

Routes into the Biosciences: alternatives to a degree

Alternative options are available for students who wish to pursue a career in the biosciences but are unsure if a degree is right for them.

Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship allows you to gain practical training in a job and earn a salary whilst studying towards a nationally recognised qualification. A range of apprenticeships are available in the biosciences. Options include conservation, the pharmaceutical industry and veterinary nursing.

There are two different levels of apprenticeship you can apply for as an alternative to a degree. These can take up to five years to complete¹:

Apprenticeship level	Equivalent educational level
Higher	Foundation degree and above
Degree	Bachelor's or master's degree

To apply for an apprenticeship, you need to be 16 years old or over and not in full-time education. There are additional specific entry requirements to each apprenticeship.

Examples of qualifications you can work on during your apprenticeship include²:

- BTEC diploma
- Foundation degree
- Higher National Certificate Higher National Diploma
- National Vocational Qualification at Level 4

After an apprenticeship you may be offered a permanent position within the company for which you completed your apprenticeship. You also have the choice to look for work at another employer or apply for higher education.

Further information on apprenticeships can be found online at:

[Skills Funding Agency](#) for England

[Careers Wales](#) for Wales

[Skills to Succeed](#) for Northern Ireland

[Skills Development Scotland](#) for Scotland

¹ National Apprenticeship Service (2016). *A guide to apprenticeships*.

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/570436/A_Guide_to_Apprenticeship_Factsheet.pdf

² Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (2016). *Post-16 apprenticeships*.

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/16-18-choices/search-and-apply/post-16-apprenticeships>

National Vocational Qualifications

A National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is a work-based qualification, which allows you to develop practical skills to do a particular job. In Scotland, these are called Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

NVQs at levels 4-6 are equivalent to a degree. You are assessed by showing your ability in the workplace³; an assessor will observe your work to see if you can perform necessary tasks and you will also need to submit a portfolio as evidence of the work you have done. Your performance is measured against national standards.

NVQs can have specific entry requirements, but there is no age limit to applying for a course. They can be completed by school and college students, full-time or part-time employees. There is also generally no time limit in which you need to complete a NVQ, but certain providers can have a cut-off date.

You can study a NVQ as a standalone qualification or as part of an apprenticeship.

To find a course online, visit:

[National Careers Service](#) for England

[Careers Wales](#) for Wales

[nidirect](#) for Northern Ireland

[Scottish Qualifications Authority](#) for Scotland

Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are work-related higher education qualifications. Both provide the skills and knowledge required for particular fields of work including agriculture and sport sciences.

Each HNC and HND will have its own specific entry requirements. Both types of qualification are assessed through assignments, practical tasks and projects⁴.

HNCs take one year to complete full-time or two years part-time. HNDs take two years to complete full-time or three years part-time.

HNCs are equivalent to the first year of a university Bachelor degree, while HNDs are equivalent to the second year of a degree. Therefore, after completion, you may wish to apply for further education and your HNC could allow you entry into the second year of a degree, while a HND could allow entry into the second/third year. The skills you develop during your HNC or HND can also lead straight to a career.

To find a course and apply online, visit [UCAS](#).

³ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (2016). NVQs.

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/16-18-choices/search-and-apply/qualifications-you-can-take/nvqs>

⁴ Prospects (2016). *Guide to qualifications*.

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/applying-for-university/choosing-a-course/guide-to-qualifications>