after 6 weeks and up until end of course fees are charged pro-rata with fee loan money being returned to the Student Loan Company.

b) Student Loan:

Repayments on any loan you have received will normally start in the April after you either finish or leave your course. If you will be stating another course next year explain this to the Student Loan Company and ask them to (i) defer your payments and (ii) add your previous/current loan debt to what you will borrow during your new course. Failure to do so will result in the student loan company seeking repayment the following April. If this leads to unpaid repayments demands appearing on your Student Loan Account, you will not be allowed any further loan instalments until the 'debt' is cleared.

Also note that if you transfer to a course at a London institution, or near your home town, and you will be living at home, this will have implications for the level of loan you are entitled to.

c) Benefits:

When you complete or leave your course you cease to be treated as a student and can therefore no longer be disqualified as such from claiming benefits. However, if at the same time you give up a part-time job you could render yourself open to benefit 'sanction' (i.e. temporary loss of or reduction in any benefit claim). Ask us for more information.

d) Bank Overdraft:

You should explain your situation and future intentions to your bank and work out with them a plan for repayment, if appropriate.

e) Rent:

If you live in **Privately Rented Accommodation** and intend to leave your current house remember that you may still have legal obligations to your landlord. If you cannot find a replacement tenant you and your fellow tenants could have a problem. Consult the SAC.

If you are in **University Accommodation**, you will probably be held liable for the full rent for the rest of the term (i.e. your billing period).

f) Council Tax:

If you are living in a privately-rented house you may attract Council Tax to the household as soon as you cease to be a full-time student. It is too complicated to explain here - see our "Council Tax" leaflet on our website and/or seek advice from the Student Advice Centre.

g) Remember to hand back your University Smartcard if you are withdrawing.

If you don't and someone else uses it, you could be held responsible, e.g. for books taken from the library.

We strongly recommend that you discuss your options with an adviser as soon as possible.

Details of Student Support for 2007-2008 are contained in a DFES booklet obtainable from the Student Advice Centre or on the website www.dfes.gov.uk "Financial Support for Higher Education Student Guide 2007/2008".

You can access our Website at

www.unionsociety.co.uk/sac

Student Advice Centre

Union Society

Kings Walk

Newcastle University

Tel: 0191 239 3979

Email: sac.reception@ncl.ac.uk

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The SAC is a member of Advice UK
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