TOP 20 UK UNIVERSITIES

The complete guide to the highest ranking universities in The United Kingdom
Introduction

If you’ve spent any time at all exploring Universities, you already know that the UK is home to many of the top universities on the planet. When it comes to choosing the one that’s right for you, however, the task can quickly become quite daunting. This one’s got the top instructors, the cosiest accommodations, and the best prospects for future employment, but this other one’s got the top instructors, the cosiest accommodations, and the best prospects for future employment. Or you could go with the one with the top instructors well, you see the predicament. The informational materials provided by the Universities themselves all paint a similar rosy picture. How can you discover what’s really the best fit for you?

What follows is our own contribution to your university search toolkit. We’ve explored a variety of reputable university rankings, so you don’t have to. Combining league tables from such sources as The Complete University Guide, the Times, and the Guardian, we’ve put together a list of the top 20 UK contributions to the world of higher education. Whatever your top criteria, from academic prestige to diversity of the student body to the most outrageous parties, we’ll break down the ups and downs of each to give you a better picture of how each differs from the others so you can find just the right fit for you.

Readers should note, by the way, that our listings are not ranked from best to worse. Instead, we’ve opted to present an informational unordered list. All of the universities listed here are excellent choices. It’s the details and our own priorities that will make one of them your ideal academic home.

Top 20 UK Universities

- UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
- UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
- UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS
- DURHAM UNIVERSITY
- IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON
- UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON
- UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
- LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
- UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
- LANCASTER UNIVERSITY
- Loughborough University
- University of Bath
- University of Bristol
- University of Surrey
- University of East Anglia UEA
- University of Birmingham
- University of York
- University of Sussex
- University of Southampton
- University of Nottingham
Cambridge

LOCATION
Cambridge brings together the old and new worlds with its medieval local atmosphere and its placement near the Silicon Fen, home to a major UK technology hub. The population of Cambridge is approximately 120,000, a fifth of which are students of either Cambridge or Anglia Ruskin University, which can make for an interesting smaller town living encased by a larger university campus.

SOCIAL
The Cambridge focus, without a doubt, is on academics, not on play. That said, the play opportunities that do exist tend to be pursued with the same single-minded zeal as are the studies. They also tend toward the quirky, to say the least. Student life doesn’t generally stray from campus, but there are societies for almost everything, from the mainstream to the decidedly not.

LEARNING
The University of Cambridge is known across the globe for top-flight education, but it’s not for the casual student. If you’re not willing to devote every moment to your studies, look elsewhere. The fact that it’s divided into colleges that are semi-autonomous makes for a more personalized learning experience as well as a more small-school atmosphere, though this can be a drawback if you wish to fade into the background. It should be noted that, despite the fact that classifications are supposedly standardized, obtaining a First from Cambridge is somewhat more difficult than it would be elsewhere. If you’re not devoted single-mindedly to study, it may be more advantageous to attend another university where one might more easily obtain a better degree.

LIVING
Accommodations are available in college for most students. Private letting is available, but considerably more expensive. Room quality varies from old and musty to newer accommodations with more in the way of comfort and modern conveniences. Rents for a shared bathroom range from £90-120. En suite accommodations go for £100-140. Lets are generally 30 weeks, so you’ll move in and out for each term (but you won’t be paying for time away).

EMPLOYMENT
Employment prospects upon graduation are exceptional.

THE REST OF THE STORY
Cambridge does not provide an introduction to independent adult life so much as other universities might. Term-time jobs are prohibited by most colleges and cleaners and catering are the norm for most rooms and halls. Like Oxford, the student experience here is unlike that of virtually any other university. It will either suit you very well indeed, or not at all.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 616 (roughly equivalent to 4 A*s at A-level and an A at AS-level)
- Number of undergraduates: 12,000
- Established: c. 1209

SUMMARY
For those properly suited to the Cambridge ethos, character, and academic approach, the educational experience there is quite simply remarkable. Of course the academic standards are exceptional, the medieval charm is undeniable, and the quirky traditions never end. You probably know already if this is the place you want to be.

www.cam.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if, behind your back, friends and family have been calling you “academically eccentric” for years.
Like Cambridge, Oxford boasts two universities. Unlike Cambridge, though, Oxford feels much less like a small town encased in a huge campus. It features an impressive variety of architecture that nonetheless exists in unique harmony. The population is approximately 150,000, a bit larger than Cambridge, but anonymity within its colleges is equally unlikely. Unlike Cambridge, however, Oxford competes with London as a tremendously expensive place to live.

### FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 580 (roughly equivalent to 4 A*s at A-level)
- Number of undergraduates: 12,000
- Established: Unknown; evidence of teaching since 1096

### SUMMARY
Like Cambridge, Oxford is intensely academic as well as happily eccentric. Oxford, however, has tended to be more of a route toward political office than has Cambridge. There is evidence of teaching there as early as 1096, and it grew rapidly when Henry II banned English students from the University of Paris.

www.ox.ac.uk

Like Cambridge, Oxford is the place to go for ancient, quirky, and fascinating traditions. Things like required sub fusc dress while sitting exams make it readily apparent that you’re attending the UK’s oldest university. Like Cambridge, Oxford handles many of the necessary activities of independent living, leaving more time for study, but perhaps making for a steeper learning curve upon graduation into “real life.”
St. Andrews

› LEARNING
St. Andrews has seen an influx of applications in recent years due to the “Prince William Effect” (it was here that he met Kate Middleton). Some believe that its position on the league table is somewhat higher than warranted as a result. This application influx has led to a more selective admissions process, though its typical offer (AAB to AAA) is somewhat low in comparison to its neighbors on the league table.

› LOCATION
The population of St. Andrews is only 20,000, and students comprise a third of that number. With such a small population, it’s no surprise that the University and the town are somewhat intertwined. If anonymity is unlikely at Cambridge or Oxford, it’s impossible at St. Andrews. The area boasts brilliant scenery, but it is somewhat isolated (an hour and a half to Edinburgh). If you’re a fan of cooler climes, you’ll enjoy its average year-round high temperatures of 20 degrees.

› SOCIAL
Thanks to the size and isolated location, St. Andrews has earned the affectionate nickname of “the Bubble.” St. Andrews is comprised of a robustly international student body with a significant percentage of both private school students and Americans. Its many societies and clubs are large and enthusiastically active. If you like the idea of everyone knowing your name as you walk down the street, St. Andrews is the place for you.

› LIVING
The expected variety of university accommodations are available at St. Andrews at prices ranging from £100-250 weekly. Accommodations are guaranteed for first year students. Students in later years often choose to live in the surrounding area rather than St. Andrews itself, which tends to make for much cheaper rents.

› EMPLOYMENT
St. Andrews is well-respected internationally, which makes for a valuable degree the world round. Work experience is not so easy to come by here as it is in larger, less isolated locations, though. As a result, though job prospects are good, they are a bit lower than one might expect based upon its position on the league table.

› THE REST OF THE STORY
As the third oldest university in the English-speaking world, St. Andrews also has its share of quirky traditions, from the red academic gown to the raisin weekend shaving foam fight to the May dip, which involves a dawn plunge into the frigid North Sea. St. Andrews also has a tradition of “academic families,” in which first year students are “adopted” and mentored by older students. Perhaps this focus on “family” is to blame for the surprisingly high percentage of eventual marriages between St. Andrews students.

FACTS & FIGURES
• Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 523 (equivalent to 2 A*s and 2 As at A-level)
• Number of undergraduates: 6,000
• Established: 1410

SUMMARY
The oldest of the four ancient universities of Scotland, and the third oldest in the English-speaking world, St. Andrews certainly has much to recommend it other than the golf course. St. Andrews, of course, boasts an impressive list of alumni, but more importantly of late, it has become known as the fateful meeting place of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

www.st-andrews.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here for top notch education on a variety of fronts, or if you’re looking to meet your Prince/ss.

www.st-andrews.ac.uk
Durham

» LEARNING
Highly ranked for the quality of its teaching, Durham is quite highly rated academically. It also has the reputation, however, as the landing place for rejects from Oxbridge, though its entrance requirements are only slightly lower.

» LOCATION
Durham is situated on the side of a steep hill, and, like St. Andrews, its high temperature hovers around 20 degrees year-round. It feels even smaller than its population of around 87,000. It was founded in 1832 (claiming to be the third oldest of England’s universities), but it’s comprised of much older, architecturally beautiful buildings. With the famous nightlife of Newcastle a mere 10-minute train ride away, though, you won’t feel nearly so isolated as you would attending St. Andrews. It’s important to note that some of Durham’s courses reside in Stockton at their Queen’s Campus (though most are at Durham). You’d do well to verify the location of your course ahead of time so as to avoid any unpleasant surprises.

» SOCIAL
The student experience at Durham is often said to be like Oxbridge, but more so, because of its high percentage of Oxbridge rejects. It features a wide range of, shall we say, eccentric societies, possibly making it seem at times to also be the preferred second choice for rejects from Hogwarts. Its nightclubs are notoriously bad (though the pubs are not), but with Newcastle only 10 minutes away, more quality nightlife options abound.

» LIVING
First-year undergraduates can count on guaranteed accommodations, and many students remain in college through third year. Most rooms are fully catered for 29 out of 39 weeks at a cost of £161/week (£115 non-catered). You may have a roommate for first year in some colleges.

» EMPLOYMENT
Six months after graduating Durham, 86% of students find themselves employed. Durham also has a very well-regarded careers service.

» THE REST OF THE STORY
Like St. Andrews and other low-population area universities, Durham is a place where everyone knows your name. In fact it’s known to have an atmosphere that’s decidedly familial, which you’ll find either comforting or off-putting.

FACTS & FIGURES
• Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 527 (roughly equivalent to 2 A*s and 2 As at A-level)
• Number of undergraduates: 11,500
• Established: 1832

SUMMARY
With a reputation leaning more toward teaching than to research, Durham has an undeniable academic reputation, but has become known somewhat as the crashing ground for high-flying Oxbridge applicants who didn’t quite make the grade. Its cozy, familial atmosphere can be either comforting or off-putting depending upon your temperament.

www.dur.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if the term “extended family” doesn’t send you into paroxysms of anxiety.
Imperial College London

› LEARNING
Imperial College’s courses have a limited focus of a scientific nature. The workload is famously high, and the pressure aggressively high. If you’re not prepared for an all-consuming academic experience, it’s probably not for you. Perhaps this is why its drop-out rate tends to be comparatively high.

› LOCATION
As a London university, Imperial College offers a stark alternative to more remote alternatives like St. Andrews or Durham. Prices are high and people are plentiful, with its population of 10 million plus. Far from everybody knowing your name, you’re not likely to meet any familiar faces on the street here. Most of Imperial College is situated in the reasonably centralized, safe, upmarket area of South Kensington. Students will certainly feel a part of the city life, though you should plan on a commute if you’re on a budget.

› SOCIAL
Imperial is not known for an abundance of leisure time. The workload is such that you’re not likely to socialise with anyone outside your course or housemates, and even then “socialising” likely involves a study group. For those few times when socialisation is possible, the best of London clubbing can be found right next door, and female students looking for an increased dating pool will certainly appreciate a student body comprised of 64 men for every 34 women.

› LIVING
Imperial’s students rate its accommodations highly, though we’re still talking about university accommodations, which are generally not known to rise far above the level of Victorian prison cell. Weekly rents mostly hover near the £130 level, but can go as low as £59 (with two roommates) or as high as £253. How much of a commute you should count on will vary greatly.

› EMPLOYMENT
Its London location is an undeniable asset for Imperial, and employment prospects for those who graduate rise even higher than those at Cambridge. 89% of Imperial graduates can expect to be employed six months after completing their course. The aforementioned back-breaking workload, however, generally precludes any employment in term.

› THE REST OF THE STORY
Imperial’s quirks are related mostly to the unique makeup of its student body. In addition to the ratio of male to female students mentioned earlier, Imperial’s enrolment also includes an unusually high percentage of international and private school students. If you don’t consider yourself to be culturally open minded, though, this internationally diverse makeup may mean that Imperial is not the place for you.

FACTS & FIGURES
• Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 576 (roughly equivalent to 4 A*s at A-level)
• Number of undergraduates: 8,000
• Established: 1907

SUMMARY
Imperial, like LSE, has a top flight reputation for research, thanks to a single-minded focus on the sciences. Its student body is home to 64 men for every 34 women, and has a decidedly international character. Its mindset is that of a business, which can be a good or a bad thing. It’s particularly popular with international students.

www.imperial.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you’re an avid scientist!
LOCATION
Also situated in central London, UCL’s campus mostly lives in the area of Bloomsbury right near Euston train station, though bits of it are also scattered elsewhere throughout the city. This is a green, lovely-to-look-at bit of London with superior transport connections and a focus on culture and the arts including the British Library and the British Museum.

SOCIAL
As compared to other London Universities, UCL comes nearest to offering a traditional experience of university life. In addition to their studies, students are strongly encouraged to engage in volunteer activity. In general, student life and community are emphasised as opposed to industry engagement, and there are an abundant variety of societies and sporting activities to choose from.

LEARNING
While the workload at UCL is extremely high, the extreme-social-deprivation, chained-to-your-desk sort of expectation is not quite so evident here as at Imperial. There’s the expectation of a 40 hour work week for UCL students, and part-time jobs are generally discouraged (though not forbidden). Also unlike Imperial, UCL is multi-disciplinary, and the ratio of academics to students is unmatched by any university in the UK.

Living Accommodations for first-year students are guaranteed, costs are exorbitant, however, even for London. Most rents live near the £150 neighbourhood, though shared accommodations can be found as low as £100 weekly. There’s also the option of intercollegiate halls. Quality and length of commute vary greatly with some areas being uncomfortably low on the desirability scale. A hefty commute should be expected after first year, however, unless you’re able to pay the price for more convenient lodging.

EMPLOYMENT
Job prospects for UCL students are excellent, with earnings expectations higher than the national average for university graduates and an 81% employment rate six months out from graduation.

THE REST OF THE STORY
As many as two-fifths of UCL students are international, and international engagement in general is a central component of the UCL experience. Applicants must possess a foreign language GCSE or they will be required to take a language as part of their courses. 25% of UCL students take a year abroad. UCL also has campuses located in Qatar and Australia.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 521 (equivalent to 2 A*s and 2 As at A-level)
- Number of undergraduates: 15,500
- Established: 1826

SUMMARY
With a radical founding leading to a list of firsts to its credit (first entirely secular university, first to admit regardless of class or religion, first to admit women on equal terms with men) UCL has additional campuses in Qatar and Australia, and a GCSE in foreign language is required to enter in order to communicate, we assume, with the Australians.

www.ucl.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you’re a frustrated, multilingual radical.
**Warwick**

**LOCATION**
Warwick is located nearby, but not connected to such locations as Leamington Spa, Coventry, and, of course, Warwick. Coventry can be reached in 13 minutes via car, or in 20 minutes by train. It’s more inexpensive than Leamington Spa, but not nearly so genteel or pretty. It’s a pleasantly roomy and leafy campus.

**SOCIAL**
As a campus university unconnected to anything else, Warwick has an extremely active student union, and societies abound. There’s a student festival featuring top headliners. It’s a self-contained town with a population of 22,000 with everything you’d expect to find in such a place.

**LEARNING**
Independent study and a wider range of class sizes are both emphasised at Warwick. The education experience here combines modern technology and online learning with the more standard fare of seminars, lectures and tutorials. Warwick students are expected to work an estimated 1200 hours each year on their studies. A sizeable amount, but certainly not unreasonable.

**LIVING**
No Warwick accommodation halls were built before 1965, and there are a wide variety of situations from which to choose, including en suite and not. Weekly rents start at £81 to as high as £160. First year undergraduates, post-grads, as well as some third years receive accommodation on campus. The rest of the third years, as well as second years live in a variety of locations throughout Leamington Spa and Coventry.

**EMPLOYMENT**
Employment prospects for Warwick graduates are reasonably high thanks to the size of the area’s population. There’s also considerable industry engagement, which aids in providing access to employers. For in term employment, the campus boasts a healthy slate of job opportunities for students.

**THE REST OF THE STORY**
Though Warwick is known less for humanities than it is for the sciences, it does feature one of the UK’s largest arts centres, London excepted. It’s built in a decidedly modern style which makes for an atmosphere much different than most other UK universities.

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**FACTS & FIGURES**
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 510 (equivalent to between A*A*AA and A*AAA at A-level)
- Number of undergraduates: 13,000
- Established: 1965

**SUMMARY**
Not actually located in Warwick, but outside Coventry on a sizeable tree-lined campus, Warwick’s league table fortunes have been on the rise of late. It’s better known for the sciences, but boasts the UK’s largest non-London arts centre.

www.warwick.ac.uk
London School of Economics

LOCATION

The LSE is well situated between Aldwych, Covent Garden, and Temple Bar in Westminster. Transport links are superb, and there are wide varieties of things to do when not studying. As with any London university, students should prepare for a greatly inflated cost of living.

LEARNING

Though it may have been somewhat mocked as recently as the 80’s for being an inferior university, LSE today is renowned internationally for its quality of education. Students can expect only two graded work assignments per term, though a considerably intense load of independent work will also be required if one wishes to be successful. Though undergraduate classes are offered on a range of topics, the exclusive focus of LSE is on the sciences of the social, economic, and political nature.

SOCIAL

LSE students can expect a high level of interaction with the rest of the city, thanks to a central location and a certain melding of its campus with the surrounding area. As mentioned above, a short walk is all that’s required to find a plethora of things to do.

LIVING

Weekly rentals for most rooms run along the £120-200 level, with a select few rooms available as low as £91 and some rising as high as £488. Depending on what you pay, the location of your housing may be in somewhat unsafe locales. Students may also seek accommodations in the slightly cheaper halls of the University of London. Or, if you’re willing and able to pay the price or live in a closet, there’s always the option of a private rental.

EMPLOYMENT

As with other London universities, LSE’s location in the city makes for a raft of options for internships and placements within a massive variety of high-end employers. Though a quirk in the calculations of ratings has led to a slight drop in its standings, students should still be assured that employment opportunities upon graduation remain stellar.

THE REST OF THE STORY

As might be expected given LSE’s focus on producing a workforce in the finance/consulting/banking world, its culture is decidedly light on such things as eccentric societies and quaint traditions. The atmosphere at LSE is modern and cosmopolitan, with a decidedly international flavour (42% of its students come from overseas), but the focus is that of single-minded academic pursuit.

FACTS & FIGURES

- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 838 (equivalent to 3 A*s and an A at A-level)
- Number of undergraduates: 4,000
- Established: 1895

SUMMARY

From somewhat of a recurring sitcom joke to internationally renowned university of political, social, and economic sciences, LSE has come up in the world in recent decades. LSE presents a driven, academic-obsessed vibe for those who like to work hard, but don’t want to worry about appropriate subfusc attire.

www.lse.ac.uk

"Should I go there? Go here if you sold retirement accounts instead of lemonade as a youth."
Exeter

LEARNING

Over 92% of Exeter students rate themselves as satisfied with its quality of teaching, which is notable, considering the comparatively high ratio of staff to student. The list of Exeter alumni contains many notable names, including Thom Yorke, JK Rowling, and former Green Party leader Caroline Lucas. It features a relatively moderate workload that leaves time for a healthy student life away from studies.

LOCATION

Making for somewhat of a mixture of city living and rural isolation, Exeter is rated high for quality of living. Its population is a somewhat homogenous 100,000, and transportation connections are favourable, but its distance from any significant population centre may be more than some are willing to endure. It is an hour away from Bristol, which is where you’ll need to go for most flight destinations, though there is a small local international airport. The campus is just a pleasant walk away from the city centre. While attractive and sunny, some might find it all a bit too dull. Exeter has a secondary campus at Falmouth in Cornwall, which some might find delightfully isolating. Others will find it depressingly isolating.

SOCIAL

Exeter students do not suffer for lack of sports, societies or party opportunities. While the university itself claims a decent ethnic and cultural mix, the surrounding city is decidedly lacking in same. Currently app. 16% of students are international, though efforts are being made to increase that percentage. Exeter's location may be perceived as excitingly cosmopolitan to those from rural backgrounds. City dwellers will find it considerably less so. Its crime rate is exceptionally low.

LIVING

Accommodation availability is predictably standard and guaranteed for first-year students. Everything is conveniently within a 20-minute walk from campus, but weekly rents are high. Self-catered rooms range anywhere from £100-157 with catered options going for £148-218. Quality of accommodations is generally high, though older blocks can be somewhat less so.

EMPLOYMENT

Job prospects for Exeter graduates are excellent, with a 78% percent employment rate six months out from graduation. In term employment can be somewhat hard to come by, but those who stay the summer will generally find a way to make some extra money.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Exeter has somewhat of a posh reputation, though students will argue vigorously with that characterisation. Students should expect at some point to find themselves handling sandbags, thanks to the city's location on the river Exe's floodplain.

FACTS & FIGURES

• Average student's UCAS points at entry: 459 (equivalent to A*A*A at A-level and an A at AS)
• Number of undergraduates: 13,000
• Established: 1955

SUMMARY

If having produced both Thom Yorke and JK Rowling isn’t enough of a calling card, Exeter also offers excellent sport facilities, a seriously environmental conscience, and the ongoing chance that you’ll be flooded by the overflowing banks of the River Exe.

www.exeter.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you enjoy playing Radiohead backward while watching Harry Potter.
Lancaster

LOCATION
Lancaster finds itself well-situated with convenient connections to the West Coast Mainline and the M6. It’s architecturally beautiful in some areas, though a bit run down in others, and it’s somewhat perpetually rainy thanks to its location near the Lake District (only a half hour away. This, of course, if offset by inspirational Lake District views and the attendant outdoor activities. Lancaster’s population is app. 45,000, a number that increases to 120,000 when adding in the university and the surrounding area. Among the top 20 UK universities, Lancaster is near the top in terms of the cheapest place to live.

SOCIAL
Lancaster provides the expected variety of societies and clubs. It’s divided into nine colleges, and each has a bar of its own. Clubs and pubs abound in the city with student nights to entice those not busy with their studies.

LEARNING
Somewhat higher than its reputation might seem to warrant, Lancaster’s academic rating rests on the fact of its being a research juggernaut on the rise. Its standard offer of AAA-AAB has been criticised by student unions as inflated.

LIVING
All first-years who list Lancaster first on their UCAs are guaranteed accommodation on campus. Approximately half of students remain on campus in later years. Good quality catered accommodation can run from £85-162, with private accommodation within the city often being even cheaper, even despite travel costs. Distances by bus run at 22 minutes, a taxi will run you under £10, and a car will get you there in 15 minutes with no worries about paying for parking.

EMPLOYMENT
Lancaster the city was somewhat hard hit by the recession, and has yet to recover. As a result, it’s a given that students should look elsewhere for employment following graduation. In fact, even part-time in-term employment can be hard to come by in the city, though jobs on campus are plentiful. Perhaps because of this economically depressed location, or perhaps due to a larger than average percentage of state school students, Lancaster’s post-graduation employment rate is somewhat lower compared to other top 20 schools (six months beyond graduation, 73% of students can expect to be employed).

THE REST OF THE STORY
Lancaster offers a refreshingly relaxed atmosphere devoid of pretentiousness or snobbery. The university itself, in fact, tends to perpetuate a kind of pleasantly surly insistence that its prestige is overestimated.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 449 (roughly equivalent to A*A*AA at A-level and an A at AS)
- Number of undergraduates: 9,000
- Established: 1964

SUMMARY
The occasionally pretty architecture of the city of Lancaster stands in contrast to the 1960’s cement aesthetic of the campus of Lancaster (it was founded in 1964). Located as they are, however, just 30 short minutes from the lake district, natural architecture would seem to be the bigger draw for many students. Characterised as an impressive research institution on the rise, Lancaster is one of the least internationally diverse universities of the top 20.

www.lancaster.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you prefer to hike while mulling the latest statistical breakouts.
Loughborough

LEARNING
Loughborough is almost exclusively known for sport as opposed to academics, although its students undoubtedly also get a respectable academic grounding. Aside from sport, the focus at Loughborough is on paths into employment. Year-long work placement is offered as a possibility within 99% of their courses, leading no doubt to useful experience and connections upon graduation. Loughborough specialises in engineering and technology, having been founded as a technical institute in 1909.

LOCATION
Loughborough itself has a population of app. 57,000, of which 16,000 are students at the university. Paradoxically, despite its proximity to places like Leicester and Nottingham with combined populations approaching 1 million, Loughborough is not the place to go if one hopes for exciting lodging away from campus. Travel connections are notoriously bad, and, other than the East Midlands Airport, it’s nearly impossible to reach any nearby location conveniently.

SOCIAL
The student life at Loughborough involves sport, sport, and more sport. With a generous portion of sport to go along with it. There are other activities, such as fundraising and media facilities, but even these things tend to absorb the general sportiness that permeates the campus. Even those not particularly interested in sport to begin with will likely leave Loughborough with a strong desire to manipulate various balls, weights, and their own bodies in ways that may be judged superior to any nearby competition.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 407 (roughly equivalent to AAB at A-level plus A at AS)
- Number of undergraduates: 12,000
- Established: 1966

SUMMARY
Founded in 1909 as a technical institute, Loughborough is now known for sport, sport, and on occasion, sport. It also retains a specialism in technology and engineering, universities of the top 20.

www.lboro.ac.uk

LIVING
Guaranteed accommodation is provided for first-year Loughborough students who did not obtain their places via clearing. Weekly rentals run from £83-150, and out of 5000 undergraduate places, approximately 1000 are catered. Cheaper, shared private accommodation is also available.

EMPLOYMENT
Six months out from leaving Loughborough, 76% of graduates can expect to find themselves employed, somewhat lower than other universities with industry engagement and a science focus.

THE REST OF THE STORY
Loughborough is another university with a notably lop-sided gender ratio, with a student body comprised of 62% men. Due no doubt to sport-induced endorphins, student satisfaction is rated extremely high.
LOCATION
Its medieval spires and Georgian architecture make Bath a particularly beautiful place to explore. Its population is app. 90,000, but as many as 3.8 million tourists flood the city every year. Bristol is the nearest city, and it’s a mere twelve minute train ride away. It’s also quite near Bristol airport, and, in general, transportation connections are quite good. If Jane Austin and Roman heritage are your thing, this is the place to be.

SOCIAL
Despite its affluent location, Bath is not as posh as one might expect. The nightlife of Bristol is nearby, but thanks to being home to two universities, local student nights and discounts are easy enough to come by as well. It’s got a roughly equal ratio of male to female students, and, Loughborough excepted, its sporting facilities are second to none. It’s also known for an impressive array of societies.

LEARNING
Despite not being a Russell Group member, Bath is rated quite high internationally for research. Study here is narrowly focused on courses in science and social science. Engineering flavoured courses are the norm. Bath is intentionally focused on industry connections and routes toward employment. You won’t spend time here musing over great literature.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 489 (roughly equivalent to A*A*A* at A-level plus A at AS)
- Number of undergraduates: 11,000
- Established: 1966

SUMMARY
The elegant Georgian city of Bath is known best for its historical and literary connections. The modernist 60s architectured University of Bath, on the other hand, takes rather a different route through a vast variety of engineering subjects. It may not be particularly pretty, but, perhaps as in laws and sausages, it’s best not to dwell too deeply upon how engineers are manufactured.

LIVING
Accommodation variety and guarantees for first-years are as expected. Rents begin at £88 to as high as £185 weekly. Second and third-years live in the city or in Bristol (if they’re not averse to a commute). Rents off-campus, with the exception of the city centre, are generally somewhat cheaper. The distance from city centre to campus is less than a mile and a half.

EMPLOYMENT
Six months after graduation, 83% of Bath students can expect to be employed, thanks in part to a concerted emphasis on industry outreach. Part-time in-term work is also fairly plentiful as a result of the yearly tourist influx.

THE REST OF THE STORY
As with other universities with a similar emphasis, don’t expect much in the way of quaint traditions. Engineers apparently have better things to do.

Should I go there? Go here if you’re a somewhat sporty, art-oriented engineer.
**LOCATION**

Situated centrally in the Clifton area of Bristol, the university benefits from many positive aspects of the city itself. Rebuilt following WWII in a manner sympathetic to its original Victorian and Georgian architecture, it features an international airport as well as the oldest continuously operating railway station in the world. It’s home to a thriving underground music scene, and is also a hub for the aerospace industry. It has also earned acclaim as a Centre of Cultural Excellence and a Science City.

**SOCIAL**

With something of a reputation for both working and partying to excess, Bristol students tend to burn the candle at both ends. Perhaps because of the Oxbridge reject effect, there are certain traditions that might only be described as Oxbridgean or Oxbridgesque, though students will deny the connection. For those not inclined toward the heavy drinking sort of leisure activities implied above, the nightlife of Bristol should serve as a welcome alternative to on-campus hijinks.

**LEARNING**

Like Durham and St. Andrews, Bristol is another leading landing place for students who didn’t make it into Oxbridge. Its international rating is somewhat higher than its ratings are nationally, so one may assume from this that it is better situated as a research university than it is in teaching. Its entry requirements seem to have been based upon its international rating rather than national standing. Bristol particularly excels in the sciences, including Maths, Geography, Social Sciences, and Engineering, as well as in Music.

**FACTS & FIGURES**

- **Average student’s UCAS points at entry:**
  483 (roughly equivalent to A*A*A* at A-level plus A at AS)
- **Number of undergraduates:**
  13,500
- **Established:**
  1909

**SUMMARY**

Bristol offers the somewhat confusing combination of a fluctuating league table position and a really quite prestigious reputation. To add more confusion, it boasts roundly unimpressive scores for student satisfaction, while also maintaining a very low drop-out rate.

www.bris.ac.uk

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**LIVING**

First-year accommodation is guaranteed, with weekly rents running £72–172 (self-catered) or £121–175 (catered). Perhaps as a remedy to the hard partying referenced above, Bristol also offers single-sex and alcohol-free accommodations.

**EMPLOYMENT**

The percentage of Bristol graduates employed six months out from graduation rests at 80%. In-term part-time employment in the area is also readily available.

**THE REST OF THE STORY**

Bristol’s ratings have been down of late in the UK tables, and they’re understandably displeased. Its student satisfaction scores are at odds with quite a low rate of drop-outs, which would seem to indicate a certain disgruntlement among students, but not so much that they’re willing to stop partying and go somewhere else. Nonetheless, one should expect vigorous steps to be taken going forward to improve student satisfaction with the non-alcoholic portion of the curriculum.

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Should I go there? Go here if you like parties and contradictions.
Surrey

> **LEARNING**

While the academic load at Surrey has increased in recent years, and in the last ten years they’ve seen a 100 point rise in entrants’ A-level scores, there’s still more than adequate time left after studies for a healthy enjoyment of societies, socialisation, and part-time employment. Unlike most UK universities, Surrey has seen a 40% rise in applicants of late, despite rising fees.

> **LOCATION**

Located in Guildford with easy access to popular destinations like South Downs, London, the coast, or National Park, it’s also convenient to both Heathrow and Gatwick airports. Sprinkled with old buildings and cobbledstones, it has a population of 130,000. Leafy and genteel, Guildford is remarkably safe. It is among the handful of UK locations that have recorded 100+ degree Fahrenheit temperatures, so you might want to dress accordingly. Its busses are infamous for a lack of reliability, and transport links other than those mentioned above are generally poor.

> **SOCIAL**

The Surrey SU works hard to make up for what can politely be called a limited Guildford nightlife, but events tend toward rather uninspired student nights. There’s a university gym for those so inclined, though the price of entry may keep all but the sportiest away. Over-all, expect a pub-based, somewhat laid back student life with little for those who might identify as eccentric.

> **LIVING**

Accommodations at Surrey are remarkably affordable, considering its location. The most common student rental goes for £98 weekly, with other choices as low as £67 to as high as £192. Private accommodations will generally be more expensive. You can also expect to pay London prices in general for your daily needs.

> **EMPLOYMENT**

Surrey University will tell you that an unbelievable 97% of graduates can expect to be employed six months out from graduation. This is in contrast to a more conservative number of 73% given by such sources as the University Guide and the Guardian. Believe what you will. The most likely explanation for the disparity is that Surrey is counting all employment as opposed to just those jobs generally requiring a degree, meaning that a considerable percentage of that 97% are working below their qualification level.

> **THE REST OF THE STORY**

Unlike other universities of its size, location type, and with a similar close-knit community, Surrey is more remarkably normal than it is remarkably weird. If you’re not thrilled at the prospect of gowns and school songs, Surrey might be the place for you.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 422 (equivalent to AAA at A-level and an A at AS)
- Number of undergraduates: 9,200
- Established: 1966

SUMMARY

Surrey is on the rise, as in recent years it has chalked up significant rises in applicants, fees, and A-level scores of entrants. If all work and no play make Jack a dull boy, Jack probably doesn’t attend Surrey.

www.surrey.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you like your education normal, with a whiskey chaser.
East Anglia

LEARNING
Unlike the many science-based universities that seem to populate much of the top 20, East Anglia’s focus is on creative writing as well as other humanities. Three winners of the Booker Prize were educated there, a fact that perhaps has to do with its academic approach to such “soft” subjects as creative writing. The wide range of module choices in most courses is indicative of its focus on interdisciplinary studies.

LOCATION
Situated on the outskirts of Norwich, UEA occupies a flat landscape that, while bicycle-friendly, does not offer much in the way of inspiring scenery. It is a historic city with a population of over 230,000, and you could drink nightly for a year and never hit the same pub twice. You can bike to the university in around 20 minutes, and buses are available till 11:30pm.

SOCIAL
UEA’s student body is decidedly arts oriented, with creativity bursting through at every opportunity. There’s an on-campus art gallery as well as active societies for both radio and film. Just off campus is the rich arts scene of Norwich, and UEA itself boasts an impressive slate of headline acts. It also offers first-rate facilities for those inclined toward sporting activities.

FACTS & FIGURES
• Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 431 (roughly equivalent to A*AA at A-level and an A at AS)
• Number of undergraduates: 13,000
• Established: 1963

SUMMARY
East Anglia makes for a refreshingly arts-focused addition to the top 20. It’s another showcase for 60’s architecture, and its location offers little in the way of scenic beauty, but pubs are plentiful and student satisfaction is high. A warm, dry climate and proximity to the beach may be two reasons why.

www.uea.ac.uk

LIVING
Accommodation is guaranteed for first-year undergraduate students. Weekly rentals begin with a range of options at £69 and can rise as high as £228. Norwich accommodations are similarly inexpensive and generally easy to come by, with little danger of a significant commute. UEA accommodations are rated just behind Lancaster as the second best halls in the UK.

EMPLOYMENT
Somewhat confirming the stereotype as to the utility of creative writing and English degrees, UEA suffers the lowest employment prospects of any top 20 university. Six months out from graduation, 69% of UEA graduates can expect to be employed. In-term part-time positions are fairly plentiful both in Norwich and on campus. Counting all employment as opposed to just those jobs generally requiring a degree, meaning that a considerable percentage of that 97% are working below their qualification level.

THE REST OF THE STORY
If you’re the driven, nose-in-your-studies kind of student, UEA most likely isn’t for you. While sunny weather, barbecues, and lakeside relaxation may sound wonderful in theory, if you’re of the type who must always have something “useful” to do, you’re likely to be searching for correspondence courses to keep yourself occupied. Those with an arty side who value a relaxed educational experience, however, will find themselves right at home.

Should I go there? Go here if you’re just as content writing a good book as reading one.
Birmingham

LOCATION
The University of Birmingham is situated in the safe, non-descript suburb of Selly Oak in Birmingham, and the area, thanks to a student population of 31,000, is decidedly student dominated. Birmingham itself is a lively city, both commercially and culturally with excellent transport connections via train, air, and motorway. Though its architecture can best be described as unremarkable, this does result in the enviable side-effect of reducing the number of tourists milling about.

SOCIAL
The size of the University of Birmingham’s campus paired with the even more massive population of Birmingham itself mean that there’s almost surely something somewhere to accommodate most any interest. There’s a variety of quality nightlife to be experienced ranging from pub to club to gallery and beyond.

LEARNING
Birmingham is particularly well thought of for degrees in sport-related subjects. They are also a noted centre nationally for STEM subjects. With an increased focus on employer-friendly, transferrable skills, their tendency is more toward the production of excellent employees as opposed to the pure joy of academia.

LIVING
Arranged into a variety of “villages,” student accommodation at Birmingham is available at rates ranging from £81 to as high as £300 weekly, and longer-than-usual contracts of 42 and 50 weeks are available. Plentiful and affordable private accommodations in the Selly Oak area are home to second- and third-year students.

EMPLOYMENT
Thanks at least in part to the massive amount of employers in the Birmingham area, as many as 80% of Birmingham grads can expect to be employed six months after graduation.

THE REST OF THE STORY
Birmingham is the antidote to the smaller, more isolated universities above in which everyone knows your name. If the thought of a place like that fills you with icy dread, you should perhaps take a good long look at Birmingham, where absolutely no one will know your name unless you absolutely want them to. Its massive size also means a distinct lack of eccentric traditions, making it a good choice for those who would rather not bother with such things.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 439 (equivalent to A*AA at A-level and an A at AS)
- Number of undergraduates: 19,000
- Established: 1900

SUMMARY
With a student population of 31,000, Birmingham is the antithesis of “cosy.” Its sheer multiplicity of everything means most any student can, with a little effort, find a niche to call their own. It was awarded the University of the Year Award in 2014 by the Sunday Times.

www.birmingham.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you appreciate the symbolism of a massive clocktower.
York

LOCATION
The city of York is remarkably beautiful, and its founding by the Romans along with its history as the capital of both Anglo Saxon and Viking states of Northumbria and Jorvik respectively up to 954 makes it endlessly fascinating as well. It also makes for basket-loads of tourists who come for its intact medieval walls and Gothic cathedral among other attractions. For a northerly city, it’s warmer than one might think, its transport connections are superb.

SOCIAL
As might be obvious from the description above, York is the place to be for history buffs. Nightlife can generally be described as pub-not-club, but for those who are so inclined, a club or two can be found with a bit of persistence. The range of available societies at York is wider than the norm, with a bit of something for everyone.

LEARNING
York has dropped slightly in the league tables, though it’s not entirely clear as to why. Its research and teaching quality both enjoy stellar reputations with more of a connection between the two than one would normally expect.

The expected first-year guarantees are in place with accommodation surrounding a sizeable lake on campus. Weekly rents on-campus begin at £81 and rise as high as £157. Housing within the city is reasonably affordable, and the walk from city centre to campus takes only 30 minutes. Regular buses are also available.

EMPLOYMENT
Six months out from graduation only 75% of York graduates can expect to be employed. The university does offer varied opportunities for a year in industry, however, and taking advantage of these options can be greatly beneficial in networking and acquiring useful contacts for the future. Part-time in-term work is readily available throughout the city.

THE REST OF THE STORY
The story here is birds. Lots of birds surrounding the largest plastic-bottomed lake in Europe, thank you very much. From geese to ducks to foul-tempered black swans. You’ll go here for the education. You’ll remember the endless flocks of waterfowl. But aside from the birds, York offers a general atmosphere of cosiness, and if that’s what you enjoy, then this is the place for you.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 446 (roughly equivalent to A*A*A at A-level and an A at AS)
- Number of undergraduates: 11,000
- Established: 1963

SUMMARY
York offers still more 60s architecture, this time made to sit alongside one of the loveliest of the UK’s cities in order to learn its place. With a diverse student body, excellent teaching and research reputations, and a significant expansion underway, there’s much to recommend it. Visit when it’s sunny, and you’ll be tempted to move right in forever. Visit while rainy, and you may leave with an overwhelming urge to drink while singing Leonard Cohen dirges.

www.york.ac.uk
LOCATION
Located on the south of Brighton, Sussex can claim to be the “only English university located entirely within a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.” According to the European Commission. The architecture by Sir Basil Spence has been praised and awarded multiple honours. Brighton itself is a popular tourist attraction, thanks to such Victorian era attractions as the Grand Hotel, Brighton Palace Pier, and the West Pier. It’s the most visited UK seaside attraction among international tourists.

SOCIAL
The expected first-year guarantees are in place with accommodation surrounding a sizeable lake on campus. Weekly rents on-campus begin at £81 and rise as high as £157. Housing within the city is reasonably affordable, and the walk from city centre to campus takes only 30 minutes. Regular buses are also available.

LEARNING
The Times Higher Education World University Rankings place Sussex 62nd in Europe and 140th worldwide. Additionally, it was ranked number one and two for Development Studies in 2015 and 2016 respectively by the QS World University Rankings. 98 percent of Sussex research activity is categorized as ‘world leading’

LIVING
Accommodation is guaranteed for first-year under-grads, and options range from en suite to not, and all accommodation is self-catered. Weekly rents range from £89-154.

EMPLOYMENT
According to the Guardian, the post-graduation employment rate for the University of Sussex comes in at a healthy 90.6%

THE REST OF THE STORY
In addition to the Brighton nightlife, the Sussex SU supports over 200 societies and clubs, plus special events, and two sports centres on campus with discounted student fees.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 375
- Number of undergraduates: 12,207
- Established: 1961

SUMMARY
Boasting officially recognised natural beauty, located in the “happiest place to live in the UK,” and rated as a world-leading research institution, Sussex effectively combines learning with enjoyment.

www.sussex.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you like scenery and rainbows.
Southampton

LEARNING
Southampton offers a workload and academic standards that are substantial without catering to the workaholic masochist. Contact hours are relatively low. One shouldn’t blindly choose their course here, though. While Southampton is quite strong in some areas, such as sciences, it can be not so strong in others. It’s best to check before committing yourself to a course.

LOCATION
Situated on the warmer, sunnier south coast, Southampton is near the beach, and its population of 250,000 supports a wide variety of clubs and bars. The crime rate may be a bit higher than one would wish, but it is decreasing, and there’s really nothing in the way of stunning architecture or a cultural scene to speak of, but it boasts strong transport connections, it’s sunny and warm, and did we mention the beach?

SOCIAL
With a vibe that tends somewhat toward the counter-culture, and somewhat fewer of the briefcase-toting future financial types among the student body, Southampton’s ethnically diverse student body is generally quite friendly and laid-back. As mentioned above, there’s no lack of nightlife, and the atmosphere in general is decidedly student-friendly.

LIVING
Weekly rents for accommodations begin at £86 to as high as £255 (self-catered) or £131-142 (catered). There is plentiful private accommodation, and it is generally cheaper, but the quality is something of a mixed bag.

EMPLOYMENT
Considering Southampton’s ranking on the league charts, the employment percentage six months from graduation is a disappointing 75% (or a bit higher). For part-time in-term employment, Southampton provides a temp bank to assist in finding positions from with the rather depressed local economy.

THE REST OF THE STORY
Southampton is making concerted efforts in fostering entrepreneurship among its students and finding unconventional routes for them to explore. There are a variety of opportunities internationally including a centre for Chinese Culture and Malaysian campus. They also now offer a European Medical degree.

FACTS & FIGURES
• Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 431 (roughly equivalent to A*AA at A-level and an A at AS)
• Number of undergraduates: 16,500
• Established: 1952

SUMMARY
Sporting attractive red-brick buildings, a laid-back atmosphere, and a high level of prestige (despite maintaining a relatively low profile), Southampton is internationally recognised for research excellence. Southampton is particularly strong in the sciences, as evidenced by its current employment of computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee.

www.southampton.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here if you’d rather learn to do it yourself than to do it for someone else.
Nottingham

LEARNING
Nottingham has a strong focus on research, boasting not one, but two recent Nobel Prize recipients in Economics and Medicine, and Nottingham is still a leading centre for research into Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Of its many departments, 26 have been rated as internationally excellent by the UK Funding Council and in 2008 they were ranked 4th among UK universities for world-leading research power. In short, if research is your thing, you could do much worse than the University of Nottingham.

LOCATION
The University of Nottingham’s main campus has received numerous architectural and landscaping awards. It is situated to the west of the city centre of Nottingham on 330 acres of greenery surrounding a lake and punctuated with a clock tower. For an institution so focused on research, the campus sports a wide range of cultural facilities.

SOCIAL
Nottingham has been graced with multiple Purple Flag Awards in recognition of superior management of nightlife in town and city centre. It’s also been named one of the safest places in the UK for an evening on the town. Your options for things to do will certainly not be lacking, with choices ranging from pub to club to cocktail bar and beyond. There are also a satisfying range of societies, student groups, organisations, and community projects to keep most any student occupied in between studies.

LIVING
Accommodation is guaranteed for first-year students, and weekly rents range from £92-199 with both catered and non-catered options. There are also private accommodation options near campus and elsewhere in the Nottingham area.

EMPLOYMENT
According to the Guardian, the University of Nottingham notches an impressive 92% employment rate, post-graduation. It was also rated best in the UK for job prospects by over 20,000 students in a survey by whatuni.com.

THE REST OF THE STORY
Along with the other famously eclectic Nottingham nightlife, one eye-opening, or rather head-scratching, tradition involves the swinging of shirts round heads on the carpeted dance floor of a local club to the blasting strains of the theme to Baywatch. Nottingham also sports England’s oldest pub, and right next door is the home of both Batman and Mr. Darcy, depending upon your taste in movies.

FACTS & FIGURES
- Average student’s UCAS points at entry: 424
- Number of undergraduates: 18,962
- Established: 1881

SUMMARY
Rounding out our list, Nottingham offers academic excellence, architectural beauty, and boundlessly varied and well-managed nightlife.

www.nottingham.ac.uk

Should I go there? Go here because...Batman!